Interactive Technology at the Cleveland Museum of Art

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Link to Exhibit:

https://www.macrumors.com/2013/03/20/cleveland-museum-of-art-uses-ipads-for-visitor-personalized-tours/ - an article describing the program and technology

http://www.clevelandart.org/artlens-gallery – link to the ArtLens interactive online and mobile features used by the Cleveland Museum of Art

Interactive Exhibits at the Cleveland Museum of Art

The 'ArtLens' program at the Cleveland Museum of Art is an interactive way of viewing the museum's collection that uses mobile devices, online services, and on-site iPads to make the experience more engaging for a user. The program combines a mobile app with interactive features in the museum itself, which allows the user to not only view the entire collection of the museum, but to choose favorites from said collection, create and share their own tours, and be linked to related or similar art.

On the premises, visitors will be greeted by a 40-foot touchscreen where they can see the entire collection and choose photos that interest them; selecting a piece also shows similar pieces in the collection, and the visitor can favorite the piece by touching a small heart next to it, which they can then transfer to the app, which can be accessed in high resolution either using an iPad the visitor has brought, or by renting one from the museum for $5 a day (Sumra 2013). The museum itself even boasts a way to interact with specific pieces on a personal level with their ArtlLens Exhibition feature, which gives visitors the ability to physically interact with specific pieces using technology that follows gestures for manipulating the piece, as well as games that provide even greater interaction. From a distance, patrons can interact with the collection through the mobile app on their phones, even creating and sharing personal artwork with others along with the personalized tours they have created using the program.

The ArtLens program also works to bring in more foot traffic; as mentioned by Paul Marty (2008), there is a concern among museums that having more of a digital presence will decrease physical interactions with exhibits (p. 183). To try and deter visitors from only viewing collections online instead of coming to the museum itself, the Cleveland Museum of Art has kept their program from including high resolution images of the pieces they carry, so that a patron viewing these collections on their mobile device will wish to see the real thing in person.

Interactive Exhibits at the Cloisters

The Cloisters museum, being part of the whole that is the Metropolitan Museum of Art, already has quite a few online elements at its disposal, including social media accounts, a website featuring images of exhibits and blurbs to accompany them, and an overall MET app for mobile devices. A program similar to what is used at the Cleveland Museum of Art, however, could bring about an interactive experience that includes both the Cloisters and the main MET location in Manhattan.

When I visited the Cloisters, compared to when I have visited the main MET museum, there was a large discrepancy in visitors. It is true that the Cloisters is smaller and more narrow, as it is built in a medieval-style building, yet it is also more isolated and hard to notice unless you know it's there. Considering that the MET museums already have an app, it could be expanded to include a similar program to what is being used in Cleveland – one that connects exhibits and art pieces in the MET with those in the Cloisters, and vice versa. With the amount of visitors that pass through the MET, using an interactive app on an iPad that shows similarly themed or connected work and exhibits in the Cloisters to the pieces in the MET could increase foot traffic for the Cloisters. Plus, with the ability to make and share their own tours, patrons could lead other patrons to make day visits out of seeing both museums –

and get some exercise to boot, considering where the Cloisters is located.

Unlike the Cleveland Museum of Art, however, the Cloisters would benefit greatly from including high resolution images of exhibits on such an app. In the NMC Horizon Report (2015), it is said that international social media accounts hosted by the MET have enjoyed great success, with 60 posts on a Weibo account, the major social network in China, "hav[ing] been viewed over three million times" (p. 16). If the MET app included interactive features connecting its different locations through related exhibits, it could create an even better experience for international users who are not currently capable of visiting the physical locations – or who may be planning to, in the future.

Potential Audiences

The two most likely potential audiences for such an interactive experience would be academic based (such as students, educators, and researchers) and art or historical enthusiasts. Both of these groups are the type to be searching for related materials, and also potentially needing to access exhibits and artifacts without being to physically visit the museums in question.

Marty (2008) brings up that "[e]xpecting the museum to be able to to give them the information they need in the format they need it...may place unreasonable or extremely difficult demands on museum employees" (p. 181); with an app that links similar or related pieces to a specific subject, a significant burden can be taken off of said employees. And with online access, these patrons will be able to find what they are looking for in their homes or classrooms, while potentially planning on-site visits to see the exhibits in person. Combining these new features with those the MET app already provides could even inspire more interest in museum and exhibition events, which would also add to foot traffic.

References

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