More than an afterthought: Planning for Physical Exhibits in a Digital Space

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More than an afterthought

Planning for Physical Exhibits in a Digital Space

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Overview

- Exhibit Creation
  - Physical exhibits
  - Digital exhibits
- Challenges
- Benefits
- Lessons learned
- Hopes & dreams
Exhibit Creation
What is a physical exhibit?

- Items arranged for public display
- Usually in gallery or museum setting
- Focus is giving context to objects

By John Lennon's missing 1962 Gibson J-160E guitar in the exhibit - "Ladies and Gentlemen... the Beatles!" exhibit at LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, 2015-06-10 10:42:09.jpg: Lauren Gerson Uploaded to Flickr by: LBJ Foundation derivative work: Clusternote [CC BY 3.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0), via Wikimedia Commons
Physical Exhibits at USU

- 5/6 major exhibits per year, handful minor exhibits + traveling exhibits
- 3 exhibit locations in library
- Exhibit Committee:
  - 8 members
  - Representatives from variety of departments
  - Graphic designer
Physical Exhibit Workflow

Exhibits can take between 9 weeks and a year to prepare

Planning elements include:

- Development of the exhibit concepts, including themes, content, and design elements;
- Arranging for professional photography, graphic design work, promotional material;
- Obtaining external funding through granting agencies or private donations;
- Securing one-time non-commercial use of copyrighted visual materials;
- Arranging for essays by scholars/specialists;
- Editing and proof-reading of all content (promotional material, gallery labels, etc.);
- Matting, framing, staging material and creating displays;
Physical Exhibit Workflow

- The physical production and installation of the exhibition is a team effort; however, the primary responsibility for completion, on schedule, of all prep and installation tasks is with the curator(s).
What is a digital exhibit?

- Electronic or digital objects arranged for public display
- Not the same as digitizing and putting items "online"
- Presented online or in a "virtual" space
- Focus is on giving context to objects
## Complimentary partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Exhibits</th>
<th>Digital Exhibits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow patrons to see original objects</td>
<td>Allow distance patrons to see exhibit, even if they can’t attend in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person connection to material</td>
<td>Virtual representation of physical space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited time of access can motivate patrons to attend</td>
<td>No time restraints on access, archive exhibit for long-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displays representative sample of material</td>
<td>Displays representative sample with direct means to access rest of material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on specific portions of items (page) can pre-empt exposure to rest of material</td>
<td>Access whole item (all pages of a book) without exposing material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical interaction with material possible</td>
<td>Virtual interaction with material possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Digital Exhibit Examples
after a physical exhibit

http://exhibits.lib.usu.edu/exhibits/show/jacklondon
Digital Exhibit Examples

in conjunction with a physical exhibit

http://exhibits.lib.usu.edu/exhibits/show/yearofwater
Digital Exhibit Examples

independent of a physical exhibit

http://exhibits.lib.usu.edu/exhibits/show/stannesretreat
Challenges
Challenges:
Creating a digital exhibit after a physical exhibit

- The time between exhibit projects can lead to information loss:
  - Curators/staff departures
  - Meaningful documentation
Challenges:
Creating a digital exhibit in conjunction with a physical exhibit

- Physical exhibit prep is chaotic in the days or hours leading up to the exhibit opening.
- Press releases go out before the exhibit opening/go live date.
- Digital exhibit cannot mirror the physical exhibit.
In 1911, L.M. Winsor received USU’s first irrigation engineering degree. During the next three decades, Winsor distinguished himself by providing many practical solutions to water problems.
Irrigation Engineering

In 1911, L.M. Winsor received USU’s first irrigation engineering degree. During the next three decades, Winsor distinguished himself by providing many practical solutions to water problems.

P0138 13-05-03. L.M. Winsor meeting with irrigators near Tooele, Utah.
Irrigation Engineering

In 1911, L.M. Winsor received USU’s first irrigation engineering degree. During the next three decades, Winsor distinguished himself by providing many practical solutions to water problems. Winsor may have epitomized the role as extension specialist, working with a variety of constituents from local irrigation companies to the American Smelting and Refining Company near Garfield, Utah.

L.M. Winsor

Extension irrigation specialist, L.M. Winsor, meeting with a group of irrigators, 1920 (P0138; Box 13; Folder 5; Item 3)

Drilling rig located west of Fillmore, Millard County, ca. 1919. The

http://exhibits.lib.usu.edu/exhibits/show/yearofwater/irrigation-engineering
Benefits
Benefits:
Creating a digital exhibit after a physical exhibit

- Exhibit layout and main content are already finalized/organized
- All material has already been identified
- More attention from curators in the development of digital exhibit
- Images of the physical exhibit can be displayed in a gallery within the digital exhibit
Physical Exhibit Gallery

Utah State University Libraries celebrated USU’s 2015 “Year of Water” by hosting an exhibit detailing the rich history and contribution of USU’s water researchers. The Year of Water physical exhibit was displayed in the atrium of the Merrill-Cazier Library from September 12 to November 6, 2015. An opening reception and gallery talk took place on September 17, 2015 and featured university archivist Bob Parson, who oversees the acquisition, organization, and care of USU’s permanent historic record.

This online photo gallery includes images of the physical exhibit as well as from the opening reception and gallery talk.

http://exhibits.lib.usu.edu/exhibits/show/yearofwater/physicalexhibit
Benefits:
Creating a digital exhibit in conjunction with a physical exhibit

- **Patrons:**
  - Those that want to dig deeper into the material
  - Those that cannot visit the physical exhibit

- **Promotion:**
  - Joint promotional efforts for the physical and digital exhibits
  - Promotion of the digital exhibit WITHIN the physical exhibit
Lessons Learned

- Continual outreach to staff:
  - **Culture** of the exhibit process
  - **Training** with staff who are very familiar with physical exhibit creation but unfamiliar with digital exhibits
  - Keep **reminding** them that you are there and need to be updated on any changes to the physical exhibit content
  - Have them **review** the digital exhibit before it goes live

- Timing of promotional materials
Year of Water Exhibit Reception and Gallery Talk at the Library

USU continues as a leader in bringing an interdisciplinary approach to water studies. More than ninety faculty members from departments in six of USU's academic colleges are currently involved in water research, teaching, and extension. Now, as then, water remains the life's work of many at USU; even as it remains the life's blood of Utah.

In recognition of these efforts and the 2015 Year of Water, the USU Libraries will host an exhibit detailing the rich history and contribution of USU's water researchers. Organized by curators Dan Davis and Bob Parson, the exhibit will run September 12, 2015 through November 6, 2015 in the Merrill-Cazier Library.

The opening reception and gallery talk will be held on Thursday, September 17 in the Merrill-Cazier Library atrium from 4:30 to 6:30 PM. The gallery talk will be presented by University Archivist Bob Parson. Mr. Parson oversees the acquisition, organization, and care of Utah State University's permanent, historic record. His areas of emphasis include state and local history, including water issues in Utah.

USU Libraries will also feature a Year of Water digital exhibit in coordination with this event. It will go live on September 12 and will be found here:

http://exhibits.usu.edu/exhibits/show/yearofwater.
More Lessons Learned

- Provide the context for your digital exhibit
- Photograph the physical exhibit
- Physical and digital exhibits cannot be mirror images of one another
- Include more images and text in the digital exhibit than what is contained in the physical exhibit
THE BEGINNING

The institution's first president and director of the Experiment Station, J.W. Sanborn, laid the college farm out into "three-hundred plots... for... irrigation trials." Sanborn published the results of these investigations in one of the Experiment Station's first bulletins in 1893.
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A native of New Hampshire, Sanborn came to Utah via Missouri where he had directed the College of Agriculture at the University of Missouri. He accepted the position as director of the Experiment Station in 1888, and was later appointed USU's first president. He served jointly as president and director until 1896, when he resigned to return to New Hampshire. Sanborn remained a staunch supporter of the institution he helped establish, and was honored in 1938 when he returned to campus to celebrate USU's semi-centennial.
Hopes & Dreams

- Make physical exhibits more interactive with digital exhibits
  - Integrate smartphone capabilities into physical exhibit (ex. QR on exhibit panel so patrons can view more of an item or associated material)
  - Computers terminals available near physical exhibit to explore the digital exhibit or associated digital collections

- Allow for user-contributed content to digital exhibits (ex. “tell your story” features, add photos, video, etc.)

- Integrate with social media capabilities
Resources

🥳 Want to build a digital exhibit with Omeka?


🥳 Omeka Exhibit Building YouTube Tutorial (by Macalester College): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-S6I7uWJPA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-S6I7uWJPA)

Questions?

Contact us!

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