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Benton County Historic Society is an Anachronism

Benton County Historic Society and Museum (BCHS) has a basic web site containing simple contact and museum information, some basic discussion about collections, a calendar of events, and the customary "Membership/Get Involved" page for donations. The simplicity is not surprising as the museum is small with little funding. However, the time has come where online privacy and utility is needed for both a better patron experience, but also for museums to better themselves and make more informed decisions (New Media Consortium, n.d., pp. 1, 32).

BCHS is clearly behind the curve as many small museums, including New York's Tenement (http://tenement.org/) and Noguchi Museums (http://www.noguchi.org), have at least a privacy statement, but also rudimentary analytics running on their web pages. BCHS's lack of a privacy statement and analytics as well as enabled right-click capabilities leaves them open, at best, to a rudimentary and largely meaningless patron first impression to, at worst, an expensive legal battle over copyright infringement.

Keys and Passwords

Web and digital security is relatively new, and can be an expensive endeavor of both time and money. The lack of a significant online security presence is neither a high priority nor a surprise for BCHS. Simply put, their priorities are to keep the doors open and preservation of their collection. The lack of online prowess in this matter does not mean there is no security present. BCHS has security in the classic sense. Most of their records are kept in locked file cabinets with a limited number of individuals having access to the keys. Additionally, their computer systems are password protected with standard protocols and security standards for different parts of the system (though how strong or how often individuals change their passwords is unknown and not tracked) (M. Tolonen, personal communication, March 23, 2017).

Volunteers and Memberships

Most museums rely on volunteers and memberships as sources of both hours and funding. BCHS is no exception to the rule and has pages for both on their current web site as well as additional pages for docents and sponsors. None of these pages, though, require any kind of interaction beyond downloading an application form, from the user. The application is then either mailed or brought in to BCHS for completion. All information is gathered in person or via e-mail and then stored behind the filing keys and computer password functionality.

Donations Please

Money concerns always require a good deal of coordination and sensitivity as they place identifiable monetary information with individuals. As the instance of digital piracy and identity theft increasing, the need for clear guidelines and protocols are needed (Tugend, 2012). Again, to have this type of information in-house can be very expensive at enterprise size and can open museums to additional liabilities if the information is compromised.

Despite this, museums need to have the capabilities to accept donations online. Recognizing this need, digital companies have developed several solutions available to museums of all sizes. Google, PayPal, and others all have capabilities, but BCHS has chosen to partner with Network for Good (NFG), a company specializing on accepting donations (and other incidentals) for non-profits.

By outsourcing the donation system, BCHS eliminates many of the legal necessities of directly accepting money. BCHS does not need to keep the database private, they do not need to be at the bleeding edge of security, they do not need to worry about being implicated in identity theft, and they do not need to keep records for tax purposes. These time-consuming activities are taken care of through a small percentage fee per donation by NFG. The solution is simple and elegant for BCHS.

Network for Good and the Big Bad Privacy Statement

NFG has a very competent and extensive privacy statement (see Figure 1). Their statement may be summed up by three basic tenets:

1. NFG uses the latest security available – Secure Socket Layers (SSL) in this case.
2. NFG collects both personal and incidental information. Personal information is gathered for the necessity of processing the payment. Incidental information is gathered for improved web site functioning and usability.
3. NFG may or may not, depending on the donation or donator situation, provide information to the client agency and may or may not keep that information for themselves. In most instances, it is possible to donate anonymously and all information is deleted upon receipt.

Figure 1: Network for Good's privacy statement. From *http://www.networkforgood.com/about/privacy/*

These three tenets are basic and very understandable, but a person would need to be aware and read the privacy statement to know, exactly, which standard is being followed (Network for Good, 2016).

NFG is carefully defers to their respective client organization's privacy protocols many times. This is logical as NFG has no control over information once it passes from their hands to that of the client's. BCHS has no specific privacy statement concerning the information gathered from their donations. This shortcoming is easily overcome as BCHS does not receive or keep data from the donations.

I Know Who You Are: Social Media's Role

BCHS has Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook presences. Other than the Meola Films linked directly to the YouTube framework, there are no references to these social media presences on the web site. As such, there is no need to have any type of security or privacy notice or tools in place to deal with any security threats social media might bring.

It should be noted, the different social media presences, the postings, and subsequent interactions are subject to the respective privacy and usage statements of the social media platforms and are not within the responsibility of BCHS.

What Should Be Done?

The current state of the BCHS web site is satisfactory, however, there are three specific changes needing to be instituted immediately or in the near future to prevent litigation and to bring BCHS in line with current standards.

1. Privacy statement
   People are becoming more educated about internet security and tracking capabilities. Because of this, the public has requested and received legal regulations concerning these issues. It is not unusual to see pop-up statements informing individuals of the usage of tracking cookies on web sites. BCHS does not have tracking cookies, but a privacy statement would alleviate any possible questions or concerns individuals might have when interacting with the web page. Additionally, with future plans of putting the collection online, the necessity of outlining appropriate use (such as image usage) should be undertaken and not left to "public domain" copyright belief. Privacy statements can be modified and should be revisited regularly to make sure they are satisfactorily up-to-date with the technology and institutional needs.

2. Copyright or watermarks on images
   All images need to have a copyright or watermark on all images. BCHS uses PastPerfect software for their museum collection and it is easy to insert a watermark in the images. At the very least, a copyright statement needs to be present on each page of the web page. It is fairly simple to add a javascript program to the web page preventing the right-click capabilities when visiting a web site. This solution is very easy to bypass, but its institution prevents the majority of individuals from copying images as bypassing the javascript is time consuming.

3. Analytics/Cookies
   As BCHS grows, the museum will garner more attention from individuals both inside and outside of the immediate geographical area and their web site needs to be able to accommodate these visitors. Being able to track how they utilize the web page would provide additional data for decisions concerning collection building, exhibition assembly, and the needs and wants of patrons. Of course, this addition will require a privacy statement.

The size of the museum should not prevent the museum from being competent at security and legal issues concerning privacy and data usage. BCHS is no exception to this as their future plans will require a good deal of additional changes to their current presence on the internet in order to bring them in line with many of the other small museums around the country.

References:

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