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Museum Observation 2

Introduction

Planting Fields Arboretum is currently working on projects to make the arboretum more digitally accessible to its visitors, and it will help to expand audience interaction with the exhibits on display. But the arboretum needs to make sure that it's reaching the proper audience and creating programs that will be beneficial to the visitors. Luckily, the Science Museum Group has principles that Planting Fields can follow in order to help them create new interactive technology. These principles are: 1)Audience Centered, 2)Sustainable and Scalable, 3)Entrepreneurial and Innovative, 4)Open, Reusable and Sharable, and 5)Embedded Across the Organization.[1] Using the five principles in the Science Museum Group's "Digital Strategy 2015-2017" may help Planting Fields to develop the proper interactive programs for visitors both near and far.

How the Principles Can Help Planting Fields

The first principle in the Strategy Guide is the Audience Centered principle, which, as it states in its title, centers around the audience. The guide mentions that a digital display needs to "develop content around clearly defined audience needs,"[2] which Planting Fields is doing through programs that are already in development: "In the future we will have a web based searchable database of all our collections. This will allow visitors to search for specific plants or even memorial trees from their phones or personal

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[1] Science Museum Group, "Digital Strategy 2015-2017" last modified 2017. https://group.sciencemuseum.org.uk/policies-and-reports/digital-strategy/.
[2] Ibid.

computer before they arrive at the arboretum."[3] This type of display is very personal to the arboretum's audience because the displays in the gardens could actually be donations from the visitors themselves, and this type of digital exhibit will allow people to be in close contact with a specific tree or plant that they memorialized for somebody. There are also plenty of events and festivals that take place at Planting Fields in order to immerse visitors in the arboretum's atmosphere.

Figure 1- Planting Fields Arboretum Events Page

But these are just a few of many ways that the arboretum can connect with the audience.

Planting Fields can also utilize the Sustainable and Scalable principle in order to keep visitors interested in the exhibits. This principle states that it will "commission content with the whole user experience in mind."[4] This can be easily accomplished if Planting Fields were to implement the interactive programs that are used on the Arbor

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[3] Michael Runkel, e-mail message, March 20, 2018.
[4] Science Museum Group, "Digital Strategy 2015-2017" last modified 2017.
https://group.sciencemuseum.org.uk/policies-and-reports/digital-strategy/.

Day Foundation website, specifically the one that takes a person inside of a tree to learn about the separate layers.
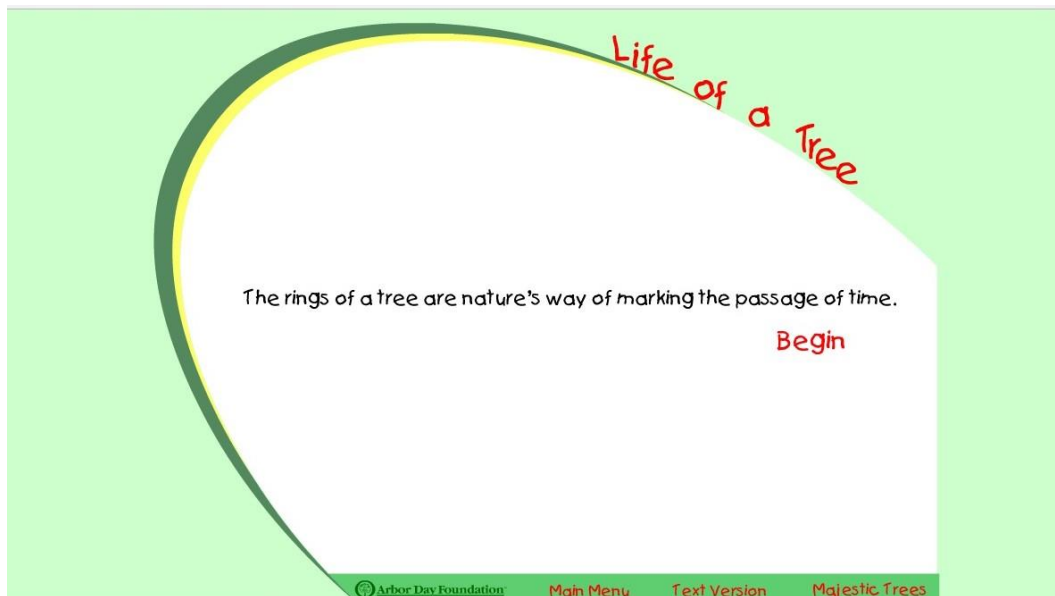

Figure 2- "Life of Tree"- Interactive Exhibit

This technology is simple, yet it can be used to show visitors the life cycles of the exhibits that are on display in the arboretum. The simple technology is also beneficial because it is already established technology that can quickly be utilized by Planting Fields without any alterations, which is important for the Entrepreneurial and Innovative principle: "Make innovative use of established and proven technologies."[5] The "Life of a Tree" program was created by Flash, and it would be easy for Planting Fields to use the same program to create their own interactive dendrochronology exhibit.

Planting Fields Arboretum is just beginning to establish complex digital programs into their arboretum, and it will be important for them to continue moving forward with many new digital programs in order to make the arboretum accessible to all people. This is covered in the Open, Reusable and Shareable, and Embedded Across the Organization

[5] Ibid.

principles of the "Digital Strategy 2015-2017," respectively: "Share collection data and other data sets where they will aid external researchers"[6] and "Embed digital into development process for all initiatives."[7] Planting Fields can aid people who go to their website by giving more information on the plants in each section of the arboretum. It is already a well established practice of tagging each individual plant in the arboretum for those looking to find more information on a plant, but this should also be done on the main part of the website with clear pictures of the plants in order to help those who need plant information but can't make it to the museum. Planting Fields has already begun to make these changes, but it is important for them to continue to "embed digital into development process"[8] in order to remain relevant in an increasingly digital world.

How Do Information Professionals Blend Digital and Physical

The biggest way that information professionals blend the physical and digital worlds is by creating interactive exhibits for visitors to museums. It is important for a museum not to remain a static, unresponsive place as it will only be attractive to scholars and students completing school projects. In order for information professionals to get everybody involved with museums, they need to immerse people in the exhibit instead of keeping it separated behind a piece of think glass. The Science Museum Group explains this as "… the need to establish sustainable, solid and high-quality public-facing digital content platforms and the exciting opportunity for the museums—especially because of

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

their subject matter—to provide innovative and exciting digital experiences."[9] This sort of technology eliminates the separation between the visitor and the exhibit, so the visitor has the opportunity to get as close as possible to the exhibit and learn more about it through their own actions with the interactive technology. This blend between worlds takes the exhibit out from behind the glass and gives it to the visitor, who now has complete control of how much he or she wishes to learn about the object.

How Does Planting Fields Blend the Worlds

While some of their more interactive programs are still in development, Planting Fields does already have some working digital exhibits that benefit its visitors. One very interesting page on the website is called "What's in Bloom," and it allows the visitors to see which plants are in bloom at certain times during the year.

Figure 3- Planting Fields Arboretum "What's in Bloom" page

[9] John Stack, "Lab Introductions and Projects," *Science Museum Group Digital Lab*, last modified November 22, 2016. https://lab.sciencemuseum.org.uk/science-museum-group-digital-lab-introduction-and-projects-1f7a6f26a208.

While this page isn't exactly interactive, it gives information to future visitors about how to plan a trip to the arboretum. If visitors want to see a specific plant in bloom, this page provides the proper information to help them. This is following the Open, Reusable and Shareable principle of the "Digital Strategy 2015-2017": "Share collection data and other data sets where they will aid external researchers"[10] For people who wish to know more about the arboretum and its programs before going, there is also a Facebook page that has more pictures and past reviews by other visitors.
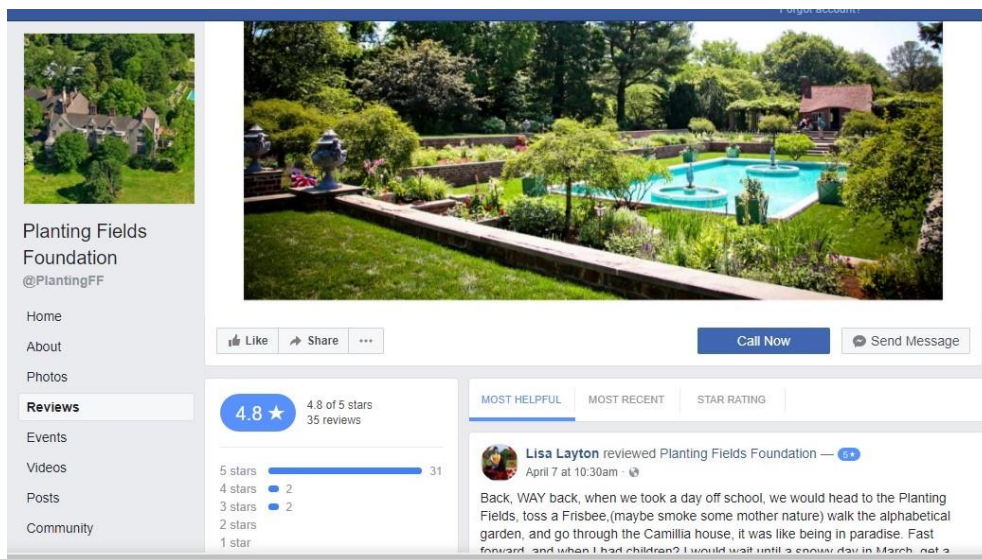

Figure 4-Planting Fields Foundation Facebook Reviews page

These already established programs offer people basic ways to stay in contact with Planting Fields, and learn about their current exhibits and programs. Although, the programs that are in development, such as the memorial tree and GPS tracking programs, are definitely going to be more interactive than the current programs and will be beneficial (and sometimes more personal) to a larger number of people.

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[10] Science Museum Group, "Digital Strategy 2015-2017" last modified 2017. https://group.sciencemuseum.org.uk/policies-and-reports/digital-strategy/.

<u>Interaction with the Monkey Puzzle</u>

In order for people to have greater interaction with specific plants, a greater digital presence is necessary. For the Monkey Puzzle, it is important for people to be able to interact with it online because it is dangerous to interact with it in person. Visitors may be able to touch this tree, but, because of its incredibly sharp leaves, people must be careful in close proximity. Online, visitors can have a greater interaction with the Monkey Puzzle without the danger.

The "Life of a Tree" exhibit would be beneficial for those who want to learn more about the general workings of the tree, but its history and migration are also just as important. Planting Fields should have an online program on their website that allows visitors to see the history of its plants, including the Monkey Puzzle Tree, such as: where it's indigenous, its importance in certain cultures, the origin of its name, and how it is used in everyday life. Planting Fields could even add stories about specific Monkey Puzzle Trees and how people react to them in current societies by partnering with media organizations, such as The Guardian, and adding their findings to the exhibit.[11] Interactive maps could be used for this purpose. A person could choose a point on a map and learn about the effect the Monkey Puzzle had in that area. Because Planting Fields already uses GIS mapping technology, they may be able to implement an interactive map program for visitors. This history and the personal accounts of how Monkey Puzzle Trees affect people will give visitors to Planting Fields a more personal connection with this tree, and it may encourage some visitors to make return trips to Planting Fields to learn even more about the Monkey Puzzle.

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[11] Robbie Blackhall-Miles, "Monkey Puzzles: An Iconic Tree Under Threat," *The Guardian*, last modified May 7, 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/gardening-blog/2015/may/07/monkey-puzzles-araucaria.

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