

Introduction

In a rapidly changing society, museums have become almost ancient artifacts of an unconnected past. In order to maintain relevant in current society, museums need to update the way they interact with their visitors. According to the NMC Horizon Report 2016 Museum Addition, if museums want to attract newer audiences, they will need to start incorporating their visitors into the museum: "... millennial audiences are 'dedicated to a radically participatory ethic,' craving experiences that incorporate fun, discovery, and community."¹ The current generation of museum-goers seem to react more to museums when they can add their opinions to the exhibits. Planting Fields Arboretum should also start using social media to its advantage in order to get more people interested in the exhibits. Right now, they just have a basic Internet presence that allows people to see pictures of the arboretum, but not much more. For Planting Fields Arboretum, there are ways to implement social media programs that may not just help the museum, but will be environmentally friendly programs as well.

Social Media Link

Currently, Planting Fields Arboretum has pages on a couple of social media websites, and one of the most active sites is their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PlantingFF/>. After looking through their Facebook page, I've learned that this site allows people to see pictures, post comments, and write reviews, just like any other Facebook page; although, this

¹ "NMC Horizon Report 2016 Museum Addition," *NMC.org*, last modified 2016, <http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2016-nmc-horizon-report-museum-EN.pdf>.

page is a little different in that it allows people to browse through the site without logging in, which is what I did. This means that Planting Fields can reach a larger audience on social media, including those without Facebook accounts, but I would have to log in if I wanted to interact with the arboretum, such as leaving a review.

Social Media Features

Planting Fields’s Facebook page is a basic social media page that allows for pictures, videos, a biography, and comments. Planting Fields uses this website in order to attract attention to the arboretum and connect visitors to the experience: “...museums forge certain kinds of social connection through the use of social media...”² Even though they’re basic features, people still use them in order to describe their experiences at the arboretum, or sometimes even register a complaint that could bring an outdated policy to the attention of the arboretum staff. Some people may feel awkward talking about the arboretum in person, whether a complaint or a compliment, and Facebook offers a way for people to communicate with the arboretum in a way in which they may feel more comfortable, which is stated as an important feature by the director of the Museum of Fine Arts: “We have to go to where the people are. It’s immensely important to connect with them in a way they’re most comfortable with. And perhaps after we make that connection, they’ll come to us and allow us to make them comfortable with museum tradition.”³ This is a good first step for Planting Fields Arboretum to connect with their audience, but there are other, more involved, ways that Planting Fields can integrate their visitors into the arboretum.

² Kirsten Drotner, and Kim Christian Schrøder, “Museum Communication and Social Media: The Connected Museum,” *European Journal of Communication* 32, no. 2 (2017): 180, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323117699758>.

³ James H. Burnett III, “Social Media Push Art Appreciation Beyond Museum Walls,” *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), Sept 18, 2011, <http://jerome.stjohns.edu:81/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.jerome.stjohns.edu/docview/890584660?accountid=14068>.

Good Example of Interactivity

Planting Fields Arboretum uses its Facebook page as a way to attract people to the actual arboretum, but Facebook could also be used to more closely connect with the patrons. The Museum of Fine Arts has starting using their Facebook page to offer opportunities to their patrons: "... through the digital grapevines of Facebook and Twitter... the MFA was kicking off a new program on Thursday nights called Drawing in the Galleries, allowing visitors to mingle socially and sketch drawings of models."⁴ The Museum of Fine Arts also issued a challenge that allowed people to find certain clues about exhibits and offered prizes to the winner: "... to draw interest in an upcoming World War II spy-themed exhibit [MFA] plant[ed] clues across the museum's websites. Visitors who found the clues were rewarded with exclusive sneak peaks at the exhibit and offered first crack at seeing the exhibit in person when it opened."⁵ Planting Fields Arboretum could also use their Facebook page to offer challenges to their visitors. Because the arboretum focuses on plants, they could issue weekly challenges for people to locate a certain kind of plant in their area, and the first people to post their successful results to the arboretum Facebook page could get a free ticket to the arboretum. This challenge could also apply to the Monkey Puzzle Tree. Although it's likely to be found in more tropical climates, there are still Monkey Puzzle Trees in the United States. These challenges could describe the Monkey Puzzle Tree, and people could use the description to try and identify this tree in the wild. Not only does this challenge get more attention for Planting Fields arboretum, but the visitors learn more about the plants in the arboretum without even being there.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Another challenge that Planting Fields could offer their visitors is what people are doing to help plants in their community. Planting Fields could have a special post every week on their Facebook page and call it “Environmentalist of the Week,” and this post could celebrate a person or group of people who are helping the environment by planting trees or plants. The Museum of Fines Arts also implemented a program where they asked people to post their experiences relating to a specific exhibit:

One of the instrument museum's most successful social media campaigns came last month when it reopened a gallery with a new Elvis Presley exhibit featuring a Martin D-28 acoustic guitar that Elvis had played at Arizona State University. The museum asked its Facebook followers if any had attended that ASU concert back in the day... ‘And they began posting pictures and sharing nostalgic stories on our pages about being there that day and seeing Elvis play that specific guitar. This sort of interaction, driven by the patrons, keeps people coming back.’⁶

Posting pictures of involved citizens helps the arboretum connect with its patrons as well as showcase people who are taking action against environmental changes. This type of challenge could be very important for a species such as the Monkey Puzzle. Because the Monkey Puzzle is an endangered species, Planting Fields could direct one of their environmentalist challenges to planting this type of tree. The challenge isn’t very hard, which could also make it attractive to potential challengers; people who want to get involved only have to plant a tree and take a picture of it for Planting Fields’s Facebook page.

⁶ Ibid.

Potential Audiences

Planting Fields's challenges can apply to anybody who uses Facebook, but they would probably apply more to people old enough to travel to locations with specific plants. Families could use the "plant location" challenge as a way to teach their children about different plants, and winning the free tickets would be useful if a family wants to take the children out for a day, but doesn't want to spend a lot of money. As somebody who works in a library which sells discounted tickets, I've noticed that families are always coming in looking for ways to help reduce costs on family trips, especially during vacations. If Planting Fields were to offer challenges where the prizes were free arboretum tickets, families would definitely try to obtain the free tickets by completing the challenge.

Another group that may respond to the social media aspect of the Planting Fields Arboretum challenges are teenagers and young adults. Posting pictures and videos of everyday events is a commonplace occurrence among millennials, and this audience could jump at the chance to be featured in one of the Planting Fields posts. For millennials who enjoy posting their days to Facebook for people to see, they could reach a larger audience by entering into one of the Planting Fields challenges and be featured in a post. This is a perfect way to get younger audiences interested and involved in Planting Fields Arboretum's exhibits because it allows these new audiences to contribute to the arboretum itself. According to the Museum of Fine Arts: "It seems simple, but providing that sort of information rewards loyalty to visitors and patrons... It really does create a bond that can push some people to want to turn off the computer and go to the museum to see for themselves."⁷

⁷ Ibid.

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