

Notes from introductory call with MAA (April 29, 2009)

Some background

- Carl Hogsden, research associate at the University of Cambridge, and curator at Museum of Archeology and Anthropology
 - Also works for CARET
 - Sits beside Antranig
 - Rebuilt the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology (MAA) using open source technologies (just finished implementing a few days ago!)
 - Responsible for curating exhibitions at the museum
 - Tries to squeeze in technology wherever possible into the space
 - When he first joined, all the MAA had was an iMac in the gallery space
 - Now they have loads of screen, some (all?) of them touch screens
 - He's interested in using web technology to have work in the museum connect with source communities (source communities are "the communities from which museum collections originate")
 - Interested in using web inside the physical space to have things interact with each other
 - Want to bring "local knowledge" into the museum
- "Assembling Bodies" exhibition
- One of their current exhibitions is on the human body
 - 12 or 13 different departments at Cambridge University contributed to this; all those departments were somehow related to the theme of the body
 - Each department gave their own interpretation, representation, visualization of the body (e.g., ultrasound, DNA, art, etc.)
 - Also about how machines become extensions of the body
 - Miniature exhibits within the exhibition, each with its own theme, corresponding to the different departments
 - Would like for visitors to take objects out of the gallery (virtually), combine and interpret the exhibition in their own way
 - Would like for visitors to build relationships among the objects on the website, and then bring that into the museum space when they visit
 - Exhibition went live in March 2009, will be up for two years
 - By autumn 2009, as a second stage, they want to somehow inject the web into the physical space
 - Users creating their own themes, and relatedness of objects, and sharing that
 - Exhibition space is ~70 metres in length, ~6 metres wide
 - 12 or 13 different areas (each corresponding to the miniature exhibits/themes/departments)
 - Every object in the physical space is on their website

Some ideas

- Visitors could prepare what objects they want to see in the physical space before coming in
- Visitors create mini, personal collections of objects [seems to be a reoccurring theme in our museum conversations!]
- Visitors sharing their own interpretations of objects
- In the near future, the collections management system could collect information from invited researchers, etc. outside the museum, and visitors in the further future
- Carl would find it interesting to see what objects visitors find interesting
- (and evidence for finding what visitors find interesting in the gallery)
- Museums collect stuff together; would be interesting to see how visitors would form their own collections, and engage with the physical space with that
- Still rare to see integration between the web and physical space in museums [another reoccurring theme in our conversations with museums]
- Functionality/experience of the website often ends there, and doesn't make it into the physical space
- The web is 2D, the physical space is 3D, and integrating the two isn't always easy
- They run a post-grad course in the museum
- Collecting in and of itself is nice, but even better would be a reason for collecting
- Encourage visitors to collect "because" of something, instead simply collecting a bunch of objects they arbitrarily like