

Notes from introductory call with DIA (April 28, 2009)

Detroit Institute of Arts and Fluid Engage

- completely reworking and reinstalling all of their exhibits at the gallery
- a shift from presenting works in strictly art historical terms, and towards more inclusive or thematic approaches to organizing works
- for example, moving from chronological to "day in the life" presentations of works
- they have great content: how can we give people technology and tools so they can take what they've done in the gallery and extend it? teachers, visitors, etc.
- they've had some success in using technology in the gallery, but it's all one-offs, and very expensive to create
 - electronic books
 - Rivera Court: handhelds using video and other materials, but the first generation of equipment was really difficult to use
 - rich collection of documentation of these Diego Rivera murals: photos, etc.
 - created AcoustaGuide: company in NYC who traditionally build audio tours; this was their first attempt at building handheld-based tour
 - details are shown on the PDA; you can click through to find things you're interested in
 - can get commentary from local experts, poets, etc.
 - still fairly tour-based
 - people wear headphones and use a Nokia 800
 - really wanted to allow visitors to add their own commentary
 - see Fluid Engage as a way to build the next generation, and something they can build upon
- TMS for collections database
- our own interpretive database using FileMaker Pro
- Through African Eyes, their next big exhibit in the pipeline
- generally have six or seven exhibits in various stages of development
 - the length of development time is a pain point for them
 - 12-16 months to do the design/development part, where you're organizing the way the show is going to lay out in the gallery, the text, educational material, etc.
- open slot in Fall 2011: that's a tight period for conceiving of a new exhibit
- DIA was an early user of TMS
 - there are portions they don't use: conservation and exhibitions portions
 - large collection: 60,000 objects with lots of fields and descriptions
 - reporting is very limited: requires Crystal Reports
 - good from a registrarial point of view, but not very useful in terms of developing interpretive materials because of the limitations of the fields
 - exhibits module: limited ability to group objects and attach text, but not useful enough, especially for large collections
- wanted a tool to do exhibit planning
- TMS keeps object information
- FileMaker lets them import data from TMS and then group them together:
 - which objects go together in which gallery?
 - different sections of objects in a gallery: more groupings
 - even information about proximity within space
 - information about look and feel
 - interpretive material can be attached at any level: the gallery, the section or the object
- they have a digital asset management system where graphic designers build the actual labels
 - their design team is off-site; contractors
 - this company gives them online access to content, letting them make changes to designs, etc.
- really interested in visitor participation:
 - low-tech so far
 - stations where people write postcards, etc.
 - experimented a little with their website (Monet to Dali), where they asked visitors to write their own labels for works of art
 - planning to do so on several new exhibits
- web site:
 - changes and innovation are very expensive, because they have to go to outside contractors to change the website
 - site has some basic ability to extract data from TMS, but again, every upgrade costs
 - contractor is M6
 - they're frustrated, feel limited by the way they manage their website
 - one of the attractions of Fluid Engage is having more control and flexibility about how they deal with their website
 - their contractor isn't a partner who helps them think through the best ways to implement experiences on the Web
 - website run by the marketing and PR department
 - they've been doing some strategic planning about how to expand and improve their website