Chapter 7

Museums on the Web: Interaction with Visitors

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ABSTRACT

This chapter surveys current best practices for museum-visitor interaction on the Web and presents impressive, publicly available examples. These examples illustrate particular interaction ideas and highlight promising research directions. The chapter provides a qualitative analysis of museum Web appearances with specific focus on interaction between museums and their visitors. The material in this chapter is grouped around the interaction paradigms of Web 1.0, Web 2.0, Web 3D, and mobile Web. The main focus of the analysis is on art museums. However, when more advanced solutions are visible at other museum types, they are mentioned as well.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet and especially the World Wide Web on top of it is playing an incredible role in enabling democratic access to information and interactive communication for its participants. This development is even more remarkable when remembering the history of the Internet that was conceptualised during the Cold War era in order to ensure the possibility of communication after a nuclear strike (Rosenzweig, 1998). The success of the Internet is amongst other issues also due to its decentralised structure and open standards and protocols. For a review of the history of the Internet in terms of the network part, we refer to (Leiner, Cerf, Clark, Kahn, Kleinrock, Lynch, Postel, Roberts & Wolff, 2009).

Once available for the general public, the Web quickly became a prime information source. In general, museums realised the potential of infor-
Museums on the Web

In the years since its launch, the Web changed dramatically in terms of usage patterns. In the beginning, the Web was primarily a medium with a limited number of information providers and a huge number of information consumers. For the providers, Web sites were mainly seen as digital analogues to brochures, where an organization may describe itself and deliver this picture to their customers. In particular, basic information about the museum was given. This era can be referred to as the Web 1.0 time. Kevin Sumption describes this first generation of museum Web sites as a derivate of the ‘just in case’ reasoning. ‘Just in case’ visitors surfing the net might wish to visit your museum, they could find sufficient information to know where to find you, what admission costs, and what programs are showing. (Sumption, 2006)

The next big step of the Web involved large-scale user participation. Platforms were developed where the role of users transcends from mere recipients of information to active producers of information. These platforms have in common that they provide easy-to-use tools that enable their users to share thoughts, photos, videos, etc. Without any intention of completeness we just refer to places like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr or YouTube. All of these places are referred to with the umbrella term of Web 2.0, the ReadWriteWeb (Murugesan, 2007). The governing principle is more or less unrestricted user participation to...
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