

Use Case

Information-Distribution in Museums

Meeting the Challenge of Keeping Digital Interactives Up-to-Date

Ironically, most digital exhibits are far more difficult to keep up-to-date than plain ‘old fashioned’ display cases. Nobody knows more about a museum’s collection and visitors than the people who work there. Therefore it’s not surprising that the best and most innovative ideas for displays and interpretation usually come from the curators and staff of the museums themselves.

Project: “Gunnery Today”

‘The Gunnery Today’ is a permanent new exhibition in the Royal Artillery’s Firepower Museum at Woolwich. It highlights the role and activities of the regiment today and looks forward to the next 10 years of developments in artillery. The topics covered include:

- Recent Campaigns – Iraq and Afghanistan
- Equipment
- Regimental Structure
- Honours and Awards
- Obituaries

The Challenge: to keep pace with what the public hear about on the news, and to avoid any predictions from becoming embarrassingly outdated, the exhibition needs to be changed and updated constantly. For the physical displays, there is the usual business of begging, borrowing and stealing (what me

officer?) items from the regiment and other sources - business as usual, just more frequent offences. The interactive displays present an altogether different challenge: The problem with using traditional interactive displays is that they are one-off applications. Updating them can be expensive and time-consuming because it needs to be done by the original programmers. After considering their options, Mark Smith and Paul Evans decided that the only practical solution was to use displays that they could update in-house.



The Solution: The Gunners borrowed a system from our system integrator to evaluate with the media and information they wanted to present. “After a couple of hours working with it, it was obvious that it was the right tool for the job.” said Paul. “I’m not an IT geek and never intend to become one, so I am the acid test to see just how user-friendly a system really is.” Using the loan system and a handful of ‘volunteers’ from the regiment, Paul and his team created superb touch screen displays containing a breadth and depth of information that would have been impossibly time-consuming and expensive if they depended on an external agency.

“It gives us a whole new way of working. Being self-sufficient is a huge boon and we can react immediately if new information, video or pictures come in from the front line. It also removes the pain of having to second-guess what the public will want and get everything perfect before signing-off a supplier’s work. We can work in real time and experiment; if we spot an imperfection

we just go in and change it. We can try different things, monitor what the public like, and fine-tune the displays. Most importantly we can keep the content bang up to date and change it so that it is always fresh and interesting.”

A major advantage of using a standard software package rather than bespoke digital interactives is that users automatically benefit from future product developments. “It has been one of those happy occasions when you get even more than you bargained for in a good way.” said Mark. “We have a good dialogue with solution provider and they are very receptive to suggestions about ways to enhance the product. As a result, features we asked for have been incorporated in the standard software and we, and all other customers, are able to benefit from them in a routine upgrade, without extra cost. This solution was the right solution for the initial requirement, but this added ‘future-proofing’ makes it a great long-term investment.”

Project: “The Gurkha Museum”

Bringing an Art Exhibition to Life

The Gurkha’s McDonald Gallery played host to the superb ‘Nepal Awakening’ exhibition of paintings and sketches by contemporary Scottish artist Gordon Davidson. They came up with the pioneering idea of using their interactive system to display images of the works in the gallery along with video of Gordon at work and, describing in his own words, what he saw, what he was trying to convey and how he did it. For art buffs and non-experts alike this provided a wonderful level of insight beyond what is normally provided at an art exhibition.

Needless to say, the public and the artist himself were deeply impressed.

Stunning Interactive Medal Displays – The Easy Way

When they see those small inanimate slabs of metal, it’s impossible for the general public to appreciate the magnitude of the stories and sacrifices that gallantry medals represent. Too often they just walk past the displays with a cursory glance.

Gerald Davies and his team at The Gurkha Museum believe that they have cracked the problem and developed an

easy way for all museums to bring medal collections and citations to life. They have created a state-of-the-art touch screen display with stunning larger-than-life images of medals that revolve beneath the viewers' fingertips. The visual impact is complemented by written and audio descriptions of the gallantry awards and the facility to add an infinite number of citations about regimental award winners.



The display was created to run on an Interactive system which makes it very easy for museum staff or volunteers to tailor in-house. Completely non-technical people can add their award winners' citations and brand it with their own 'look and feel'. They can keep adding to the system as more awards are donated or won.

Christened 'British Military Awards for Gallantry' the package should appeal to curators and accountants alike. System users can add it to their systems for a surprisingly modest £500, although non-users will have to add in the cost of a system to run it on.

Gerald said "The project has been a great success. We set out to create the gold standard for medal displays and achieved it for far less money than anything comparable."

Project: "The light Box"

Creating a Permanent Legacy from Temporary Exhibitions

Museums put months of work in to preparing top quality temporary exhibitions. Sadly, after even the most successful, much of the work tends to be consigned to deep storage or a skip once the exhibition is over. This summer, the Light Box in Woking ran one of their most ambitious temporary exhibitions to-date - 'From Mummies to Motorbikes' – charting the development of a historic site in the town. After a couple of hours of training Jenny Webb set about creating an interactive display. In a remarkably short time an information point was created containing a great quantity and variety of information: Videos of WWI planes built there, oral histories of employees, picture galleries

and information about what was on display. Jenny's display, combined with other visuals created for the exhibition and a 'virtual tour' of the gallery, can now be kept on a system providing a permanent archive of 'From Mummies to Motorbikes' and other past exhibitions.



Another interesting idea from the Woking team was to mount the touch

screen at knee level in front of a bench half way around the exhibition. This provided a natural place to stop and rest as well as making the screen accessible to younger children. It worked extremely

well, the system's audit file recorded almost 4,000 item viewings during the exhibition.

Project: "The Royal Military School of Music Museum"

Making the Most of Musical Exhibits

The museum at Kneller Hall has one of the finest collections of musical instruments and manuscripts in the country. Naturally, most of them can be viewed in display cases, but what everyone really wants to know is 'What do they sound like?' To answer that vital question, Adrian Kingston created a system that allows visitors to search for regimental music, instruments or manuscripts, view them, and touch the screen to hear them being played. The system continues to grow and evolve as time permits. Getting the enhanced

sound quality he wanted was a simple matter of adding a relatively inexpensive pair of Bose speakers to the PC. This has added a new and vital dimension to the visitor experience at Kneller Hall. The most important thing to note is that these very successful projects were the work of museum staff and subject matter experts, not computer experts. All they needed was a system that was easy and versatile enough for them to create the interactive displays they envisaged. The Churchillian spirit runs high in our museum curators: "Give us the tools and we will finish the job!"

Results:

Wherever information distribution is on the list of "to-does" (and museums are only an enlightening example) you can use this solution on trade shows, in hotels, in public tourism areas ... to mention just a few...

The distribution has more than one option:

1. you may show it on a screen
2. you may print it "on demand"
3. you may download it on a USB stick
4. you may send it to your mail account

The investment in this solution starts at 3.250 Euro plus VAT (software only).

PrimeConsult Unternehmensberatung specializes in consulting in the area of digital media. The focal points are strategy development, marketing and sales policy and the creation of white papers, market studies and advising suppliers and users in this field.

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