EKAP Update: Rethinking the Presentation of Historic Sites

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The Eastern Kentucky Arts Project was founded in 2007 as a way to connect communities with resources pertaining to visual arts and music in Eastern Kentucky. A significant portion of these resources were information on historic architecture in Eastern Kentucky communities. This was directly based on the National Register of Historic Places listings. Through the process of updating the links for historic architecture, several issues with the resources available became apparent.

Issues Found:

• Dead Links

• Website redesigns that rendered information inaccessible

• Complicated language

• Ineffective search and database functions

• Low visibility for projects and fundraising

The update of these resources for EKAP led to an awareness of broader concerns in the preservation field with regards to the interface between organizations and the public. It became clear that these issues have serious effects on the success of preservation efforts. Most resources on preservation of historic sites are nearly inaccessible and this discourages community involvement in preservation projects among those not in the preservation field. Recently, more organizations have become aware of the impact and importance of community action and are stepping up outreach and promotion of projects on social media.
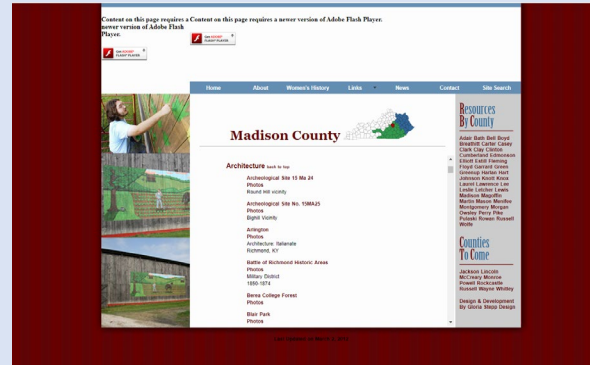

Image: A screenshot of the EKAP website. The resources on the EKAP website are mostly dead links, hindered by poor internet literacy and planning regarding preservation information.

Why Social Media?

• People use Social Media for a variety of reasons from shopping, to organizing events, or even receiving news.

• Millennials and Gen Z are very active on social media, and studies show they are highly service driven--- they want to back organizations with a strong mission and values. This makes them more open to educational or community driven projects and provides opportunities for crowdfunding.

• Social media allows for global connections and allow for instant feedback to improve or adjust content. This improves the experience for many, and widens the pool of potential audiences, volunteers and donors.

• A focus on a narrative, "storytelling" style of posting, combined with a personal and relaxed tone allows for audiences to feel personally connected with a group or project.

Some groups are using social media but may not be utilizing them to the full extent, or don't understand what generates user interaction and interest. An examination of successful preservation or cultural heritage accounts displays the merits of a personal tone and policy of digital storytelling.

Characteristics of Successful Preservation/Public History Accounts:

• Emphasis on Visual Storytelling
• Keeping an eye on trends
• Making frequent posts, with a variety of post styles.
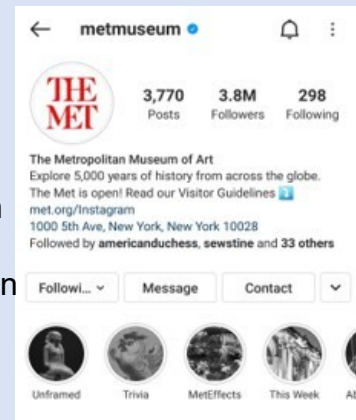• Encouraging post interaction
• Using a personal Tone

Image: A screenshot of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Instagram page. Although a larger institution The Met, is an excellent example of post engagement and digital storytelling.

References:

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