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Social Media Technology

Social Media

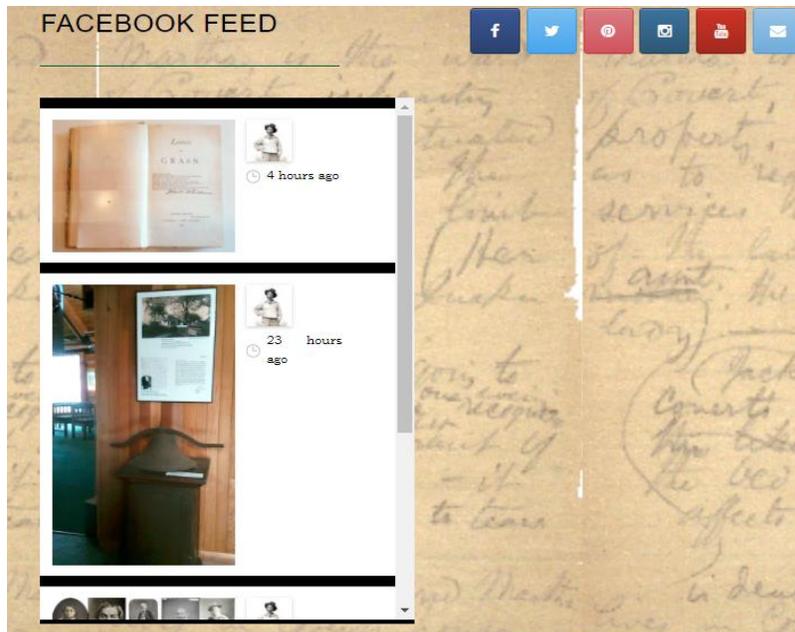
The 2016 NMC Horizon Report states, “Participatory experiences are becoming the norm, both onsite and online, and museums are increasingly finding new ways to encourage and incorporate community contribution.”¹ With social media being a large part of our day-to-day lives and many of us being constantly on the hunt for new experiences (largely to share these experiences on social media), museums have had to adapt their policies and approaches to incorporate social media. It is also worthy to note that “[d]iscussion regarding social media usage in cultural institutions often focuses on museums with large and significant permanent collections. However, smaller institutions, including local heritage sites, can arguably gain more than larger organizations by having a significant online presence.... Many times even local residents are unaware of their town’s heritage sites and smaller museums. Social media can aid in strengthening community identity and awareness in these situations.”² Thus it is evident that a strong social media presence should be essential to a small cultural heritage organization like the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association (WWBA).

Analysis of the WWBA’s Social Media Engagement

As stated above, a social media presence can be more important to smaller institutions than larger ones because it is these small institutions that need to produce greater visibility and community engagement. The WWBA has social media accounts with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Pinterest. The WWBA website features links to all these social media accounts as well as a live Facebook Feed.

¹ “Participatory Experiences.” 2016. *NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Museum Edition*: 18.

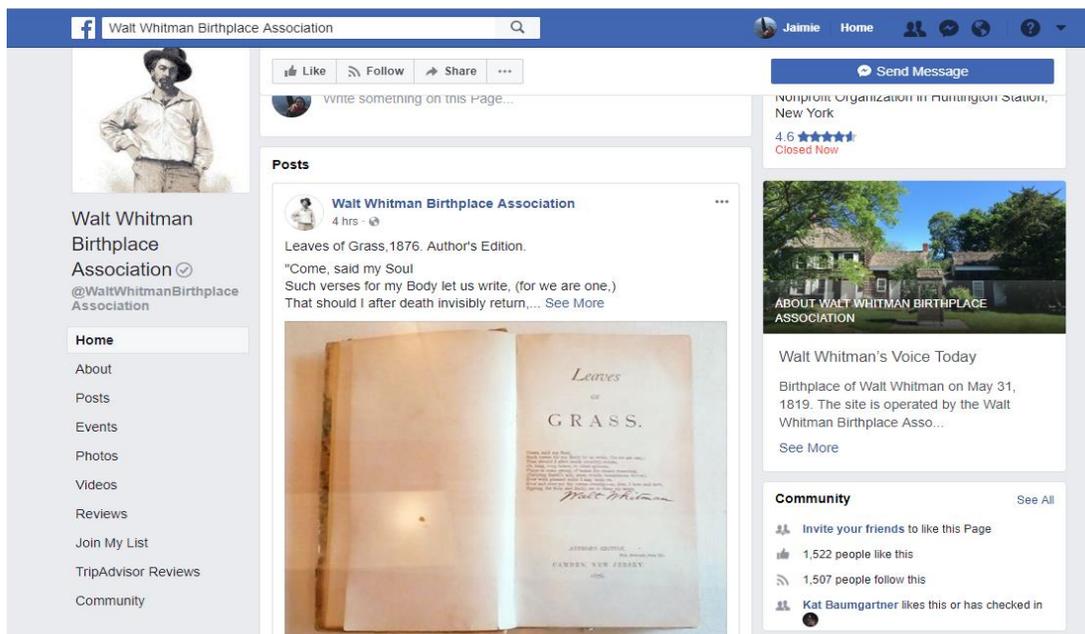
² Gonzalez. “Keep the Conversation Going: How Museums Use Social Media to Engage the Public.” 2017. *The Museum Scholar*: <https://themuseum scholar.atavist.com/vol1no1gonzalez>



Screenshot from waltwhitman.org showing Facebook Feed and social media links.

Facebook

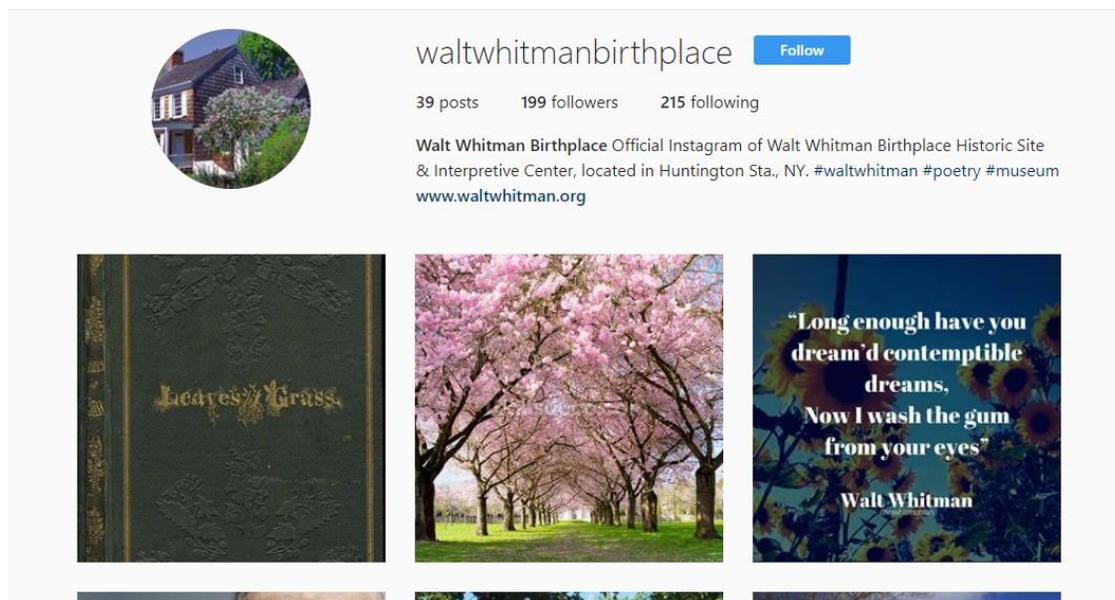
Overall, the WWBA's Facebook page is well-maintained. The page has approximately 1,500 followers. The Facebook page also shows a 4.6/5-star rating on 67 reviews, as well as glowing reviews provided by TripAdvisor. The WWBA Facebook has many postings of photos and events and is pleasant to browse. The Facebook page could improve by providing more video-related media by connecting to the association's YouTube channel and/or engaging in the Facebook Live feature.



Screenshot of WWBA Facebook page.

Instagram

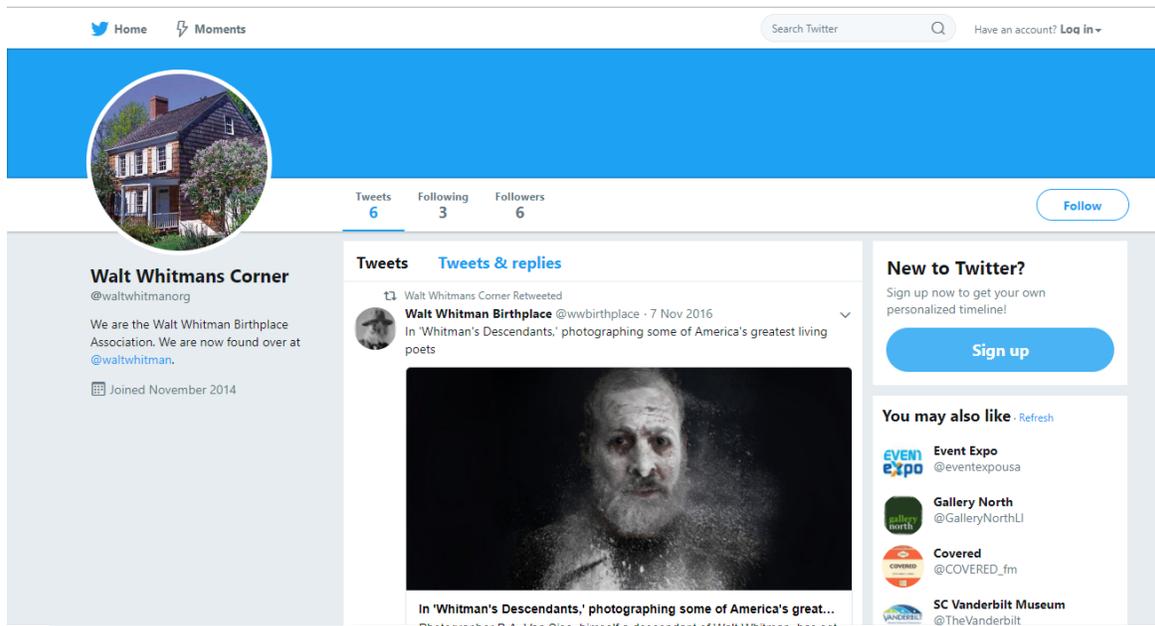
WWBA's Instagram page, like the Facebook, is fairly well-maintained. Unfortunately, the Instagram page does not come close to the number of followers as their Facebook. The Instagram postings are quite nice and having a larger Instagram following could benefit the organization's visibility in a hugely positive way. The WWBA Facebook and Twitter do not appear to be linked to one another, which is a missed opportunity. The Instagram does feature a few tags, but the institution might benefit from creating and pushing for the use of a tag that is specific to their organization (i.e.: #WWBA). The WWBA Instagram could also be an opportunity to post about some of the many items that are not on display anywhere in the Interpretive Center or Birthplace.



Screenshot of WWBA Instagram.

Twitter

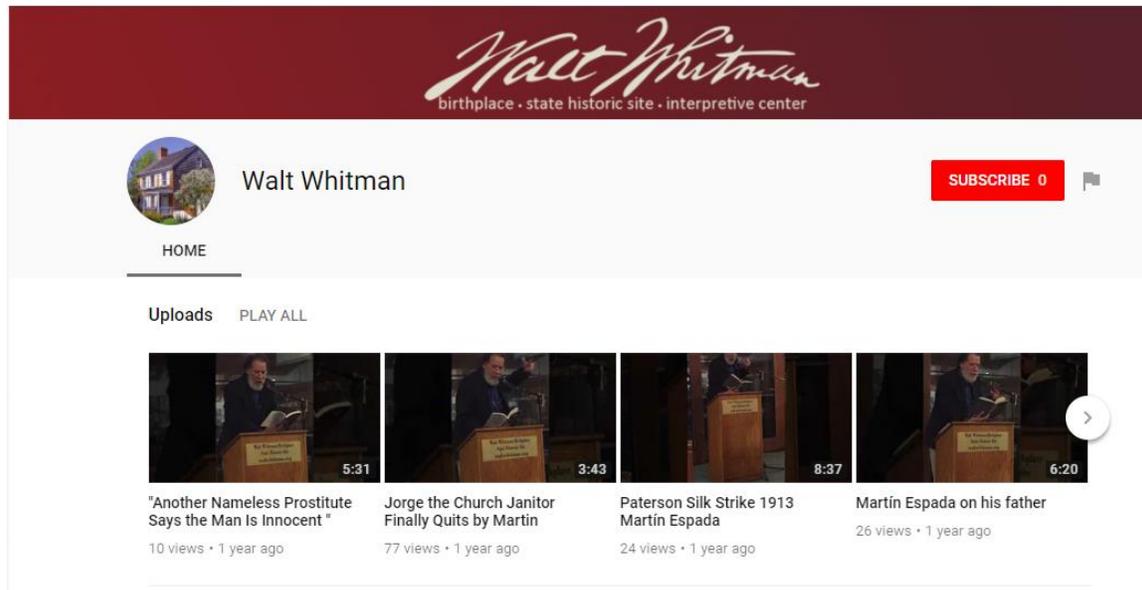
While the WWBA's Facebook and the Instagram could improve in minor ways, the Twitter page is in desperate need of some TLC. WWBA's Twitter has virtually no followers and is incredibly underutilized (the most recent post being from November 2016). While Twitter might not be worth the effort for some organizations, Twitter connects well with what the WWBA is about. Whitman was a poet and Twitter is a platform based on text, the two seem meant for each other, but WWBA's Twitter is sorely neglected. The association has both Whitman and resident poets to draw inspiration from for what could be beautiful and inspiring Twitter postings.



Screenshot of WWBA Twitter.

YouTube

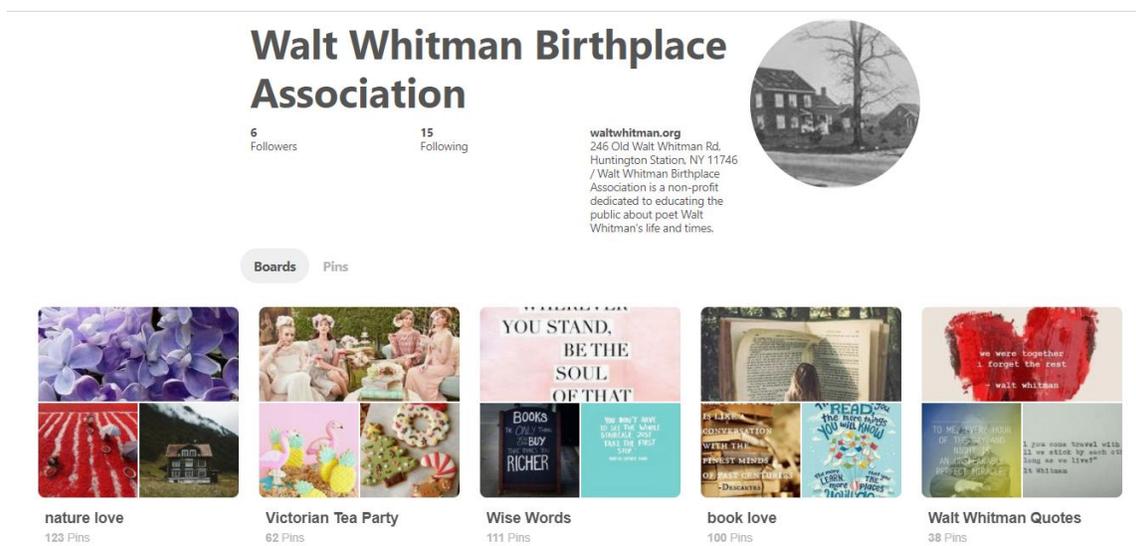
Like the Twitter account, the YouTube account has been neglected. The site hosts a multitude of events from poetry readings to workshops to performances and their YouTube channel could be a wonderful way to generate interest in these and other events. This could be achieved easily by uploading videos (like the most recent videos from a year ago) and linking the YouTube account to the Facebook page so that the Facebook's followers are engaged on another level.



Screenshot of YouTube.

Pinterest

Lastly, the WWBA website has a link that connects to their Pinterest page. Unfortunately, the Pinterest has virtually no followers, has not been posted to in quite some time, and does not seem to serve any purpose. A Pinterest account does not make sense for this type of organization and the association could easily delete this account and remove the link from the website.



Screenshot of WWBA Pinterest.

Overall, the WWBA engages in offsite social media and the Facebook page seems to be the organization's most successful media outlet. However, if the organization were to create a plan and dedicate more time to the maintenance of their Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, I have no doubt their visibility and following would increase immensely. The WWBA could also benefit from linking their social media accounts together so that they can cross-post with various types of media (text, photo, video) and generate greater interest in the Birthplace and State Historic Site. Since WWBA is a small, local organization and social media is free, this is an opportunity for visibility that the organization should make more of an effort to be actively engaged in.

Implementation

There are many free or low-cost ways that museums and cultural institutions can engage their audience via social media. Inspiration in this matter can be taken from the Chicago History Museum which "launched an Instagram contest asking people to share their favorite part of an exhibit, and the winner was announced on their social media and received a special

catalogue.”³ The WWBA could use Instagram and have participants write a short poem (with a few defined parameters), post the poem to Instagram with a tag, and the museum could conduct a contest that whoever gets the most “likes” wins. In this way, WWBA is supporting their mission, engaging users, and increasing the number of views and followers. They could reach two types of audiences by running two contests, one for adults and one for kids. Additionally, if WWBA were to link their social media accounts together, as they should, the contest could be cross-posted to reach more people. The prizes for the contest winners and runners-up could include free admission to writing workshops and events, a feature on the WWBA’s social media accounts, and even a feature specially displayed on-site. The possibilities for a social media contest are endless and the implementation of a contest of this nature could tap into the social media potential that WWBA has yet to unlock.

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³ “Participatory Experiences.” 2016. *NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Museum Edition*: 19.