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Digital Strategies at the American Museum of Natural History

The Five Principles

The Science and Museum Group develops a strong guide on how information professionals can develop strategies befitting an increasingly digital world that benefits both museum's and their visitors. The five principles of digital strategies, as cited in Science Museum Group's Digital Strategy guide are:

- **Audience Centered**, the audience and visitor experience is at the core of all of digital strategies and that new technologies should be implemented with the audience as the primary concern. Technologies should be built around people's needs and adapted to changing trends and values when applicable (Science Museum Group, 2015).

- **Sustainable and Scalable**, build digital strategies upon technologies that can grow and evolve alongside changing trends and values. Plan for the long-term with streamlined and user-centric information architecture, so that when technologies become outdated, the processes can be adjusted rather than completely dismantled and replaced (Science Museum Group, 2015).

- **Entrepreneurial and Innovative**, experiment with new technologies that are well-established and well-received. Follow technological developments and apply them to the museum context to create a unique user experience that thrives on modern technologies (Science Museum Group, 2015).

- **Open, Reusable, and Sharable**, enable and encourage open source platforms that allows reuse of museum content. Bring the information to researchers through the digital realm as well as the physical by making data accessible and sharable in the online environment (Science Museum Group, 2015).

- **Embedded Across the Organization**, if the institution has several different technological elements operating separately, or even against one another, start from scratch. Develop a plan that includes a singular digital department that is responsible for the museum's digital strategies as a whole so that information sharing is embedded throughout all of the museum's processes (Science Museum Group, 2015).

Blending the Digital and the Physical Worlds

Connecting with users through relevant and meaningful narrative that provides a context for museum object's is an important foundation to building valuable exhibits (Science Museum Group, 2015). Additionally, information professionals can make the museum collection's engaging and accessible not only in a physical space, but in a digital one as well. In turn, the physical and the digital environments compliment and influence one another. As museum's strive to present physical exhibitions that engage with audience's needs and values,

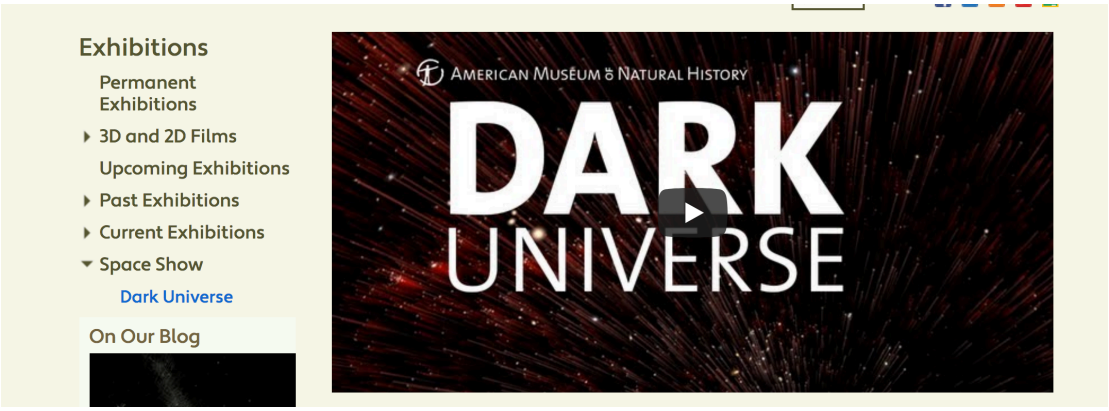
information professionals are given a platform on which they may build innovative digital experiences. Observing and understanding the ways in which visitors interact with the physical environments reflects the digital strategies through which exhibits may be enhanced. This relationship between the physical and digital is symbiotic, as the digital experience strengthens that physical one, and vice versa.

Digital Strategies Applied at AMNH

The American Museum of Natural History is actively attempting to engage with the visiting public through digital strategies and interactive technologies. Based on my observations, via experiences visiting the museum and the AMNH's website, it is clear that in the realm of the general visiting public, the museum understands the power of digital strategies and makes great efforts to enact digital strategies across such a large and historic institution. The museum falls short in this area when attempting to connect researchers with content and the institution would benefit from considering and adhering to Principle 5, "Embedded across the organization', of the Science Museum Group's report. Overall the museum is making great strides to connect audiences to museum collections through digital strategies.

There are several methods by which museum staff utilize new technologies to engage with visitors:

- **The Hayden Planetarium**, featuring a large dome, IMAX-like screen, that captures the eye-catching beauty of astronomy and the nature of the universe. (https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/space-show/dark-universe)

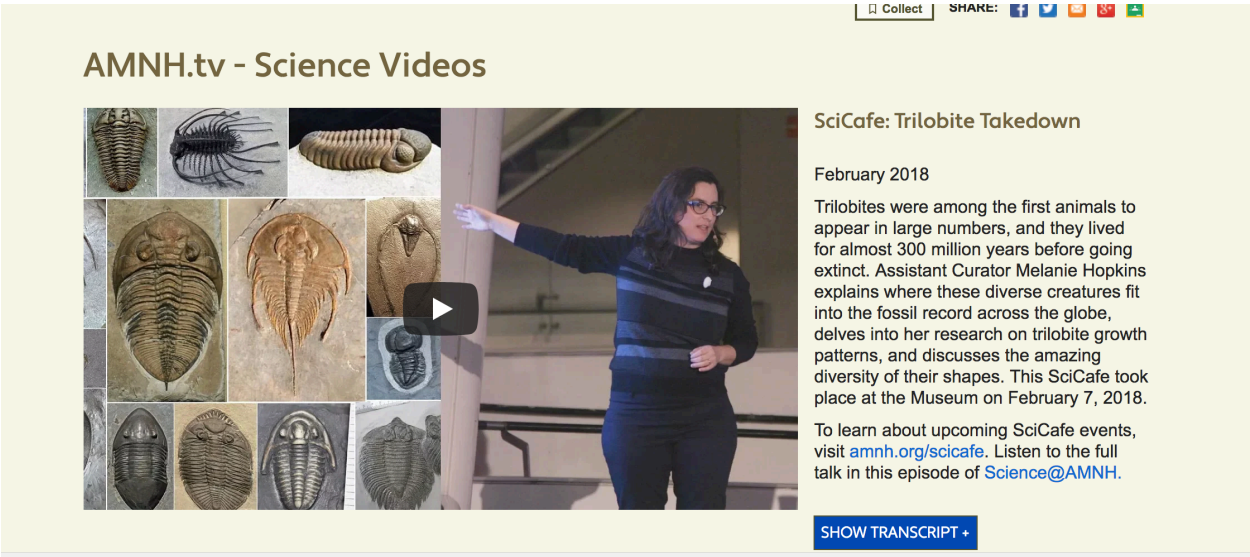


American Museum of Natural History, Dark Universe

- **2D and 3D films**, present a rotating selection of films, sometimes related to current exhibitions, that engage with audience's senses (https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/3d-and-2d-films).

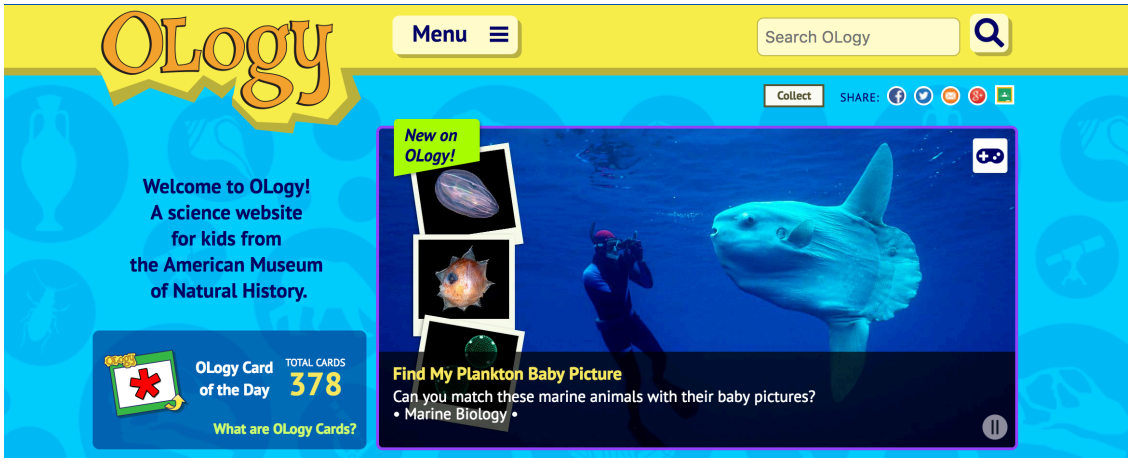
- **Touch screen information kiosks and video kiosks**, to connect visitors to museum objects through authoritative information that goes beyond static, object descriptions

- **AMNH.tv**, available online and featuring videos on lectures, events, research, museum operations, and exhibits (https://www.amnh.org/explore/amnh.tv).



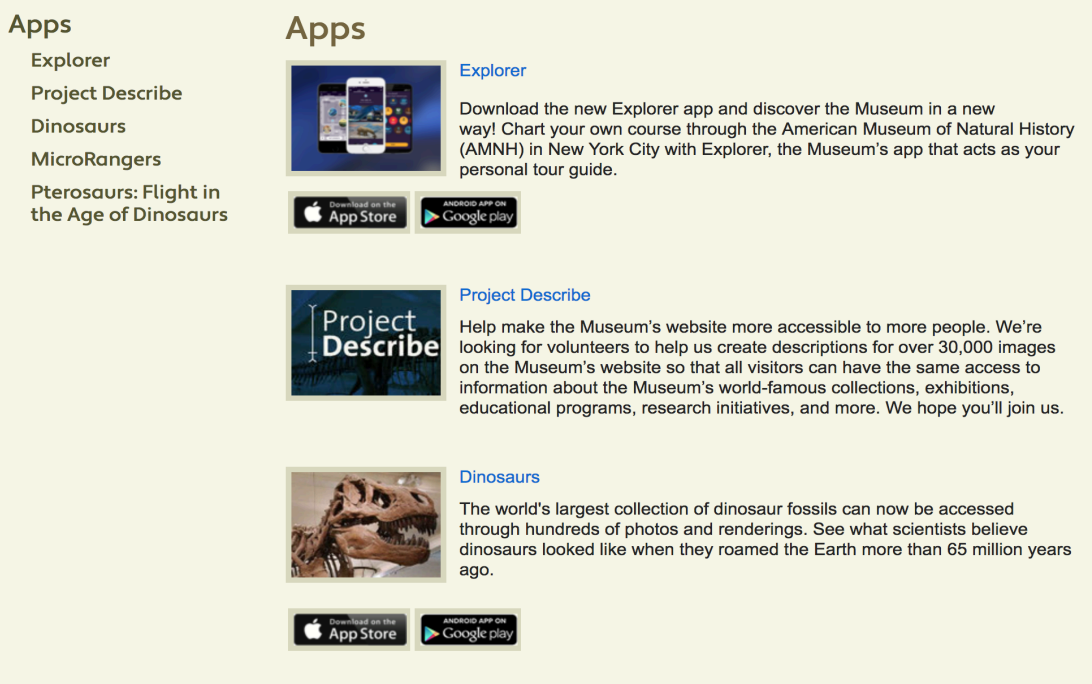
American Museum of Natural History, AMNH.tv

- **AMNH Ology**, a learning website for children that connects children to museum collections through family-friendly games, stories, hands-on activities, and videos (https://www.amnh.org/explore/ology).



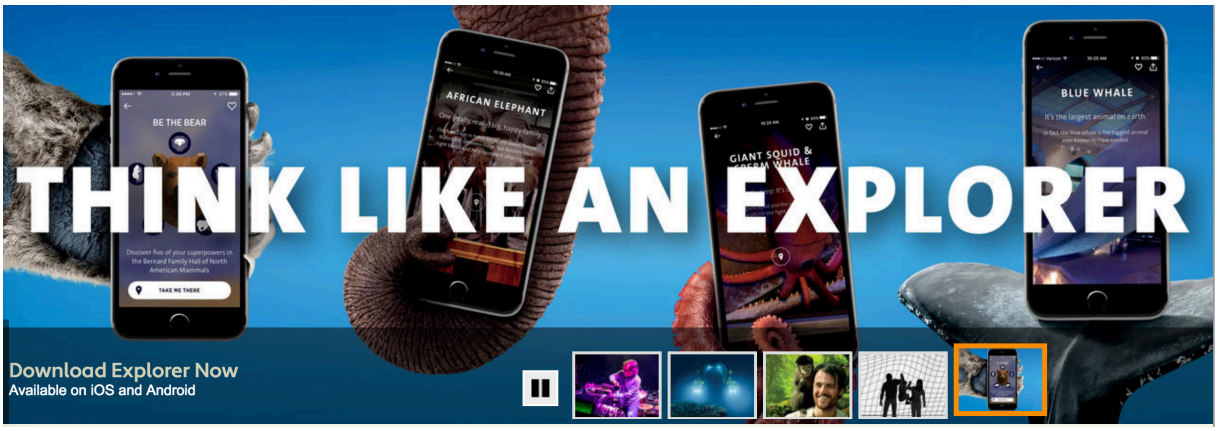
American Museum of Natural History, Ology

- **Apps**, the museum offers multiple apps for smart phones for a range of ages and contexts *(*https://www.amnh.org/apps/)



American Museum of Natural History, Apps

  - "Explorer", provides a behind-the-scenes look at exhibits through interactive content. Also gives directions and maps to assist in navigating the museum. Users from home can explore permanent halls via the app. (https://www.amnh.org/apps/explorer)



American Museum of Natural History, Explorer

- "Project Describe", the AMNH's open-source, tagging project that allows users to provide descriptions of the museum's images and participate in the process of making museum content universally accessible and findable in the online environment (http://projectdescribe.amnh.org/#/).

American Museum of Natural History, Project Describe

- "MicroRangers", an augmented reality game for kids that uses geolocation to bring particular exhibits to life and encourages children to learn about microorganisms through mini-games (https://www.amnh.org/learn-teach/families/microrangers).

American Museum of Natural History, MicroRangers

Javanese Puppet Theatre through a Digital Experience

As previously discussed in the interactive technology assignment, one way in which the object, Javanese Puppet Theatre, made be made digitally interactive is to include videos or touch-screen information kiosks about the craft of Javanese and Balinese puppet. Tutorials could be included in the videos and the crafting workshop that I previously recommended to highlight the object could also be formatted for a digital platform rather than a physical one. Similar to the museum's "Ology" website for kids, or the "MicroRangers" app, a puppet building game could be implemented, granting users the ability to digitally design a puppet by choosing

materials, carving different facial expressions, decorating the form in the traditional Javanese style, and even creating a story-telling narrative that allows other puppets to interact with one another.

References

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