

Mike Ellis (2011). *Managing and Growing a Cultural Heritage Web Presence: a strategic guide*. Facet. xv + 217. ISBN 978-1-85604-710-4.

Cultural Heritage Institutions have long recognised that the Web can offer them new ways to make their collections available to users. In a recent report the European Commission's *Comité des Sages* on Digital Cultural Heritage stated that 'digitisation is more than a technical option, it is a moral obligation. In a time when more and more cultural goods are consumed online, when screens and digital devices are becoming ubiquitous, it is crucial to bring culture online (and, in fact, a large part of it is already there)' (European Union & Comité des Sages 2011, p.9). Web 2.0 and mobile computing can be used to reconceptualise ways of bringing culture online and avoid the unidirectional transmission from Organisation to User that sometimes resulted in an apparent stockpiling of digital artefacts on institutional websites. For example, the QRator project is allowing visitors to engage in conversations about museum objects by scanning QR codes attached to them (see Ross 2012). The Tales of Things project allows memories and thoughts about objects such as those held in museums to be recorded online and shared with others (see Ross et al, 2013). The Steve.Museum Social Tagging project explores how users can enhance existing documentation about museum collections (see Moulin et al 2012). In essence, such projects are prompting us to reflect not only on the changing roles and definitions of 'Cultural Heritage Institutions' and 'Users' but also on their interrelationships with physical museum objects and their digital surrogates. This raises a host of complex questions for such organisations. For example, as Ellis points out, Cultural Heritage web presences are no longer confined to institutional websites or content created in-house. Users are, among other things, making their own social media pages dedicated to their favourite museums and engaging in public conversations about them. Does this material form part of an Institutions web presence? How can they manage it? If it is negative how might they respond to it? This is but one of the many issues touched on in this book which accordingly focuses on an institution's broad web presence as opposed to website only.

Chapter 1 emphasises the importance of understanding the kinds of web presence that a given Cultural Heritage organisation has along with its place in the wider ecosystem of digital cultural heritage. To assist readers who are analysing their organisation's current make-up an audit covering areas such as Stakeholders and Metrics is set out. Chapter 2 argues for the importance of a web strategy and gives practical advice about how to devise one. Chapter 3 looks at content and its management. The focus is not only on content that is held by an organisation but also on content that is created and maintained externally to it and over which it may have little control, for example, content created via social media such as Twitter and Flickr. Chapter 4 introduces marketing. Best practice ways of working that are related to marketing are also discussed, for example, the necessity of avoiding tag abuse by using <title> elements appropriately. It was somewhat surprising given this book's strategic scope that metadata is discussed at this micro level rather than in a more wide ranging way that emphasises the importance and benefits of using W3C approved standards such as XHTML and XML etc. Chapter 5 covers the policies and guidelines that help the institutional web strategy, discussed in Chapter 2, to be implemented (and perhaps questioned and revised) on a day to day basis. For example, the importance of having social media guidelines is discussed and literature on institutional as opposed to personal social media use pointed to. Chapter 6 addresses traffic and metrics. Overviews are given of various techniques, such as log file analysis and page tagging, that can be used to track numbers of visitors to a site and aspects of their movements once there. Both advantages and disadvantages of key techniques are given and grounded in real-world reflections. An important point, which has much wider resonances, is made about the definition of 'success' in digital cultural heritage contexts. Cultural heritage organisations must reflect on what 'success' means for them and metrics can be harnessed to understand and further such considerations; however, traffic and metrics alone cannot diagnose success. Chapter 7

introduces the social web. As well as reflecting on how social media is currently being used in the cultural heritage sector and the new ways that it can engage users some potential risks, such as dealing with negative user-generated content are also outlined. A more sustained discussion of strategies that institutions could draw on when responding to more negative aspects of social media would have been welcome and it is hoped that the author may take this topic up in a future publication. Chapter 8 offers guidance on planning website development and redevelopment projects, for example, writing technical specifications. Chapter 9 discusses technologies that, at the time the book was written, were still on the horizon, for example, Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). Chapter 10 emphasizes that the process of developing, maintaining and growing a cultural heritage web presence is necessarily an ever evolving one and it suggests practical ways of supporting this such as User groups.

A key challenge of writing a book such as this is that new technologies and platforms wax and wane with such alacrity. The consequences of this are, perhaps inevitably, noticeable to some extent in Chapter 9, which is the only chapter to focus on technologies. Yet, for the most part the book deftly side steps this potential hurdle by focusing on strategic considerations and not the fleeting particulars of various technologies. Some topics would have benefitted from a more detailed treatment. The discussion of managing website development in Chapter 8 would have been improved by greater emphasis on the importance of User testing and User experience testing when building a web presence. The aim of Usability studies can be defined as objectively “judge[ing] quality by measuring the performance of a document, in actual use, against conventional figures of merit. [For example] How quickly can readers find facts in the hypertext? How well do they score on tests? Do readers report liking or disliking their encounter with the work?” (<http://www.eastgate.com/HypertextNow/archives/Merit.html>). Ideally, usability testing should be done throughout the lifecycle of a project so that problems can be identified, remedied and fed back into the design and the digital platform retested in an iterative cycle. Key techniques include the use of Focused Groups, Think Out Loud protocols, structured questionnaires and tasks (for an overview of the many methods that can be used to study users see, for example, Shneiderman and Plaisant (2009), Blandford and Attfield (2010)).

Digital Humanities focuses much of its attention on the creation, study and dissemination of digital cultural heritage. However, in general, the uptake of such digital resources in the Humanities has been somewhat slower than in the Sciences. Warwick (2012) has argued that lack of user awareness has been a contributing factor towards this. She writes, “if users are consulted, and researchers take the time to understand their working culture and how digital resources fit into it, there is the possibility that attitudes to and levels of digital resource use may change”. In this way Cultural Heritage organisations may also benefit from further awareness of user testing.

On the whole, this book is informative, interesting and well written. The author is especially good at explaining clearly and effectively concepts that people without technical training might otherwise find difficult to understand. Numerous real-world examples are given and relevant research and policy literature pointed to. It will be of use to those working in Cultural Heritage organisations of all sizes irrespective of whether they have an already established or fledgling web presence.

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Warwick, C., 2012. Studying users in digital humanities. In C. Warwick, M. Terras, & J. Nyhan, eds. *Digital humanities in practice*. London: Facet, pp. 1-22.