



## “Using Digital as a Tool in Storytelling”

Evolution of the Arts in a Digital World Symposium - Session No. 2 Notes  
January 13, 2021

### INTRODUCTION

#### [Gallagher & Associates](#)

- Gallagher & Associates is a visitor experience studio with offices across North America and Singapore.
- They use an integrated approach, focusing on the physical and digital world to integrate interpretive design, architecture, and media.
- **Design Philosophy:**
  - **Be obsessed with audience** - how do we serve our audience and integrate user-centred design?
  - **Be in love with what you create** - this means loving innovation and meaningful, playful design.
  - **Be inspired by every discipline** - creativity is unpredictable, so are the best ideas and the things that people can do. We work in an interdisciplinary world and need to keep everyone's perspectives in mind.
- “Our Work” video
  - Our work radiates.
  - Our work combines stories with imagination, to unite people.
  - We ignite your mission, fuel your vision, and activate your audience.
- Project categories: music and the arts, social and cultural history, sports and attractions, natural history, and corporate experiences. The one consistent thread between all the categories is storytelling.

### STORYTELLING

- Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of any organization.
- Stories emotionalize information and bring it to life. Stories give colour, depth, and a way to be different.
- Participation. Joy. Action.
- How do we use technology (a tool devoid of emotion) to stimulate a response in people?

### BRING THE STORY TO LIFE

#### Audience

- What are their interests, triggers, needs? We need to make sure that we give the people what they want.
- Are there barriers to participation? Performing arts and cultural institutions can feel intimidating:
  - [CultureTrack](#) does a study every three years. One page from the Culture + Community in a Time of Crisis 2020 study was shown and this study was done specifically for COVID-related responses.
  - The top five reasons for people not going to art and cultural events are as follows:
    1. It's not for someone like me.



2. I didn't think of it.
  3. It's inconvenient.
  4. I couldn't find anyone to go with.
  5. Its value is not worth the cost.
- Before we can speak effectively to the audience, we need to know who they are and what they want.

Example: [Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience](#)

- Targeted local audiences to show their state's history, cultural heritage, and homegrown talents.
- The purpose of the museum is to create an experience that inspires future musicians and answer the question: "where does inspiration come from?".
- Quote: "it's amazing how a day can potentially change a life. What an opportunity we have been given!" For a group of students visiting the museum, this experience was a first for many. For some, it was their first time to downtown Meridian, the first time visiting a museum, the first time to see interactives, and the first-time seeing artists who came from similar backgrounds.

Example: [Destination Crenshaw](#)

- An outdoor museum right in the middle of the neighbourhood.
- The purpose of the museum is to celebrate the reputation of the neighbourhood as a creative incubator. It also highlights Black LA's impact on popular culture and social change.
- Look at the map, across this three-block stretch. How will the museum interact with visitors on and off-site?

## PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL

Digital Media Approach - Beyond the Physical Space

- By using social media on-site, we can create a space for conversation, creativity, and connecting people with stories in the physical world. With visitors interacting in a digital space, they generate content that will be shown on site.
- Use mobile technology as the connective tissue between all experiential and storytelling elements.
- Provide off-site activities and learning resources - website updated with feature events, in-person storytelling meetups, an online gallery, etc.
- Many organizations with a digital presence often utilize a 'set it and forget it' approach, where they make a post on their website and it will live there in perpetuity. The Crenshaw project for example has live content.
- It is necessary to work with artists to amplify voices and encouraging dialogue.

Same song, different verse

- Tone matters. The voice that is used matters.
- All audiences do not learn in the same way and/or see through the same lens.

Example: [Violins of Hope](#)

- A travelling exhibit that features violins and other string instruments that were saved during the Holocaust.



- The exhibit tells one story through the instrument themselves. The other story is told through the actual voices of survivors using holographic 3D technology.
- The collection contains over 60 violins that have all been used in concerts.
- Mr. Weinstein rescued 26 violins from the Holocaust so they could be heard in concerts.
- There are thirteen survivors who share their stories as part of this exhibit. They asked each survivor over 2,000 questions about their Holocaust experience so that their responses could be integrated into their interactive exhibit.

## Delivering the message

- Spoken word vs. classical violinists - what we would consider contrasting art mediums but were put together to deliver Violins of Hope's message.
- Lead visitors from knowledge to inspiration to action
- In the final image of the spoken word video, Harold Green, the spoken word artist, is standing with an audience of young people on one side and Holocaust survivors on the other.
- It is important that the kids in the audience are understanding the message being put forward.

## Reframe the Experience

- Context is crucial.
- To bring home the importance of a pivotal moment in history to a younger audience, sometimes all you need is to provide context.

## Example: [Bethel Woods Centre for the Arts](#)

- Bethel Woods Centre for the Arts is an immersive multimedia experience of Woodstock that takes visitors on a journey through time with artefacts, films, music, and more.
- Originally, the designers thought that the most important aspect of Woodstock to showcase was the musical performances.
- Younger audiences didn't have any context surrounding the protests and G&A realized that audiences needed to be dropped into the 1960s so they would understand the movements and the meaning behind the performances: peace, connection to the environment, civility, and kindness.
- The bus recreation in the museum is a replica of one that was driven to Woodstock. The front windshield now plays a video that visitors can watch from the hot pink leather seats. To the left, outside the bus, is a video loop of the three-day protests at Woodstock.

Moral of the Story: Know your audience and test your assumptions.

## Example: [Gilcrease Museum](#)

- Telling the story of the American West through the collection.
- Lives at a place of crossroads, intersections, thresholds, and boundaries; a region defined by its diversity of communities.
- Needed to use multiple lenses of interpretation to promote the understanding of intersections between art, history, community, and place.
- Uses RFID (radio frequency identification) technology to allow visitors to physically tap to save their favourite objects without the need for an additional screen. Saved items become personal entry



points into the broader Digital Collections Database. No longer a static room: people can create context by interacting with the artifacts.

## Shifting Perception

- [The Folger Shakespeare Library](#) (FSL) is attempting to break down barriers to embrace new approaches that are fun and welcoming.
- FSL can become the gateway to participation for new audiences.
- However, just because you decide to change perception, does not mean that it will follow. Perception shifts must be done in a strategic way and organizations need to listen to the audience they are trying to access.
- The [United States Olympic & Paralympic Museum](#) (USOPM) is integral to the new southwest downtown urban renewal district in Colorado Springs. It establishes the city as an Olympic city.

## CREATING THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

How do we harness the power of digital media? When is a physical artifact or activity more powerful? The answer is that physical and digital elements need to be in balance. We need to orchestrate highs and lows.

Strategy matters - the intersection between physical and digital is not an accident.

- Be grounded in the 'Why'. Be intentional.
- It is easy to be mesmerized by digital media.
- **Be relentless about the 'Why'. Rest assured, the 'HOW' will follow.**

## Innovative storytelling

- Audience driven.
- Content-driven (targeted to the audience)
- Emotionally engaging
- Surprising, not predictable... "did you know" moments.

## Holistic approach, physical and digital

- Creative alignment (includes the architecture) balance and intentional placement.
- Media should complement rather than overshadow.
- Holistic/seamless design across ALL disciplines and budgets

## Technology platforms

- System analysis and design engineering
- Implementation and support
- Appropriate media design and software development (specifically geared to YOUR needs)

## Measurable impact

- Stay grounded in goals.
- Measurable (this word has many iterations when it comes to experiential design)

## Sensory engagement

- Thoughtful experience designs can trigger powerful emotional responses.



- Obstructing sightlines might arouse feelings of isolation or intimacy. Do we want to reveal something after they interact with an exhibit?

## A Holistic View

- Bring all key disciplines into the process from the very beginning. Everything will work together in harmony to create inviting spaces and to tell stories. Sounds, lighting, and space will affect the mood of the subject matter.

## Lobby and Transition Spaces

- Important areas for those who are in the performing arts as these are not dedicated spaces.
- Still need to capture the visitor's attention but needs a different approach than dedicated spaces.
- Ex. [US Postal Museum](#) - in the lobby, begin to introduce content and get visitors to move through a linear path.
- Ex. [Natural History](#) lobby - Dinosaur hanging from the ceiling with a projection in the background that provides environmental context.

## SUMMARY - OUR ROLE/IMPACT

### Considerations

- Make your choices wisely:
  - Participation - meeting musicians, playing your instruments together virtually, touching something, creating something, listening to something, emulating the activity.
  - The Power of Place - this cannot be replaced. How do we augment the on-site experiences, both digitally and virtually? Cross-platform cohesion instigates connection for participants.
  - Inquiry and Imagination - meaningful storytelling is most successful when it pushes beyond the edges of expectations to the fresh and unexpected.
  - Making learning fun - create magic by orchestrating the highs and lows. Learning should be fun and interactive, and not always digital.
    - Ex. The Olympic Museum has a room where you can walk through as though you are in the opening ceremony.
  - Touchless or Touchable? - some activities and experiences need to remain touchable. AR technology enhances on-site discovery through stories, images, and interesting facts. QR codes provide layered information and take-home content.
  - Personalize and Create Shareable Moments - amplify the message through personalization and create a direct dialogue with visitors. Important for cultural institutions
    - Ex. Hall of Fame. When visitors entered, they put in which college they went to, who their favourite players are, and this information follows the visitors on their RFID tag and will pull that information as they travel through the exhibit.
  - Staying connected with visitors before, during, and after their visits. Outside of the core experience, can use things such as web/mobile, multi-user games, partner museums, travelling VR, out-of-home AR, partners/tours.
  - Guest Tracking, Control and Tracing - Using RFID to customize the experience, track how many visitors are in a space, which interactions are popular, create micro access control points, contact tracing.





Where do we go from here?

- Strategize and ask who is your current audience and whom do you want to reach?
- Our role and impact: The arts have the power to bring our people, our cities, and our economics back (\$58.9M industry in Canada, this does not include sports revenue, specifically cultural)
- COVID has brought a light to the Arts that we are a driver of the economy.
- People are returning to cultural institutions. After quarantine, 29% of people are excited to go to a concert or musical performance. However, 69% of people surveyed had done little to no planning for future arts and culture experiences. How can we change that perspective?

**Parting thought: How can your story impact the world around you and how can you make a difference?**

## Q&A SESSION

**What are some steps you take to help organizations be positioned to keep up with living content?**

- Most important: the planning that you put forward needs room for flexibility and a platform where that digital content can be refreshed regularly.
- For static exhibits, room is always needed for change.
- The budget must be considered. There has to be someone in charge of living content and visitors must see that it is not something that will be disconnected after a while.

**How does one adopt a holistic approach in the COVID paradigm?**

- Regardless of the institution, the idea of strategic planning is where this all begins. We are trying to map out the experience and the key takeaways. The space you have is your playground and these messages are mapped out in the space.
- When you use the element of film, most of the time we use an orientation theatre to bring a visitor to a full understanding of content and context.
- In some cases, personalization does not make sense.
- What is the overarching story? You need to find a balance between the moments in which you are telling the story and not providing so much content that there is a breakdown between how you tell a story.

**How do you create exhibits that are surprising and unpredictable? How do you get visitors to say, "I didn't know that" and carry on the conversation outside the four walls of the exhibit?**

- Using a rap artist in a Holocaust museum is certainly unexpected, but as consultants, we can only bring ideas to organizations. Individual organizations must be brave enough to execute these ideas. We are so trained to look at things in a scholarly fashion, but we know that this will not capture the audience's attention.
- When you use music as an avenue to talk about something, it is another entry point to engage with the audience.



## How would you recommend a way forward for those individuals that have no or very little space? How would you recommend it for those with only a digital space?

- Have a virtual space.
- Violins of Hope is a small travelling exhibit (only 1100 - 2000 sq ft).
- Use the physical space you do have to start the conversation but assume that people may not come to your site. Use your digital space to layer the conversation and to get people interested in the conversation.
- Use pop-up exhibits. Take it to the people! You can go to the audience, create an audience, and bring them back to you.

## Will virtual performances start to outweigh physical performances in concert halls?

- No. Physical performances will not go away. People want to get into those perfect spaces with perfect sound, lighting, and atmosphere. People want those experience.

## As Arts Organizations, we have a responsibility to bring the audience back to our downtowns and to our buildings. What do we need to start doing?

- Pick up/start projects. If you wait to strategize, it is too late. The arts cannot wait. They must come back strong to help and rebuild the city. You cannot sit on your hands because you cannot get back into the game quickly enough when everything does restart.
- Your job: start, strategize, and survive.
- Also, stop thinking that cultural institutions are accessible. You need to understand what a diverse audience sees, feels and how they can get into your building.

## Any tips for small organizations and small budgets?

- You must make wise choices.
- Just because you go to another facility and see a fancy virtual display does not mean you go and spend the two million dollars to have the same thing.
- Look at how you can take the content beyond the four walls. Use your place and space for people to learn and understand your story.
- Have things being driven by physical activity. Fuse educational activities and takeaways by mapping your space.
- Look at your budget. Look at what your return will be on that investment (impact, not dollars). If that digital tool will have a great impact, it will be a great addition to your programming.
- If anything you do does not support the takeaways in your storyline, it does not happen.
- Set expectations. If those expectations fall short when I attend your site, then you have failed.

## Are touch exhibits going to disappear due to COVID and what additional things should we be taking into consideration?

- No. 95% of clients panicked when COVID started, but need to think about the present and the future.
- The MAX sent a 5-page document of things that would go touch-less. We had to tell them to pause for a minute and think about the results of their actions a year from now. If you make all these touch-less changes now, will you have demolished the experience for those in the future?

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SYMPOSIUM 2021

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- Do a revisioning: we are changing this because... we are not changing this because... we are putting a temporary wall here... spend money wisely.
- Remember: stay grounded in the 'why'.