

Museum Environments in Transition: Impact of IT on Museum Workers

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Impact of IT on museum work: A Research Project

- Funded by Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN)
- Five parts
 - Analysis of I.T. courses taught in museum studies programs in North America
 - Review of literature
 - Interviews with 16 mid to senior museum professionals
 - Analysis of job ads
 - Gap analysis

The literature

- Impact of IT on the museum?
 - ‘from object-based to experience based” Parry
 - Fundamental changed the ways museums communicate with their publics – Bearman and Gerber
 - “Digitization, virtualization, networking, syndication and user-generated and co-created content have shaken the sector’s constructs of authenticity, materiality, ownership, authority and audience” Peacock

Literature – future trends

- DigiCult Study
 - Intelligent and contextual
 - Natural and enjoyable
 - Digital creation and co-creation
 - Large-scale and distributed
 - Persistent and perpetual

Interviews

- 35-75 minute telephone interviews
- 16 mid to senior museum professions working in North America
- Interviews recorded and notes taken
- Participants – working in natural history museums, art museums, museum foundations, encyclopedic museums, academia
 - Senior collection managers
 - Senior I.T professionals
 - Museum managers
 - Faculty teaching museum studies

From the interviews

- Impact
 - Multi-media installations changed the ways exhibitions are undertaken and the ways museums communicate - Kiosks moved from the corner to the centre of the exhibition
 - Digitization of collections – sharing of 3d images of museum objects and specimens– scholars can access material at a distance and compare objects
 - Web 2.0 – new ways of thinking and connecting with the public
 - ‘no longer about the visitor in the life of the museum, now about the museum in the life of the visitor’
 - Move from a conservative, authoritative voice to a more casual, social space.

Collection management software

- Backbone of the museum
- All museum workers use and add information to the system
- Collection management data available on the web – need to make sure it is accurate
- Problems with legacy data – standardizing 150 years of collection data

Web 2.0

- Museums are using web 2.0 to connect with public. Web 2.0 changes the way museums communicate
- Visitors adding own material to the collection and tagging documents
- Museums advertising services and making material available through Youtube, Facebook, Flickr
- Museum webmasters often set policy

Alternative point of view

- Some suggest museums have not changes any more than society
- Museum's core values remain the same – museums still collect, preserve and make objects available.

A tension – between access and accuracy

Some legacy data not completely up-to-date or accurate

- Museums still an authority and must make sure their authoritative role remains – need to differentiate between what the public contributes from what the museum provides
- Bad data or poor information made available on the Web reflects poorly on the subject expertise of museum professionals
- One interviewee pointed out public does not require 100% accuracy for all description and if museums wait until 100% accurate will never get it on the Web

Challenges

- The pressure to serve the public online has lead many museums to pursue IT trends without understanding consequences
- Cost of designing, implementing and maintaining technology
- Lack of in-house expertise about information technology
- Many challenges related to information management.
- Preservation of digital objects – digital photographs not given the same care as traditional photographs

Job ads

- 190 job ads
- 67.9 % of jobs posting required knowledge of basic Office skills
- 21.6% required relational database skills
- 17.4% Internet/Web skills
- 15.3% required knowledge of specialized museum software
– Raiser Edge

Skills needed

- Need to know how to evaluate the benefits and risks of implementing technologies
- Need to know how to care for digital assets – digital curation expertise
- Need information management skills – merging legacy data with data that complies to new metadata schemes
- Need to understand how stories are made and navigated on the Web
- Need to evaluate and use specific museum software.
- Some need specialized digital media skills, e.g., website design, digital images and providing material on mobile devices but also need to understand museum theory and the museum environment

- Thank you

- More information

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