

WORKPLACE
PARTISANSHIP
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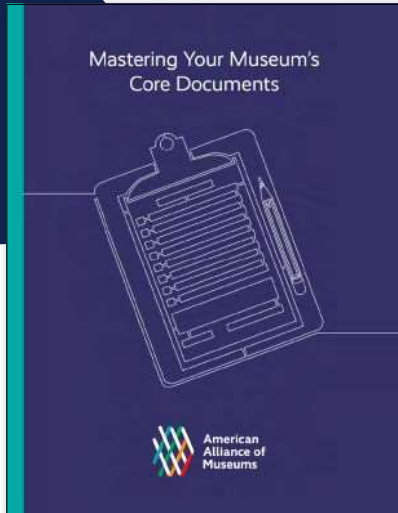
MUSEUM

TRENDSWATCH

BUILDING THE
POST-PANDEMIC
WORLD



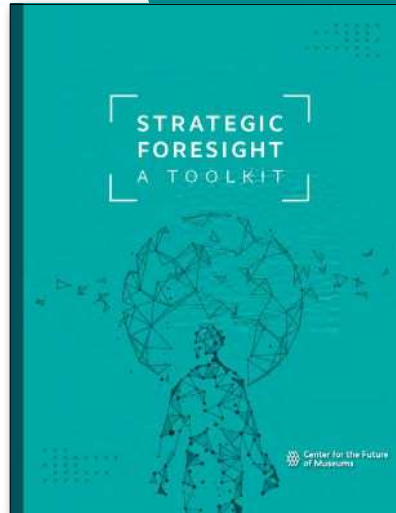
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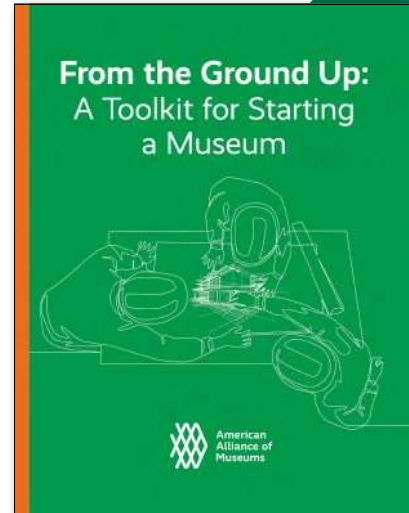
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About the Center for the Future of Museums

The American Alliance of Museums' Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) helps museums explore the cultural, political, and economic challenges facing society and devise strategies to shape a better tomorrow. CFM is a think tank and R&D lab for fostering creativity and helping museums transcend traditional boundaries to serve society in new ways. Find research, reports, blog content, and foresight tools at aam-us.org/programs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/.

About the Author

Elizabeth Merritt is the Vice President for Strategic Foresight and Founding Director of the Center for the Future of Museums at the American Alliance of Museums. She studied ecology and evolution as an undergraduate at Yale and received her master's degree in cell and molecular biology from Duke University. Her museum career has included working in a children's museum as well as natural history and history museums. She is a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute's Museum Management Program and the Foresight Certificate program at the University of Houston. Prior to starting CFM, Merritt literally wrote the book on museum standards and best practices as Director of the Alliance's accreditation and excellence programs—perfect preparation for her current role as agent provocateur. She challenges museums to question assumptions about traditional practice and experiment with new ways of doing business.



Elizabeth Merritt at her fencing club—one of the rare places where people with a wide spectrum of political views can amicably spar together.

Acknowledgements

TrendsWatch is made possible by the collective wisdom of many people inside and outside the museum field who contribute their time and creativity to CFM's work. For their help with this edition, we would particularly like to thank:

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The Alliance wishes to thank these corporate partners, which have generously supported this year's *TrendsWatch*:



"2022 proved to be another year of change and adaptation for all of us in the museum community. Elizabeth Merritt and our friends at AAM have delivered a thoughtful *TrendsWatch* report to anchor us around how to continue forging a path in the current landscape. We are honored to support this report every year, and our hope is that you are all inspired by the ideas and content within." —Susan Luu, Senior Director of Customer Success, Blackbaud Arts & Cultural

With a focus on contactless experiences and digital enablement, Blackbaud is the technology backbone to support your organization and its mission. Blackbaud provides comprehensive, cloud-based software solutions to arts and cultural organizations seeking to optimize their operations, build and grow lifelong, loyal patron relationships, and maximize revenue.



"I always look forward to reading CFM's annual *TrendsWatch* report as it provides a window into the world of what concerns museums most. The highlighted trends often provide a spotlight on current perils and exposures and thus potential helpful clues about how we need to modify risk management techniques to better serve the museum community." —Joe Dunn, President & CEO, Huntington T. Block Insurance Agency, Inc.

Huntington T. Block Insurance manages AAM-recognized insurance programs, offering Museum Collections, Exhibitions & Temporary Loans/Fine Art; Property & Casualty; and Trustees/Directors & Officers Liability insurance. Each unique program strives to provide broad coverage at very competitive premiums with service from a knowledgeable and responsive team of risk professionals.



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Dean Phelus

GUEST EDITOR

Elizabeth Merritt

MANAGING EDITOR

Gayle Bennett

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Joseph O'Neill

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Team of Creatives, LLC

ADVERTISING

Carol Nettles
aamad@adboomadvertising.com
404-347-1755

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INSURING
THE WORLD'S
TREASURES



Seeing the Future

What if someone had told you in 2012 that something called augmented reality would soon take hold in museums? Or in 2016 that changing labor conditions were likely to increase worker flexibility and highlight wage disparities? In 2019 that blockchain, a little-understood digital ledger technology, might come to the field through applications like collectible digital art?

If you are a regular reader of AAM's *TrendsWatch*, someone did tell you.

Every year since 2012, Elizabeth Merritt, the Founding Director of AAM's Center for the Future of Museums, has collaborated with professionals across the field to research and write this report outlining emerging phenomena likely to impact museums, with remarkably prescient results. And she's done it not through psychic ability, as far as I know, but through a disciplined, futurist practice called strategic foresight.

Strategic foresight, a structured approach to thinking about the future and preparing for change, first came to AAM in 2006. As the Alliance approached its 100th anniversary, our board began to reflect on what the *next* century might look like, and to wonder how the field could be proactive in meeting it. Eventually, they called in Elizabeth, then the Director of AAM's Excellence programs, who had a keen sense from her work of the common challenges and opportunities that faced museums. They asked her to found a new center dedicated to exploring trends that could impact museum operations.

Since then, the Center for the Future of Museums has been researching changes happening in museums and in the world, sharing findings in reports like *TrendsWatch*, and teaching museum people how they can use the same practices to think far outside of the strategic-planning box in their work. In a CFM

planning workshop, participants start not from their current situations and their assumptions about what they can achieve, but by thinking decades into the future. Then, they work their way backward, figuring out what would need to happen to make the future they want a reality.

I've seen how liberating this strategy tool can be compared to the typical SWOT analysis.

All of a sudden, people feel emboldened to come up with their most creative, innovative, and strategic ideas rather than letting fear of change and short-term thinking keep them clinging to the status quo. That's the power of a futurist mindset: to remind us to think in terms of big possibilities and be courageous in going after them.

To help spread that mindset more widely, this year we're printing the newest edition of *TrendsWatch* as an issue of *Museum* magazine. Our world seems to be changing faster than ever, and leading museums successfully into the future will require using foresight in every plan we make, not just our periodic strategic plans. This issue will help you get started, with articles unpacking some of the most pressing changes museums face: worrying partisan divides, accelerated digital evolutions, changing workplace norms, and renewed efforts in repatriation and restitution.

I urge you to keep reading and find out what might be in store. Then, in 2030—or 2040—you can say you saw it all coming.

11/16/2022



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Lott". The script is fluid and cursive.

Laura L. Lott is the Alliance's President and CEO. Follow Laura on Twitter at [@LottLaura](#).

Signals of the Future

76%

Percentage of museum directors intending to continue virtual/online practices implemented for programming during the pandemic.

And

Portion of global workers who don't feel ready to operate in a digital-first world.


31%

The share of museums reporting that they had no digital strategy going into the pandemic.

1 in 3

Proportion of Americans who believe that "violence against the government can at times be justified."

Sources: Clockwise from bottom left: Digital Readiness and Innovation in Museums: A Baseline National Survey, Knight Foundation, 2020; National Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on United States Museums (fielded December 2021–January 2022), American Alliance of Museums; 2022 Salesforce Global Digital Skills Index; *Washington Post* and the University of Maryland's Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement, 2022



90%

Percentage of cultural heritage from sub-Saharan Africa that resides in Western collections.

56%

Percentage of American museums having difficulty filling positions.

69%

Percentage of museum professionals who identify as somewhat or very liberal.

50

The number of counties in the US expected to experience temperatures above 125°F in 2023.

1 in 5

Proportion of people who report that they are “miserable” at work.


Sources: Clockwise from top left: *The 6th National Climate Risk Assessment: Hazardous Heat*, First Street Foundation, 2022; *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics*, 2018; *Annual Survey of Museum-Goers*, 2022; *State of the Global Workplace: 2022 Report*; National Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on United States Museums (fielded December 2021–January 2022), American Alliance of Museums

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Welcome to *TrendsWatch*

Shedd Aquarium
penguins visiting
the Museum of
Contemporary Art
Chicago during
pandemic lockdown.



This issue of *Museum* is also the 2023 edition of *TrendsWatch*—the 12th installment of AAM’s annual forecasting report. Produced by the Alliance’s Center for the Future of Museums, *TrendsWatch* examines the forces shaping the museum sector in the context of broader changes in society and explores the long-term implications of these trends. Museum people often use this report to inform planning, uncover blind spots, identify opportunities, and expand their vision of what they can achieve.

This is a critical time for museum professionals to apply a foresight lens to their planning. The COVID-19 pandemic was profoundly disruptive—not a meteoric extinction-level event (for humans, at least) but on par with previous global pandemics and world wars. There is a risk we may overestimate the long-term effect of massively disruptive events, such as the current pandemic, on all aspects of our lives—social, economic, ecological, technological, and political. Conversely, it is tempting to assume that the world will snap back, like a rubber band, to the way things used to be.

Foresight, more colloquially known as futures thinking, helps counteract the tendency to over- or underestimate the scale of these changes while providing a reminder that the legacy of the pandemic is, in large part, up to us. As we shape this legacy, there are three kinds of actions we might want to take: mitigating damage, amplifying good things, and preparing for the next disruption.

Mitigating Damage

The harm inflicted in the past three years will have a very long tail indeed. As many as 23 million Americans are suffering the effects of long COVID, and health care professionals worry about the long-term impact of the pandemic on children’s mental health. Proficiency in K–12 math and reading plummeted, with students who were already lagging experiencing the biggest losses. Researchers estimate it may take \$700 billion to regain lost ground, with more equitable distribution of aid than we have seen so far. A million women left the workforce, and with good, affordable childcare even scarcer than before the pandemic, many women may be sidelined for years. Public trust in scientists, government, journalists, business leaders, and elected officials—already low—sank even further, hindering our response to the pandemic. And around the globe COVID-19 exacerbated existing inequalities in health, wealth, and education. How can we begin to heal these wounds?

Amplifying the Good

Despite the terrible toll COVID-19 has taken on the world, there were some silver linings. Government policies helped drive child poverty in the US to a record low. Some wildlife flourished during the “anthropause,” and people overall spent more time in nature (which we know is good for human health and well-being). During the pandemic a third of Americans experienced positive impacts on their

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Use this edition of *TrendsWatch* as a catalyst for tackling post-pandemic challenges at your organization:

- What long-term damage needs to be repaired in your museum and in your community?
- How might you build on successful pandemic adaptations?
- What did you learn about what you might stop doing?
- Which systems proved to be resilient during the pandemic, and which—in operations, management, finance, technology, education, or community service—need to be strengthened or redesigned?

Each article includes a list of things museums might do to tackle these issues. Share this report with your students, clients, colleagues, staff, volunteers, and board of trustees to foster discussion about how your organization will build the post-pandemic future.

relationships, including being able to spend more time with family. In the face of massive economic losses and a burgeoning labor shortage, many companies began to prioritize the well-being of their workforce, discovering the benefits of empathetic, compassionate, flexible, and supportive policies and practices. How can we nurture these beneficial practices and build on what we have learned?

Preparing for the Next Disruption

Much of the damage we suffered in the past three years stemmed from weaknesses in critical systems: health care, government, education, the social safety net. These systems were strained to the breaking point by multiple crises: the pandemic; wildfires, heat events, and storms fueled by climate change; and social unrest sparked by police violence, racism, and the legacy of oppression.

Some of the patches and tweaks we made during the pandemic worked in the short term, but the critical infrastructure of our country may need to be redesigned from the ground up. The partisan divide currently paralyzing society will make it immensely difficult to undertake such reforms, but our shared experiences during the pandemic may create common ground. New research shows that people who suffered personal harm during the pandemic (as

did almost half of all Americans) are more likely to understand the roots of inequality and become advocates for equity. How can we make our organizations and our communities better able to withstand disruptions in the century to come?

The Challenge for Museums

Our sector faces the same challenges as society as a whole: to mitigate damage, amplify good things, and repair fundamental flaws in our systems. Museums face a long road to recovery. Despite widespread fears at the beginning of the pandemic, most museums survived, some thrived, but many struggle to regain lost ground. The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) reports that attendance at history organizations climbed 75 percent from 2020 to 2021—but still hovers at half of what it was in 2019.

Museums can learn from each other the best ways to rebuild attendance, stabilize their finances, and attend to the damage staff and volunteers experienced. Museums that had already made strategic investments in digital practices seemed to compensate more quickly for pandemic disruptions. They used their digital capacity to expand their reach, find new audiences, make work safer and more efficient, and improve the visitor experience. These good practices can help museums prosper in the post-pandemic future as well.

Museums also stopped doing a lot of things they usually do, testing assumptions about what is useful or necessary. Maybe some products, programs, procedures, and policies can be left behind, making way for new and better practices. Before the pandemic, museums had just begun to confront the precarity and inequity of museum labor—the past three years have thrown those issues into stark relief. This is an opportunity for our sector to make long-term improvements in how we support the staff who make our work possible, from fair compensation to human-centered policies that create equitable access to museum jobs.

What's Next?

This pandemic was not unforeseeable, or unforeseen, nor will it be the last profound disruption to rock the world this decade. The mission of AAM's Center for the Future of Museums is to help you and your

organization anticipate these disruptions, understand ongoing forces of change, and navigate the futures they might create. You—as an individual and collectively as an organization—are also a powerful force of change, with the ability to influence what will happen in years to come. The most important goal of foresight is to envision preferred futures—the shape and texture of the world you want to live in and leave to future generations—and take action to bring that future into being.

Warmest regards from that brighter future,



Elizabeth Merritt

Vice President, Strategic Foresight, and Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums, American Alliance of Museums

WHAT IS *TRENDSWATCH*?

TrendsWatch is the annual forecasting report produced by the Center for the Future of Museums, the American Alliance of Museums' think tank and idea laboratory for the museum field. Each edition is built on a year's worth of news gathering and analysis, research, and conversations.

This edition of *TrendsWatch*, the 12th in the series, appears as the January/February issue of *Museum* magazine. A PDF copy of the report will be available from the *TrendsWatch* landing page on the AAM website at the end of March 2023. You can find dozens of embedded links to original sources for the information referenced in this text in the digital issue of *Museum* and in the PDF.

The text for this report was written by CFM's director, Elizabeth Merritt, with input and advice from many people inside and outside the museum sector. (See page 1 for a list of people who reviewed and commented on the articles.) We encourage you to join this conversation. Please share your thoughts and questions by:

- Tagging @futureofmuseums on Twitter or @emerritt@glamr.us on Mastodon.
- Posting to the Alliance discussion forum Museum Junction. (Directors are welcome to join the CEO Forum on Museum Junction.)
- Submitting guest posts to the CFM blog.
- Emailing CFM at emerritt@aam-us.org.

Elizabeth and her colleagues are available to support your work via speaking engagements, workshops, moderating discussions, and consulting. For more information on those services and to request our help, visit the Alliance Advisors and Speakers Bureau on the AAM website.

The Philbrook Museum of Art is a vital partner in efforts to convince remote workers to relocate to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Many become museum members and regular visitors.



The Post-pandemic Workplace

How can museums build the workforce they need while creating better, more equitable labor practices?



“This is not complicated. If you can’t afford to pay your employees a living wage, you do not have a viable business model.”

—Robert Reich

As the world shut down in 2020, unemployment soared to its highest rate since the government started keeping records in 1948. Labor participation crashed to a 50-year low as people left the workforce to care for family and protect themselves and their loved ones. Many of those still working were stressed, fearful, angry, and feeling burnt out.

By summer 2022, worker disengagement and discontent were at an all-time high: 60 percent of employees reported they were emotionally detached at work, and nearly one-fifth were outright miserable. Economist Anthony Klotz coined the term “The Great Resignation” to describe the record number of workers leaving their jobs in this time of trauma—4.3 million in August 2021 alone. Long term, this labor shortage may be exacerbated by the massive effects of long COVID, which potentially affects 31 million working-age Americans.

Given all of this, how can museums attract and retain the workforce they need while building better, more equitable labor practices?

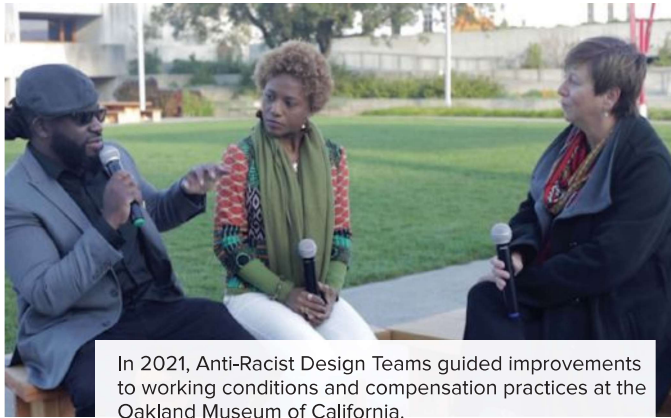
The Challenge

The stress and instability of recent years is causing some people to question ingrained attitudes about the primacy of work. In China and South Korea this gave rise to the “lying flat” movement in which young people took to social media to extol the virtues of a frugal lifestyle (supported by minimal income). In Atlanta, artist and theologian Tricia Hersey founded The Nap Ministry, a reaction to burnout culture centered in Black liberation. In fall 2022, the media began writing about “quiet quitting,” which, confusingly, sometimes refers to “checking out”—doing the bare minimum required by a job—and sometimes to a healthy practice of drawing firm boundaries around work rather than striving to overachieve.

While the pandemic may have brought growing dissatisfaction about work to a

head, reactions such as lying flat, “napping,” or quietly enforcing work-life boundaries reflect long-standing tensions. One might argue they are the inevitable result of increased wealth inequality, social stratification, and a drop in socioeconomic mobility. What is the point of going “over and above” at work when your salary doesn’t cover basic living expenses, much less enable you to pay down student debt? The pandemic also forced us to confront the fact that unless we provide better protection, compensation, and respect, undervalued but essential work (teaching, nursing, providing childcare) may go undone.

Growing resistance to the many deficiencies of the workplace and the rise in the power of labor mean that employers must compete in a tight labor market. This has led to significant changes in how businesses



In 2021, Anti-Racist Design Teams guided improvements to working conditions and compensation practices at the Oakland Museum of California.

recruit and retain staff. To expand the pool of potential hires, some are rethinking position prerequisites, dropping degree requirements, and explicitly valuing life experience in addition to formal education. (In response to this trend, LinkedIn, a major global platform for recruitment, has introduced a “career breaks” feature to make it easier for candidates to highlight skills and experience they have acquired outside the workplace.) Other companies are looking outside the traditional workforce for skilled workers, including the pool of 72 million people reaching retirement age, many of whom want to continue to work part time. Entire sectors, notably technology, are capitalizing on the preference for remote work, freeing employees to live where they like.

The competition for labor has pushed up wages—by 4.6 percent in the private sector in 2021—but employers are expanding other incentives as well. In response to data that the top reason for workers quitting was lack of career development, some companies are prioritizing training and establishing mentorship programs. Some companies are helping workers repay student debt, while others are covering tuition for continuing education. In the wake of the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision, some are even offering to cover travel costs for employees who need to go out of state to seek abortions.

We are only beginning to assess significant long-term changes in work prompted by pandemic disruptions. Legislative efforts in California are seeking to cap a full (non-overtime) workweek at 32 hours (perhaps piloting future changes to the national

Fair Labor Standards Act). Some companies are experimenting with the end of the five-day workweek, whether that takes the form of a three-day office week within a longer workweek or four days of work (80 percent of the traditional workweek) at 100 percent salary. These efforts may be supported by research showing that parents, based on pandemic educational experiments, overwhelmingly prefer a four-day school week as well.

There is significant consensus that one massive change driven by the pandemic—the rise of remote and hybrid work—is here to stay. Remote work tripled between 2019 and 2021—to nearly 18 percent of all workers in the US. Research suggests that in coming years from 20 percent to nearly 40 percent of jobs may be fully remote, while 15 percent may be hybrid—with a quarter of work time spent in home offices. There will doubtless be some rebound from the pandemic peak, but some sectors, notably technology, are making remote work a fundamental part of their business model, both as a way to court scarce workers and to save on the costs of expensive real estate.

The untethering of work from geography is reshaping cities across the US. Major urban cores, including New York, Boston, San Francisco, Miami, and Washington, DC, are hollowing out as companies close offices and workers relocate to areas with lower costs of living and higher qualities of life. Many formerly thriving cities are struggling to rebuild their tax base and redevelop downtowns as attractive places to live, shop, and hang out. Some small cities, including Ruston, Louisiana, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, are courting remote workers with financial incentives to relocate. One interesting side effect of this migration might be increased political diversity in the heartland, potentially blurring the boundaries between red and blue America.

What This Means for Museums

The pandemic labor exodus struck the nonprofit sector particularly hard, and as the world reopened for business, this shortage only got worse. In the 2022 Nonprofit Industry Pulse Survey, 69 percent of nonprofits cited staffing challenges, which left social service nonprofits unable to meet acute needs created or exacerbated by the pandemic. In AAM’s 2021 *National*

Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on US Museums, directors anticipated that one of the biggest disruptions in 2022 would be labor and skills shortages.

This labor shortage stems in part from the terrible toll the pandemic has taken on staff. In the past three years museum workers experienced stress and burnout paralleling that of their nonprofit and

for-profit colleagues. Over 40 percent lost income, and nearly half experienced increased workload—with the heaviest burden falling on BIPOC staff and women. Stress, and burnout, may have been exacerbated by the pressure museums felt to innovate their way out of the pandemic. Research from Glassdoor shows that high levels of innovation are

MUSEUMS MIGHT ...

- Evaluate how they can improve pay and benefits. Pay not only determines who can afford to work in museums, it sends a clear signal about a museum's values and priorities. Thoughtful salary benchmarking might include examining compensation data from comparable local and national museums and non-museum jobs that compete for museum labor. While benchmarking is important, decisions about compensation should also be grounded in principles of equity and fairness.
- Consider how compensation practices reflect an organization's values, particularly regarding equity, fairness, and transparency, which are core elements of workplace culture. While building the overall budget, a museum might evaluate the balance between funds allocated to producing stuff (exhibits, programs, services) and to paying the people who make that stuff. Fair wages may require less stuff, or fewer staff. A growing number of museums are explicitly setting a cap on the pay ratio between the highest and lowest paid positions. This is both more equitable and a strategy for allocating salary dollars to support the museum's needs.
- Follow the lead of organizations in the nonprofit sector that are offering flexible and hybrid work schedules or full-time remote work, prioritizing employee needs, improving DEAI, and even cutting work hours. Such actions can help compensate for museums' competitive disadvantage in pay relative to the for-profit sector.
- Improve workplace culture—communications, mechanisms for meaningful input, sharing responsibility and power, and reducing unfair treatment at work (which is one of the biggest contributors to burnout).
- Create pathways to advancement and provide leadership training in order to keep people in the field. This is especially important in light of potential turnover in the field, accelerated by the pandemic. In a 2021 AAM survey, over half of paid staff said it was somewhat to highly unlikely they would still be working in the museum sector in three years.
- Revisit assumptions about degree requirements. A museum might broaden its pool of qualified applicants by valuing experience in addition to formal education and welcoming historically undervalued workers, including retirees, formerly incarcerated individuals, and people with disabilities.
- Evaluate how remote work might fit into the workplace, and the effect remote work policies might have on equity and inclusion. How can the museum offset the documented tendency for remote and hybrid workers to be passed over for promotions and raises? Conversely, how can it address the inequities of only some staff or some positions being eligible for remote work?
- If the museum does offer remote and hybrid work, focus on how to enhance and support internal connections. Help workers who rarely meet in person get to know each other and foster a culture of belonging and trust.
- Create support mechanisms for staff coping with long COVID. As with most accommodations, these changes may turn out to be good for all workers, improving morale, reducing turnover, and increasing productivity.
- Help communities respond to demographic shifts. Museums might help reshape former business districts into vibrant centers for residents and recreation, pitching their communities as destinations for people who can work anywhere.



The Mychal's/ESMoA Education Internship Program introduces students with developmental disabilities to careers in arts and cultural organizations.

predictor of employee resignations. This is ironic, in the saddest way, as innovation is what enabled many museums to remain solvent and retain staff. The stress of working in pandemic conditions and the worker empowerment created by the tight labor market may be significant drivers of museum unionization. Workers have formed collective bargaining units at more than two dozen museums in the past three years.

These pressures are leading many museums to think about how to create better, more supportive, and more equitable workplaces. Some practical steps build on lessons learned from diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) initiatives: committing to paid internships for a broad range of positions (thereby reducing economic barriers to entering the field) and including salaries in position descriptions (which has been shown to raise women's pay). Some museums are taking steps to significantly raise salaries, provide flexible work hours, and navigate the technical, legal, organizational, and financial complexities of supporting a widely distributed remote workforce. During the pandemic, more than 80 percent of museums allowed at least some staff to telework, and while this figure continues to drop as the world opens up, 16 percent of directors expect to increase the use of telework going forward.

Museums are also responding to a growing body of research documenting the important role of workplace culture—how workers are managed, coached, and treated—in employee engagement and satisfaction. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; ensuring workers feel respected; and transparent, ethical practices can have a huge impact on satisfaction and retention. Many of these changes have been pragmatic responses to immediate needs—sustaining them in the long term will require a values-based commitment to these reforms.

As museums recover financially, and rebuild their staff, some may take this opportunity to reshape their workforce. The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) notes that many museums have used open positions to increase the diversity of their staff and what they were hired to do. For example, AAMD research documented a drop in museum educators in the four-year period between 2018 and 2022. Will these shifts prove to be transitory or enduring?

Museums across the country are also being affected by the demographic shifts transforming their communities. Those in cities being drained by the migration fueled by remote work face the potential loss of visitors, members, donors, staff, and financial support of cash-strapped states and municipalities. Museums in cities competing to attract remote workers can play a role in courting new residents and then welcome them into the museum's family of friends and supporters.

The pandemic inflicted terrible damage, but it also drew attention to ways that the workplace could be different and, in many ways, better—more flexible and compassionate, more skillful in the use of digital tools to support the work of staff. The lessons museums learned in the past three years may help them become more desirable places to work for decades to come. If remote work continues to grow, as many believe it will, communities may place an even higher value on museums as cultural amenities that help them woo workers who can choose where they want to live. These are seeds of hope museums can tend as they help to build the post-pandemic world.



The **Philbrook Museum of Art** is partnering with Tulsa Remote, a recruitment initiative that provides a wide variety of incentives for telecommuters living outside Oklahoma to relocate to Tulsa. Through private events and invitations to ongoing programs, the museum introduces these new residents to the diverse and engaging cultural activities at the museum. Many Tulsa Remote families have become members and regular visitors, and some have gone on to become higher-level members, patrons, and volunteers.

Facing workforce challenges during the pandemic, the **Delaware Art Museum** broadened its pool of applicants by removing unnecessary requirements from job descriptions and recruiting from outside the museum sector. At the same time, the museum strove to create a “people-centered work culture” that raised morale and increased retention. This included creating policies and practices that ensure strategy and finances are clear and transparent, instituting paid family leave, raising the minimum wage, creating codes of conduct that outline the expectation of respectful behavior in detail, and building new pipelines for advancement.

In 2019, the rising cost of living in the San Francisco Bay Area and competition for labor caused annual staff turnover at the historic house and garden **Filoli** to soar to 50 percent. This stress, combined with the museum’s goal to “attract and retain a talented team” impelled the organization to make a living wage—now nearly \$31 an hour in the Bay Area—the base pay for all positions. Supporting these higher salaries required adding an additional \$750,000 to the approximately \$9 million operating budget, paid for by increasing revenue from rental events, admissions, membership, and a new group tour program. As of 2022, Filoli’s turnover rate had gone down eightfold to 8 percent.

RESOURCES

The US Labor Shortage: A Plan to Tackle the Challenge, Committee for Economic Development: The Public Policy Center of the Conference Board, April 2022

Many of this report’s recommendations about recruitment, hiring, and workforce development are relevant to museum operations.

ced.org/solutions-briefs/the-us-labor-shortage-a-plan-to-tackle-the-challenge

Museums Moving Forward (MMF)

MMF is a staff-driven coalition working to measure and support equity within museum workplaces. MMF recently fielded a pilot survey across 54 museums with 1,922 art museum staff sharing their perspectives that will be published in a fieldwide report in May 2023. Key topics include pay and promotion rate equity, salary transparency, and various dimensions of organizational culture in art museums.

museumsmovingforward.com




A Digital (R)evolution

Has the pandemic sparked an evolutionary leap in practice?

During the pandemic, a Shedd Aquarium video of Wellington the rockhopper penguin visiting the belugas received over 93,000 views on YouTube.





“Revolutions usually begin as replacements for older certainties, and not as pristine discoveries in uncharted terrain.”

—Stephen Jay Gould, evolutionary biologist

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated existing trends in the adoption and deployment of digital technologies in business, education, and commerce around the world. Some museums went into pandemic lockdown prepared to deploy digital survival strategies, while many others struggled to catch up.

As the world emerges from the pandemic, we may find that the stress of the past three years has accelerated digital adoption to the point where it constitutes an evolutionary leap in practice. Digital competence, in this new era, is not merely nice but necessary, a fact that may induce more museums to approach digital as a pragmatic investment in sustainable operations. However, improving an organization's digital literacy isn't as simple as creating a new job title or even a department. Skillfully navigating digital opportunities requires a human infrastructure of vision and skills integrated throughout the organization. How can museums navigate the transition from proto-digital to digital proficiency and embark on a continual process of adaptation?

The Challenge

Sometimes a disruptive event can transform the world by magnifying the importance of what already exists. In the past 20 years digital technologies reshaped the world with bewildering speed, transforming how people engage with entertainment, shopping, education, work, and socializing.

The pandemic turbocharged that pace of change. Almost half of consumers increased their use of digital channels to interact with businesses (and most expect to sustain that use), use of messaging apps doubled, and engagement via video increased 300 percent. Companies met this demand by accelerating their own digital transformation, increasing the amount they spent on digital and speeding improvements to their digital communications strategy. Use of telehealth platforms has stabilized at a level 38 times higher than the pre-COVID baseline. A combination of state and federal funding channeled \$1.3 billion to support K–12 online learning, with an additional \$388 million devoted to closing the “digital divide” that disadvantages less wealthy school

districts. The pandemic even sparked the revival of QR codes, turning a technology once disparaged in the US as “niche” into a ubiquitous tool.

These digital adaptations are reshaping the nature of how and where people work. In a recent Gallup poll, 94 percent of employees who can do their work remotely expressed their preference for remote or hybrid work, and many employers are willing to comply. But many jobs still have to be done in person, and pandemic labor shortages prompted many retailers to replace checkout staff with self-service kiosks, waitstaff with ordering apps, and inventory stockers with robots. The World Monetary Fund reports that 43 percent of global companies intend to reduce their workforces through automation.

The reliance on digital technology for business increases the importance of digital literacy, but globally 76 percent of workers feel they are unequipped to operate in a digital-first world, and less than a third are actively involved in digital skills learning and training. This skills gap may, in turn, exacerbate existing inequalities in income and employment.

What This Means for Museums

In the future, the museum sector may look back on the first two decades of the 21st century as a golden era of digital experimentation. Cutting-edge digital labs were hotbeds of experimentation and playful innovation. Digital was hailed as the perfect medium for generously sharing content and cultivating input from and dialog with audiences. Foundations poured millions of dollars into the digitization of collections images and documentation, often in the absence of a specific vision of how those assets would be used.

By 2020, there were signs that the enthusiasm about digital innovation for the sake of innovation was beginning to wane. In the early digital era, several US museums founded digital labs (for example, the Met MediaLab and Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh's The Studio) to conduct ambitious experiments with new technologies. But perhaps because they were often positioned as amenities, not essential components of museum operations, many of these labs had been

sidelined or closed by the beginning of the new decade. Some of the most respected digital innovators left the sector when their influence and autonomy failed to make up for the pay they sacrificed to work in museums.

The museum sector has always been cautious about adopting new practices and technologies, preferring, on the whole, to let others go first and see what works. But during the financial disruptions of COVID, digital practices were often essential in museum survival, plugging gaping holes left by the disruption of place-based operations. Tools that some regarded as edgy or experimental (for example, online ticketing, variable pricing, contact-free payment systems, and touch-free interactives) went mainstream due to necessity. The pandemic may prove to be the inflection point between an era of experimentation and one of pragmatism in which digital strategy is seen as an essential component of museum operations.

The past three years turned into a vast, unplanned experiment in testing audience appetite

CALIBRATING SCREEN TIME IN THE MUSEUM

By Ann Fortescue, President and Executive Director, International Museum of Art & Science, McAllen, Texas

Even before the pandemic-induced shift to virtual instruction, meetings, and socialization, there was concern, particularly among parents and pediatricians, that children were spending too much time looking at screens. Data on the developmental and behavioral effects of too much screen time for children is in tension with perspectives that "not all screens are bad."

All agree that children need interaction with adults for screen time to be valuable to their development. Anecdotal evidence: I recently met with two moms bemoaning their children's challenges with in-person socialization. One's teen live chats and games with friends, each in their own home, and the other's middle-schooler struggles to make friends because everyone is on their phone. Both agreed that human interaction is either missing, remote, or hard to initiate in their children's lives.

At the International Museum of Art & Science (IMAS), we are responding to these current (and likely long-term) concerns by intentionally using a variety of media (digital and analog) to create interactive museum experiences for more than two people to do together, or do side-by-side in the same area. As we plan new exhibits, we're asking for multiples of the same activity so families and friends can interact. We're also intentionally including cooperative experiences to encourage sharing, even among strangers—recognizing a smile or thumbs up can provide that non-verbal moment of human connection. In our more traditional art galleries, we're learning from peers, like the Columbus Museum of Art, and including reflection stations for visitors to interact with one another through words and drawings.

We aren't anti-screen at IMAS; in fact, one of our signature exhibits is NOAA's *Science on a Sphere*—a room-sized, digital display. However, we are paying more attention to how screen time may be impacting our visitors and what kinds of interactions may be missing or significantly reduced so we can provide museum experiences to make up for that deficit and support our community's value of raising well-rounded individuals.



Videos filmed by staff at the William Root House bring life and humor to the interactive touchscreens that guide visitors through the site.

for engaging with museums via digital pathways. Research from *Culture + Community in a Time of Crisis* showed that in early 2020 a significant chunk of the audience using museums' digital offerings (between 32 and 67 percent, depending on the type of museum) had not used similar place-based offerings in the year preceding pandemic lockdowns. Data (through September 2021) from IMPACTS Experience showed even more people engaging with cultural organizations online as the pandemic continued.

For the most part, museums figured out how to meet this demand. AASLH's 2022 *National Visitation Report* found that over the course of the pandemic, the portion of history organizations offering virtual programming rose almost four-fold, to 40 percent—and more than 80 percent at large institutions. During the past three years, many museums found that digital programs reached more people and attracted a wider range of participants, demographically and geographically, than the place-based programs they replaced. And while it remains challenging to build an income stream around digital programs (in the face of so much free content on the web), the ROI for digital programs that do charge is often exponentially better than for physical ones.

In addition to increased demand for digital engagement, society increasingly needs the benefits digital resources can provide, particularly to support student learning, as kids struggle to make up lost ground and address stress, anxiety, and isolation. Museums have traditionally met these needs with place-based experiences, but research is beginning to show that online engagement can be meaningful and beneficial as well. Just three minutes of viewing art online can alleviate loneliness and anxiety and improve mood and well-being, comparable to the effect of visiting a museum in real life, and evidence suggests that longer engagements offer greater benefits. In one study, people over the age of 65 who attended weekly 45-minute virtual museum guided tours for three months significantly increased their well-being.

Catapaulted by pandemic disruptions into the digital future, many museums are now assessing whether and how to sustain or expand their investment in digital going forward. These decisions may be driven, in part, by changes in user expectations and behavior. Can museums convert their new virtual audience into in-person visitors, or will many users continue to prefer digital experiences?

Many schools have become hooked on the relative simplicity, lower costs, and wider options afforded

MUSEUMS MIGHT ...

- Create a digital strategy that establishes a vision and goals for how “digital” in a broad sense can contribute to the work of the museum. To support this strategy, bring a digital lens to bear on the whole organization, integrating digital resources and goals into all departments.
- Invest in content creation in tandem with developing digital channels. The success of online programming, social media, and digitally mediated place-based experiences rests on the quality of the materials they present.
- Audit current digital assets and assess whether and how they contribute to the museum’s operations and strategy. Evaluate the long-term costs of maintaining digital assets, budget for those costs, and ensure there is alignment between the museum’s investments in these assets and plans to support those expenses.
- Evaluate the preferences and appetite of current and potential audiences for online participation, the potential for the museum to reach a broader segment of the public locally and internationally, and the business plan for serving these audiences.
- Identify how digital can contribute materially to financial stability through direct income for products and services, behind the scenes by optimizing operations, or by enhancing staff productivity.
- Create a staff development plan for digital literacy that evaluates needs and identifies and supports training. This involves not only building skills but (to quote ACMI Director Seb Chan) “fostering a digital imagination that can invent more creative practices, and build more diverse audiences in the future.”

by remote field trips. Might this increase the number of students museums serve as teachers and schools realize they can access meaningful experiences without expending the time, and bus money, to schlep to the museum? Will that in turn reduce the yearly tide of class visits to the galleries as more students make use of museums’ digital resources?

Conversely, might we see a growing advantage of place-based experiences as people become fatigued by the ever-growing amount of time they spend online? Children’s screen time went up during the pandemic — a disturbing trend given the copious research documenting the link between screen time, anxiety, and depression in children and adolescents. Might parents place an even higher value on physical museum visits, with minimal digital overlay, as an antidote to these concerns?

Many museums will need to significantly invest in planning, infrastructure, and training to take advantage of digital opportunities. The sector as a whole went into the pandemic digitally underequipped. In 2019, only one-quarter of museums had a digital strategy, either separate from or incorporated into the strategic plan. Hopefully museums will use what they learned from ad hoc digital experiments during the pandemic to create formal strategies going forward. Many, still experiencing significant financial challenges, may assess how data collection and business analytics can help them reduce costs and improve the bottom line.

Working out the long-term ROI on digital strategies is complicated. Museums often take advantage of the massively expensive infrastructure (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) created by commercial companies but then are at the mercy of mergers, acquisitions, and policy changes that can sever connections to the audience they have cultivated on those platforms. How might museums buffer themselves against these risks?

Museums that intend to maintain and grow digital audiences may have to figure out how to monetize this engagement, either directly through fees, purchases, or subscriptions or indirectly through cultivating members and donors. Weighing the practical outcomes of digital investments will be challenging, but museum leaders who do so may create a more sustainable approach to digital.



Before the pandemic, the **William Root House** in Marietta, Georgia, began testing the use of touchscreens to provide a self-directed visitor experience in lieu of volunteer-led tours. Now the organization has switched the entire site (five structures plus historic gardens) to digitally enabled, self-guided tours. Through the digital content, including videos, the museum brought historic rooms to life, ensured the quality of interpretation around sensitive topics such as slavery, and experimented with content geared at younger visitors. This digital focus positions the museum for future growth while ensuring the campus can operate with just a single staff member if necessary.

Old Salem Museums & Gardens in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and the **Black Country Living Museum** in Dudley, England, turned to TikTok during the pandemic to engage new audiences while traditional, on-site interpretation was closed, using the platform to inspire critical thinking and constructive dialogue. Despite the challenges of producing content (including research into what's trending on the platform, filming and editing high-quality videos, and managing the public comments and reactions), the museums found that their TikTok presence enhanced visitor experience, not only online but also on-site. At both museums, visitors often say that they decided to visit because of the institution's TikTok presence.

Pre-COVID, visitors to **Space Center Houston** stood in line for the tram to visit the NASA Johnson Space Center. When it reopened after an initial pandemic closure, staff developed a virtual queue system to facilitate physical distancing. In the process, they discovered that not only did this solution provide a safer way for visitors to wait to board, but it also positively affected the length and quality of their stay. They were now free to roam the exhibits while waiting their turn rather than spending a portion of their visit waiting in line.

REPORTS

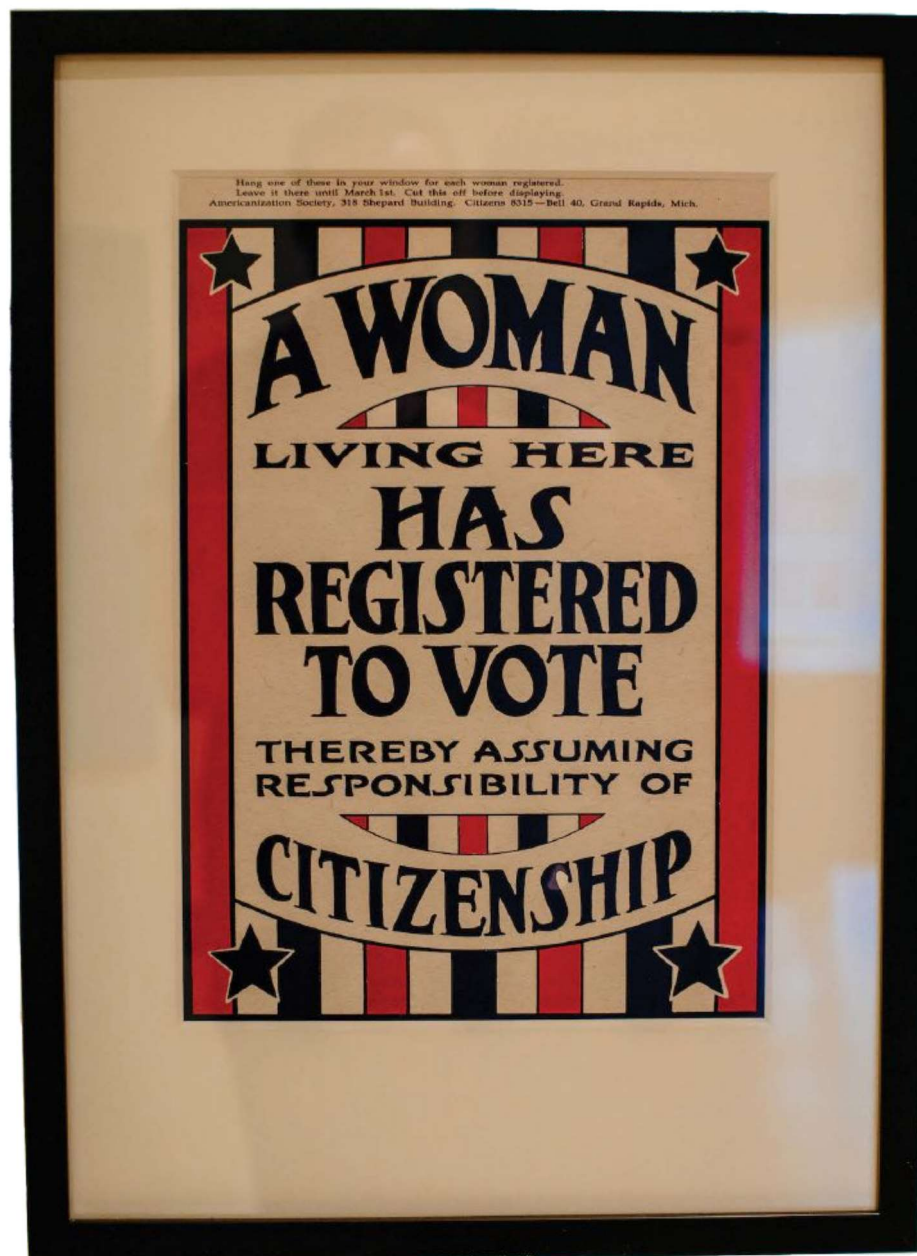
Digital Readiness and Innovation in Museums, Knight Foundation, 2020.

The Knight Foundation commissioned this report to provide a fuller understanding of digital readiness and innovation maturity in the museum sector. The report includes data from 480 museums of all sizes, including art museums, historic institutions and sites, science museums, and others.

knightfoundation.org/reports/digital-readiness-and-innovation-in-museums/

The Partisan Divide

How can museums build bridges and foster tolerance to strengthen democracy?



This poster is part of the Atlanta History Center exhibition "Any Great Change: The Centennial of the 19th Amendment," which explores the paths that women from many backgrounds took to open doors for the next generation.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”
—Abraham Lincoln

Our country is racked by political

rancor, intransigence on critical issues, and heightened tendency toward violence. This hyper-partisanship is impeding the work of public institutions, including schools and libraries, and impairing our ability to respond to threats such as pandemics and climate change. Some worry that the stability of our government is itself at risk.

To maintain a functioning democracy, we need to learn to talk across the growing political chasm, foster mutual respect, and encourage peaceful civic participation. Museums can play a role in narrowing the partisan divide, using their superpower of trust to build bridges, foster tolerance, and nurture inclusive attitudes.

The Challenge

Political polarization in the US has been growing for the past quarter century. It's not clear to what extent this growing divide stems from fundamental disagreements on critical issues such as racial justice, climate change, and immigration policy, and to what extent these issues have become proxies for deeper disputes about culture, identity, and the role of government. We are experiencing a growing number of threats to election workers, elected or appointed officials, law enforcement, and government employees. At the height of the pandemic, researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that one in five Americans thought

it was okay to threaten public health officials. So many acts of aggression have been directed at libraries and librarians that the American Library Association issued a statement condemning the trend.

These threats and actions may be symptoms of a deep and growing sense of alienation. Leading up to Independence Day last year, the University of Chicago released a report showing that nearly half of Americans feel like “a stranger in their own country,” and 28 percent of voters feel it may be necessary, sometime soon, for citizens to take up arms against the government. In a recent briefing for President Joe Biden, historians warned that democracy itself may be at risk. In the face of such dire signals, what can all of us do, as individuals and institutions, to hold things together?

Rancorous partisanship has been a defining feature of American politics even before the country achieved independence. (John Adams habitually referred to his fellow founding father Alexander Hamilton as a “bastard brat of a Scotch pedlar.”) One might argue this passion is a feature, not a bug. Throughout our history, partisan ardor has also fueled civic participation, cycling between peaks of conflict and voter turnout, and troughs of amity and low engagement.

Passions are once again on the rise. Increasingly, Republicans and Democrats not only object to the other party, but to the people in that party, viewing each other as close-minded, dishonest, immoral, and unintelligent. Is this surge in violent rhetoric (and



Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Philadelphia, serving as a polling station in May 2021.

WHY I'M HOPEFUL

By Susie Wilkening, Wilkening Consulting

The partisan divide is indisputably painful to this country, and we see the divide clearly in our research among museum-goers. People's political attitudes come with them to museums, and they deeply affect how they respond to content...especially content that we, as a society, do not yet have consensus on.

But long term, I have hope. And data from the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers has led to my hopeful outlook.

While political *identities* seem to be entrenched, people's *values* are shifting, and shifting in remarkable ways.

Here's what I am seeing in our work among both museum-goers and the broader population:

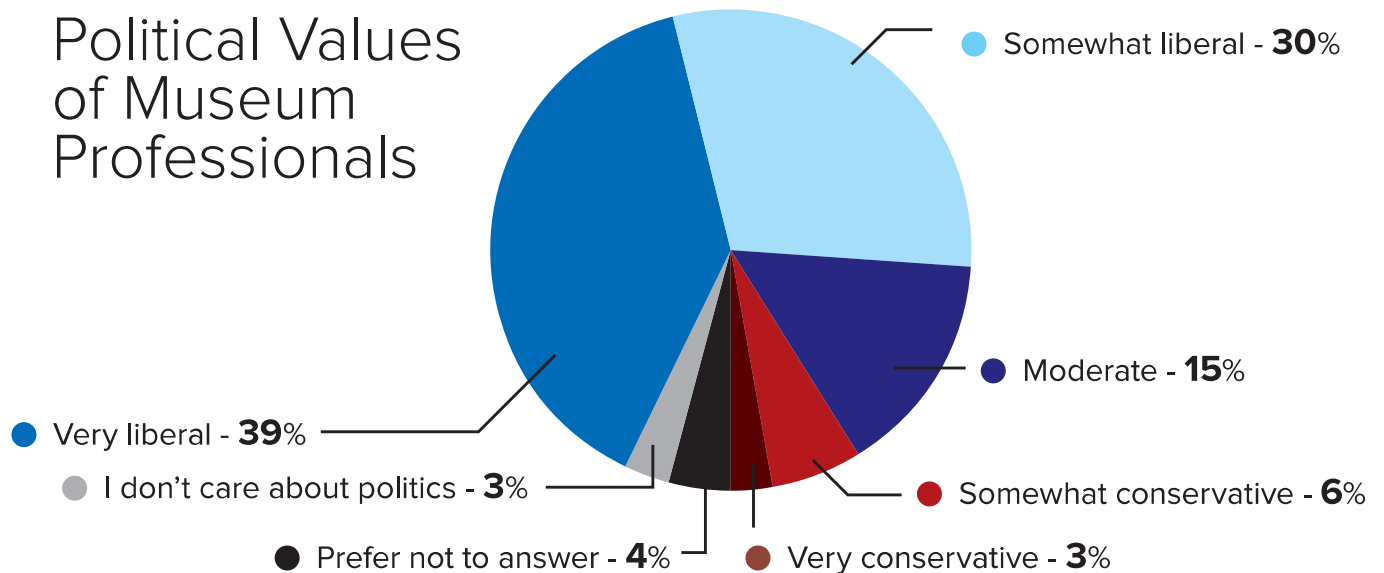
- Inclusive values are going mainstream. While the majority of museum-going liberals express inclusive values, the percentage of moderates expressing inclusive values increased from 34 percent to 43 percent from 2021 to 2022. And the portion of inclusive conservative museum-goers **doubled** from 14 percent to 29 percent. These patterns also carried over into our broader population sampling.
- Openness to climate change content has also gone mainstream. While a 55 percent majority of museum-going conservatives 60 or older fall on the "anti-green" side of the climate change attitudes spectrum, only a quarter of conservatives under 40 agree with them. **And more young conservatives fall on the "green" side of the spectrum than the "anti-green" side.** Again, we see these patterns carry over into our broader population sampling. Young conservatives think climate change is real, and we need to take action to mitigate the harms.

This isn't just our data either. There has been a colossal shift in attitudes related to the LGBTQ+ community over the past 15 years or so (though there is still, admittedly, much more work to be done). Pew Research Center sees similar trends about climate change. And while the data about racial attitudes for the past couple of years is mixed depending on what is being asked, the long-term data trends on racial attitudes bend toward justice.

I don't want to downplay the difficulty of addressing the political divide in 2023, nor do I want to downplay the harmful effects of racism and anti-climate change sentiment. It's bad, and the effects are devastating. And if I am brutally honest, I think it is going to get worse before it gets better. As anti-inclusive and anti-green segments of the population slowly shrink, those who espouse those views are likely to become even more defensive, emotional, vocal, volatile, and—distressingly—violent. I think the 2020s will be politically awful, and there is the potential for real harm to people as a result.

But when I look at the long-term values shifts on these issues, I'm more hopeful that in the 2030s we will be able to come together more easily to deal with the immense challenges we are facing.

Political Values of Museum Professionals



Source: 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers; sample size: 2,999 respondents identifying as museum professionals

occasionally violent acts) simply another crest in America's historic cycle, or do current events potentially signal something worse?

In the past, the forces that divided us were diminished by day-to-day exposure to people of diverse views. But Americans increasingly politically self-segregate by where they live, where they work, who they socialize with, and who they choose to marry. Nearly half of college students don't want to room with someone who votes differently from them. There is a growing demographic divide between urban centers and the rest of the country (leading to some Democrat-leaning cities being sued by their conservative state government for seeking to use their own funding to support abortion access).

This sorting creates barriers to conversation—and it is distressingly easy to demonize people you never meet. Making things still worse, while we are increasingly physically aggregated by ideology, we are hyper-connected on social media. These platforms foster isolated echo chambers while lowering barriers to uncivil discourse and amplifying the voices of small numbers of people with extreme views.

America's current "pernicious polarization" (as it has been dubbed by political scientist Jennifer McCoy) may in fact be unprecedented—surpassing the political division experienced in our country or in any of

our peer democracies in the past half century. And research suggests that such severe polarization could lead to serious democratic decline, at the extreme descending into some form of authoritarian regime. Where might this lead?

Polling in 2022 showed 60 percent of Americans anticipate an increase in political violence in coming years, and 43 percent think a civil war is at least somewhat likely. Some researchers and policy makers fear we may functionally fracture into two Americas—red and blue—sharing the same geographic space or, at worst, experience a second civil war.

However, in the midst of this depressing deluge of data, we can also find rays of hope. In 2022, the Strengthening Democracy Challenge showed that many kinds of interventions can significantly reduce partisan animosity and strengthen democracy. And there are some indicators we may be rebounding from partisan extremes. An increasing share of Americans identify as moderate—and a stronger middle might make for a more stable democracy. (See "Why I'm Hopeful" by Susie Wilkening on the previous page for more reasons to be optimistic.)

It is vitally important that we chart a path between apathy and violence and bridge the growing partisan divide. How might we build a new, better synthesis that combines the energy and passion of



Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano at the Reagan Institute Summit on Education in 2018.

caring with open and inclusive attitudes that can help unite our country?

What This Means for Museums

Museums, as prominent symbols of civic life, can all too easily become pawns in partisan quarrels. In 1989 Senator Jesse Helms used Andres Serrano's photograph *Piss Christ* as an excuse for efforts to defund the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1999, county prosecutors charged the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, and its director, with purveying obscenity when the center hosted the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition "The Perfect Moment." In 1999, New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani made political hay from controversial art in the "Sensation" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, threatening to withdraw city funding.

Unfortunately, museums and allied sectors are beginning to get caught up in a new wave of politically fueled culture wars. Some states are drafting legislation that would control how libraries build their collections and how librarians provide access to books, resources, and information, and abolish the immunity that traditionally shielded librarians for the decisions they make. In Florida, businesses (including museums) with 15 or more employees must now comply with the new Individual Freedom Act (aka the "Stop WOKE Act") that limits how they can provide diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) training. Stories of censorship and threats of violence form a grim diary of 2022.

- In March, the Idaho House of Representatives passed Bill 666, which would have deprived schools, museums, colleges, and public libraries of protections shielding them from charges of "disseminating material harmful to minors." (The bill died in the state Senate.)
- In June in North Carolina, the county manager ordered the Gaston County Museum of Art and History to remove a photograph of two men kissing—one commissioner, noting that he believes that homosexuality is a sin, said he would defund the museum given a chance.
- In September, 30 or so armed members of the Proud Boys (self-described "Western chauvinists") showed up to protest a family-friendly drag show and dance party at the Museum of Science and History in Memphis, Tennessee, forcing the museum to cancel the event.

As these examples illustrate, museums can become targets when their actions touch on issues central to political identity—and right now that is a very long list of issues.

In addition to uproars over specific exhibits, books, or statements, a broader risk arises when a sector is perceived as inherently partisan. Higher education as a whole has come under attack by conservatives

Photo by Jeff Song

concerned that college campuses (faculty and students) skew strongly liberal. Data from the Pew Research Center shows that almost three-quarters of Republicans think higher ed is “going in the wrong direction” (compared with half of Democrats), with almost 80 percent of these Republicans attributing this “wrong direction” to professors’ liberal bias. While there is no evidence that these perceptions have led to fewer Republicans sending their kids to college (yet), it may fuel the fragmentation of higher ed. Colleges and universities (like the new University of Austin) promising to create conservative campuses could deconstruct the academic melting pot that has historically exposed students to peers with different politics and values from their own.

While it may be less evident to the public, the museum field also skews significantly to the left, with 69 percent of people working in the museum sector identifying as somewhat or very liberal compared to one-quarter of the public. These political differences may become relevant as museums come under pressure from inside and outside the sector to take positions on issues—whether directly related to their mission or of importance to society generally.

AAM’s *Museums and Trust* (2021) revealed that nearly half of the public believes museums should always be “neutral.” (While museum professionals understand museums are inherently not neutral, members of the public commonly use the term to mean “not take positions on issues.”) Only one in five feel museums can or should take positions on important issues, even if they are controversial. This poses a dilemma—museums as trusted sources of information can be powerful agents for change. However, museums that wield that power might be relegated to the status of “untrusted other.” How can museums present information, promote dialogue, and foster reflection without being perceived as partisan?

Currently, going to museums is a nonpartisan activity (liberals and conservatives are equally likely to have visited a museum in the past two years), and museums are trusted across the political spectrum. As such, museums can play an important role in bridging the partisan divide, using their existing superpower of trust to help build bridges and foster tolerance and inclusive attitudes.

MUSEUMS MIGHT ...

- Become engaged with efforts such as Educating for American Democracy, iCivics and CivXNow, The History Co:Lab, or Made by Us to provide the education needed to support civic activism.
- Advocate for funding to support this work: AAM is a member of the CivXNow Coalition and supports bipartisan federal legislation that would authorize \$5 billion to fund K–12 history and civics education and programs over the next five years. If passed into law and fully funded, at least \$200 million annually would go to “qualified nonprofit organizations,” such as museums, through competitive grants. (As *TrendsWatch* went to print it was unclear whether or not this legislation would pass before the end of the 117th Congress in December or need to be reintroduced when the 118th Congress convenes in January.)
- Engage in actions likely to strengthen democratic attitudes, building on research about successful interventions. This might include educating people about how common anti-democratic attitudes, support for violence, and dehumanization are among partisan rivals. In addition, exhibitions and interpretation of art and history could dramatize the consequences of democratic collapse in other countries.
- Explicitly encompass political diversity in their commitment to DEI, ensuring that staff with diverse political values feel able to express that identity at work. This commitment to diversity can apply to visitors as well, acknowledging that museums’ communities include people across the political spectrum.
- Provide free access to information that is being censored in other spheres.
- Give staff time off to work as poll workers in their communities, and provide paid time off to vote.
- Encourage voter participation by becoming a National Voter Registration Day Partner, engage with Independent Sector’s Nonprofit Voter Empowerment Project, and serve as a polling place.



The **Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute** (which supports the corresponding presidential museum in the National Archives and Records Administration's library system) hosts a number of bipartisan gatherings featuring a plethora of liberals and conservatives, specifically in the policy areas of national defense and education. The foundation also fosters the development of civic skills like dialogue, debate, and deep research on controversial topics through various education programs, including a national speech and debate program.



In 2021, **Atlanta History Center** launched a five-year democracy initiative leading up to its centennial in 2026 (which is also the nation's 250th birthday), using its resources to explore the history of the components that make a healthy democratic system, including methods of civic engagement, widespread and informed voter participation, civil rights, and community leadership. The initiative is a core component in the History Center's strategic plan, which affirms its purpose: "to use history to bring people together to explore new and different perspectives with the goal of strengthening our shared commitment to, and engagement in, our democratic system."



In 2005, the **Japanese American National Museum** founded the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy to convene and educate people of all ages about democracy, transform attitudes, influence culture, and promote civic engagement. It is a place for dialogue about race and social justice where visitors can examine contemporary and historical frameworks, including the Asian American experience. The center explores the rights, freedoms, and enduring fragility of democracy, helping to build bridges and find common ground between people of diverse backgrounds and opinions.

RESOURCES

Audiences and Inclusion: A Primer for Cultivating More Inclusive Attitudes Among the Public, American Alliance of Museums and Wilkening Consulting, 2021
aam-us.org/2021/02/09/audiences-and-inclusion-primer

Great Communicator Debate Series, photo courtesy of Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute; courtesy of the Atlanta History Center; flashcard from An American Vocabulary: Words to Action, courtesy of the Japanese American National Museum

Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations

“I greatly appreciate learning about cultural objects, ancient history, and global cultures different than my own, but this should not be at the expense of perpetuating the harms inflicted by colonialism.”

—2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers,
open-ended comment by respondent



In 2022, the Minnesota Historical Society digitally repatriated one terabyte of images and archives to the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation in North Dakota.

Photo courtesy of the Gilbert L. and Frederick N. Wilson Papers, Minnesota Historical Society

Collections lie at the heart of museums, and values regarding the ownership and control of collections are central to museum ethics. As we look toward the future of the sector, it is vital to acknowledge that the field is at a tipping point where these values are radically shifting. In recent decades, an avalanche of legal battles, legislative action, and community outcry has expanded the terms of debate from legal compliance to broader ethical issues, especially regarding items in museum collections linked to war, looting, and colonialism.

Epic shifts in standards and practices are being validated by global, national, and institutional examples. The landmark report *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage* in 2018, commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron, prompted museums around the globe to reconsider their positions on the repatriation of material looted from Benin in the 19th century. In 2022 the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) released a report sparked by the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Advocating a proactive approach to the return of cultural property, CMA exhorts museums “Don’t Wait, Repatriate!”

In the US, the Smithsonian Institution is leading the way, revising its policies to allow shared ownership and the return of objects for ethical rather than legal reasons. In October 2022, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art transferred ownership of 29

Benin Bronzes to the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria. At the ceremony announcing the return, Lonnie Bunch, Secretary of the Smithsonian, declared, “Not only was returning ownership of these magnificent artifacts to their rightful home the right thing to do, it also demonstrates how we all benefit from cultural institutions making ethical choices.”

Claimants Rights

Societal shifts drive the evolution of law and vice versa. In the past, governments were more likely to focus on protecting owners, including museums, from demands for repatriation. (See, for example, Australia’s 2013 Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Act). Recent legislation is more likely to strengthen and expand the rights of potential claimants. One example: in 2022 New York state passed a bill that requires museums to identify art stolen from the Jewish community during the Nazi era—essentially codifying what had been until now voluntary guidelines for the museum sector.

This ethical and legal evolution is complicated by rapid changes in technology. Reproduction of objects (whether as digital images or the digitally enabled creation of physical duplicates) creates the potential for what has been dubbed “digital repatriation.”

This can allow museums to retain original material and give digital or physical copies to the cultures of origin, or the other way around.

The ethics, logistics, and effectiveness of these approaches

are still the subject of debate. The Institute for Digital Archaeology (IDA) has been urging the British Museum to replace the Parthenon Marbles with robotically carved copies, guided by 3-D scans, and return the originals to Greece. The accessibility of digital technologies is even eroding museums’ ability to control the process. When the British Museum refused to cooperate in a demonstration project, IDA staff used smartphones and tablets to scan the collection in the gallery without permission.

Shifts in public opinion are also raising new questions regarding who has standing to call for repatriation of objects and what groups or individuals museums should work with to effect returns. Even as momentum gathers for the voluntary restitution of the cultural heritage of Benin, looted by the British in the 19th century, the Restitution Study Group has challenged how this should be done. Speaking on behalf of descendants of enslaved people living in the United States, the Caribbean, and Britain, the study group argues that these looted materials should not be returned to Nigeria, as the representative of the former Kingdom of Benin, because they represent wealth extracted from Africa by the kingdom through the slave trade. Instead, the group is calling for ownership of the relics to be transferred to descendants of people enslaved in the region. How might this campaign affect how museums proceed with voluntary repatriation and who they deal with in negotiating returns?

In 2019, Connecticut resident

Tamara Lanier sued the Harvard Museums, asserting that the museum should transfer to her historic photographs depicting her enslaved ancestors. While the courts rejected this claim, they allowed that the claimant has a plausible case for damages related to emotional distress caused by the museum's ownership and use of the photographs. Might this case hold broader implications for other historical images in museum collections?

Reparations Rethought

Finally, the conversation around reparations is growing beyond the ownership of material, *per se*, to a consideration of what is owed to countries and individuals harmed by past appropriation and exploitation. The city of Oakland, California, is in the process of granting a “cultural conservation easement” for five acres of a city park in perpetuity to the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, an Indigenous women-led nonprofit, and the Confederated Villages of Lisjan. In 2020 the Yale Union arts center in Portland, Oregon, voluntarily transferred its land and building to the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation in what the governing board characterized “a radical act of decolonization.”

While calls for financial reparations are most frequently directed at governments, some museums are taking action on this front as well. The Mattress Factory—a contemporary art museum in Pittsburgh—is implementing an artist-led project to pay financial reparations to selected residents



In October 2022, Abba Isa Tijani, Director General of Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments, and Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian, signed an agreement to transfer ownership of Benin Bronzes at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art to the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria.

for displacement and gentrification caused in part by the museum. How might museum reparations take the form of power sharing over appropriated resources, whether collections or land?

The attitudes and legislation defining rights and ownership are changing. The debate is swiftly

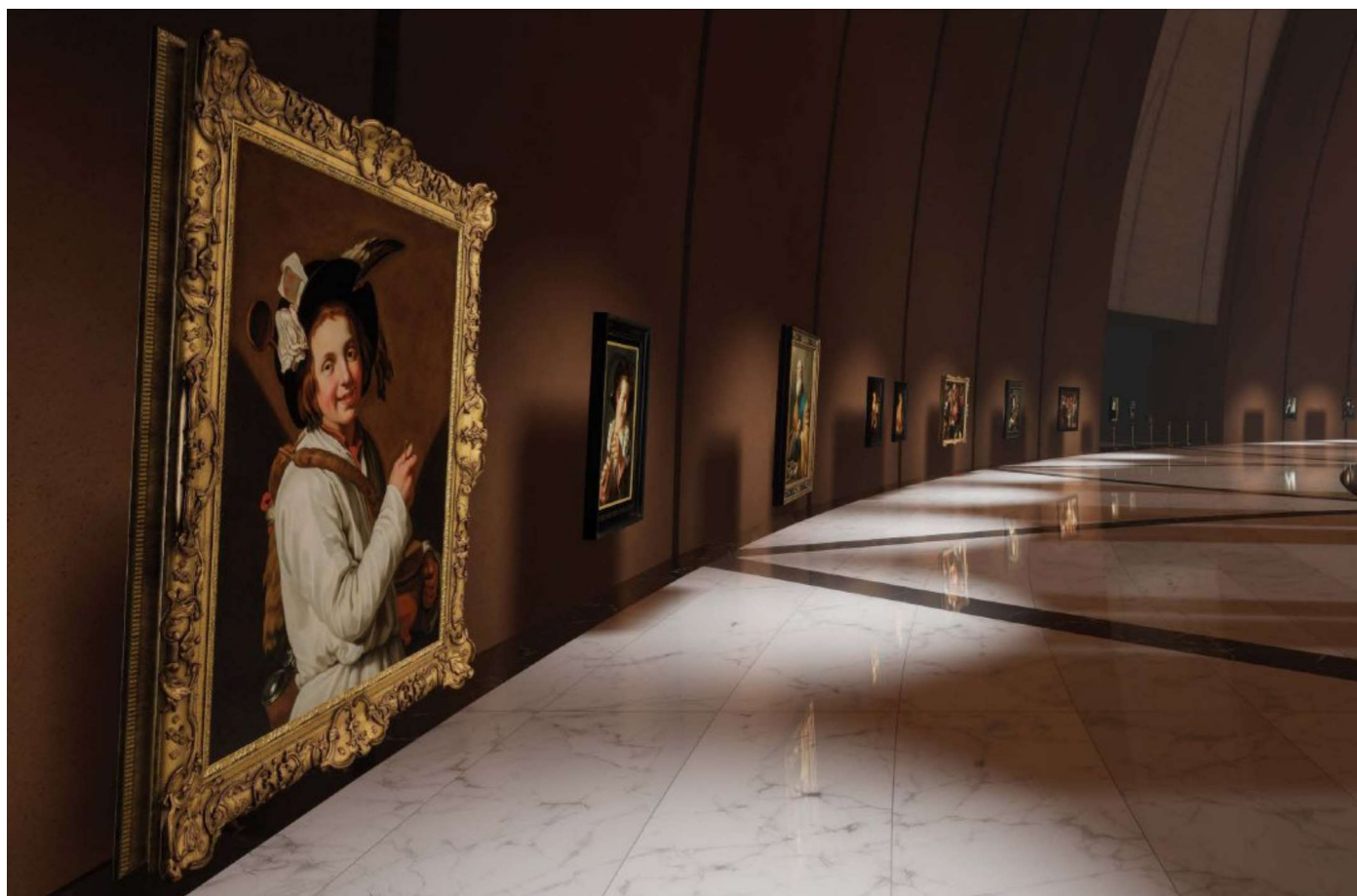
moving from what museums are allowed to do to what they should do, up to and including sharing power and decision-making about the assets they steward, return of those assets, and reparations for past harm. Where will that arc take us a decade hence?

MUSEUMS MIGHT ...

- Start by ensuring the museum is in compliance with all current local, national, and international law. Review collections and establish a process for flagging any objects with unclear provenance or that might be subject to legal claims for repatriation.
- Engage the board and staff in discussing the following questions:
 - Where does the organization currently lie on a spectrum of action that encompasses legal compliance, voluntary repatriation of collections, and reparations for damage inflicted by the museum or by society?
 - How might the museum work productively with communities and individuals who self-identify as having a moral, cultural, or legal claim to collections?
 - Where is there agreement, or disagreement, on the values that should guide the museum's decisions regarding ownership and control of cultural heritage?

The Metaverse and Web 3.0

A brief guide to terms that may be popping up in your newsfeeds.

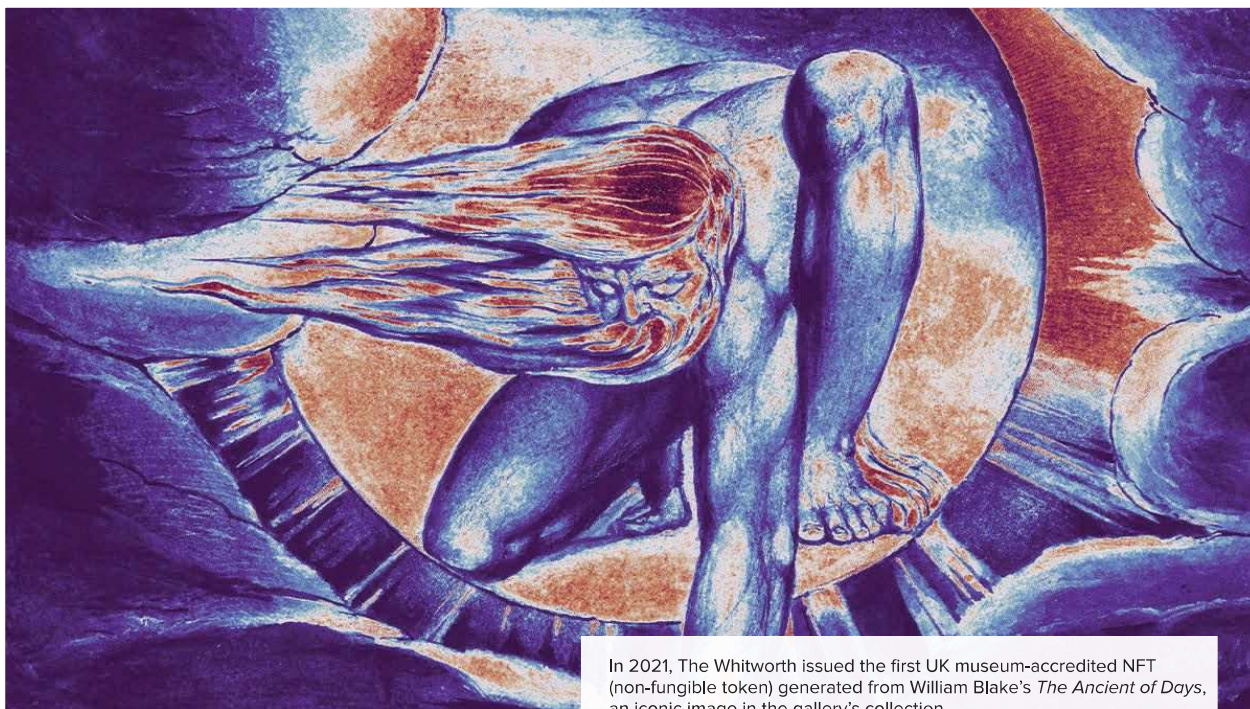


Visitors must don virtual reality goggles to enter the Kremer Museum, as the Dutch and Flemish Old Master paintings of the Kremer Collection are accessible only in the metaverse.

The Metaverse: a blending of physical and virtual realities, from augmented reality (images, text, or sound layered onto the real world) to immersive virtual worlds. This is not a new concept—Second Life, a virtual reality platform that launched in 2003, contains dozens

of museums, both unique, born-digital experiences and digital clones of physical institutions. The metaverse is currently receiving a lot of attention because some major technology companies, notably Meta (formerly Facebook), plan to pivot their business

Courtesy of the Kremer Collection



In 2021, The Whitworth issued the first UK museum-accredited NFT (non-fungible token) generated from William Blake's *The Ancient of Days*, an iconic image in the gallery's collection.

Courtesy of The Whitworth,
The University of Manchester

models from social platforms to immersive virtual experiences. Outside the gaming community, adoption of this technology has been slow, but migration into the metaverse for work and leisure may speed up as better technology and platforms are rolled out.

Web 3.0: a term describing the decentralized internet, built on technologies like blockchain that allow storage and control of data to be distributed across servers owned by many individuals or organizations. It is being positioned as a means to democratize the web, as it enables users to bypass the centralized control wielded by major technology companies. The development of Web 3.0 is primarily being driven by the potential to create new economies

around digital assets such as cryptocurrencies and NFTs (digital collectibles). The designation “3.0” places this version of the web in an evolutionary tree that starts with Web 1.0, in which users were limited to passively viewing static content, and Web 2.0, the participatory, social, collaborative web that spawned Wikipedia, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and Reddit. For a primer on blockchain, download *TrendsWatch* 2019 from the AAM website.



Changing Climate Risk

2022 marked a new high

in climatic extremes. The US set records for number of tornadoes (29 in March); heat (nearly 1,000 record high temperatures in one week of September alone); and flooding (St. Louis and Kentucky both experienced “thousand year” rain events). More than 100 million people were put on heat alerts in July when over 85 percent of the country experienced temperatures that reached or exceeded 90°F.

According to Climate Central, a research and communications nonprofit, the frequency of billion-dollar weather disasters is now about one event every 18 days.

These signals are a clear warning that **we are entering an era in**



In 2021, a catastrophic rain event caused by Hurricane Ida flooded the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware.

which past data about climate (flood, fire, rain, drought, heat, cold, storm) is no longer an accurate predictor of future risk. Even as climate change itself remains a political bone of contention, governments and organizations are scrambling to adapt to the new reality. Phoenix created an Office of Heat Response and Mitigation, California launched a new heat ranking system to protect the vulnerable, and Miami joined a growing roster of cities around the world that have appointed chief heat officers.

Museums should be at the forefront of these adaptations as guardians of natural and cultural heritage imperiled by extreme weather, as organizations vulnerable to climate disasters, and as infrastructure that can support their communities in times of danger.

Museums are advised to do the following:

- Monitor the most recent data on risk projections, drawing on sites such as

climatecentral.org, climatecheck.com, and the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (c2es.org).

- Reassess how extremes of heat and cold and events such as flood and storm are likely to impact their communities, budgets, and operations.
- Evaluate how the museum’s physical plant might need to be upgraded to withstand climate extremes.
- Revisit insurance coverage, and work with insurance providers to mitigate risk and adjust coverage, if needed.
- Identify how they might serve in an integrated network of local response to climate events.
- Help combat climate change through public education and making changes to their own operations.

Museums Respond

Last year, museums of the Houston Museum District encouraged residents to use their air-conditioned galleries as a refuge from the hottest July on record. In Columbus, Ohio, COSI offered free admission as its neighbors coped with power outages while temperatures soared.

In the UK, the government has recruited libraries and museums into a national network of public organizations serving as warming hubs in the face of plunging temperatures and soaring energy prices in the coming winter. (Museums, in turn, have asked the government to subsidize the high costs of keeping galleries open and warm.)

Photo courtesy of the Hagley Museum and Library

Bridging Communities

By Scott Kratz

The nonprofit Building Bridges Across the River is partnering with the District of Columbia government to transform an aging freeway into a new park over the Anacostia River. The 11th Street Bridge Park, slated to open in 2025, will reconnect neighborhoods long divided by freeways and waterways, supporting residents' environmental, cultural, and physical health while serving as an anchor for inclusive economic growth. Informed by more than 1,000 meetings with community stakeholders, the park will include an outdoor amphitheater, environmental education center, intergenerational play space, and public art celebrating the river's history and people who live along its banks.

In addition to being a symbol of unity, Bridge Park seeks to serve as an anchor for equitable and inclusive economic growth, redressing profound discrepancies of income, home values, and even life expectancy between downtown DC and the predominantly Black Anacostia neighborhood. The project has already invested over \$85 million in these equity strategies, including creating affordable housing, developing job training, and preserving Black-owned businesses. By acting intentionally and committing to a community-driven process, the project will literally and metaphorically bridge the nation's capital and create an iconic new civic space for all.

Scott Kratz is the Director of the 11th Street Bridge Park. He was formerly Vice President for Education at the National Building Museum, where he led school programs, family festivals, adult education, and academic symposia.





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» Sign up by **February 28** for the best rate, and save nearly 70%.

2023 Research Themes:



Connection to Humanity

Feeling connected to humankind is likely a key driver for inclusive attitudes, taking action on climate change, and other challenges we face as a society. What role can museums play in cultivating a more emotionally connected humankind? What are the most effective ways for us to engender that empathy towards others?



Civic Participation

Our society is fraught with partisan turmoil, with civil discourse fraying, increasingly entrenched polarization, and democracy at risk. This leads to many people feeling disempowered, and a rising sense of helplessness. **How can museums bring disparate viewpoints together** in ways that promote a civic mindset?



Rebuilding Museum Visitation

The COVID-19 pandemic upended leisure time and disrupted museum visitation. For many, visitation has yet to rebound. Some museum-goers have enthusiastically returned, but others continue to be "COVID cautious" or have developed new leisure-time patterns. **What opportunities can museums take advantage of to expand audiences?**

By participating, you'll receive custom results about your museum's audiences, tracking and benchmarking of results, comparisons to peers by locale, institution type, or geographic region, and all results via slide deck and spreadsheet. The cost is **\$1,000 per museum** if you enroll by Feb. 28 and launch the survey by March 8, 2023.





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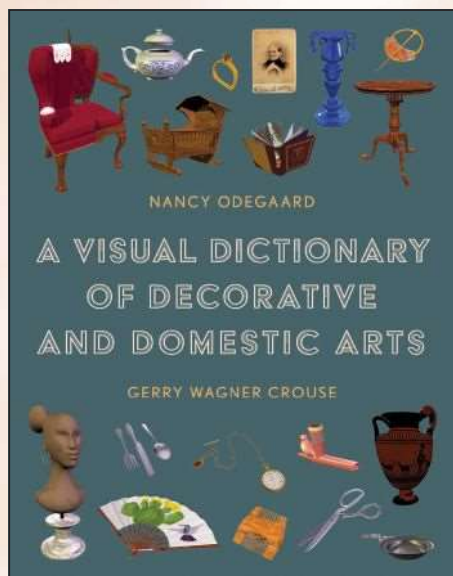
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NEW RESOURCES FOR MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS



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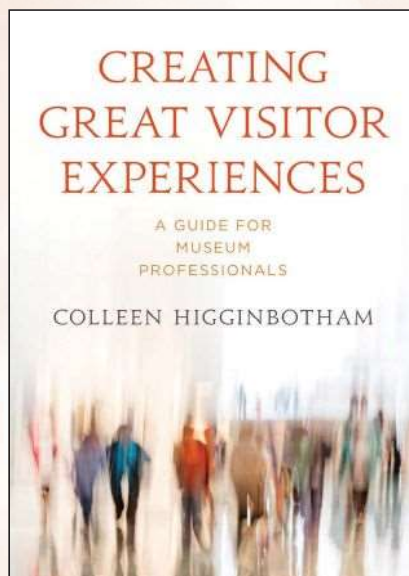
A VISUAL DICTIONARY OF DECORATIVE AND DOMESTIC ARTS

By Nancy Odegaard and
Gerry Wagner Crouse

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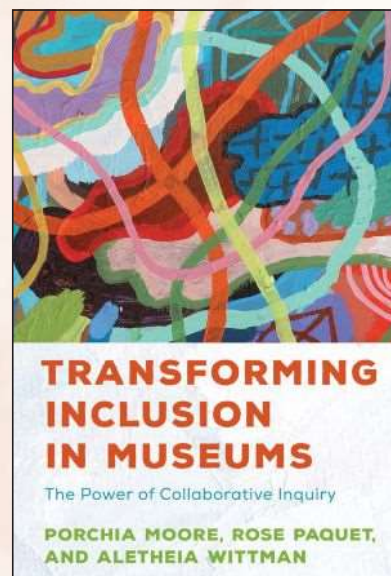
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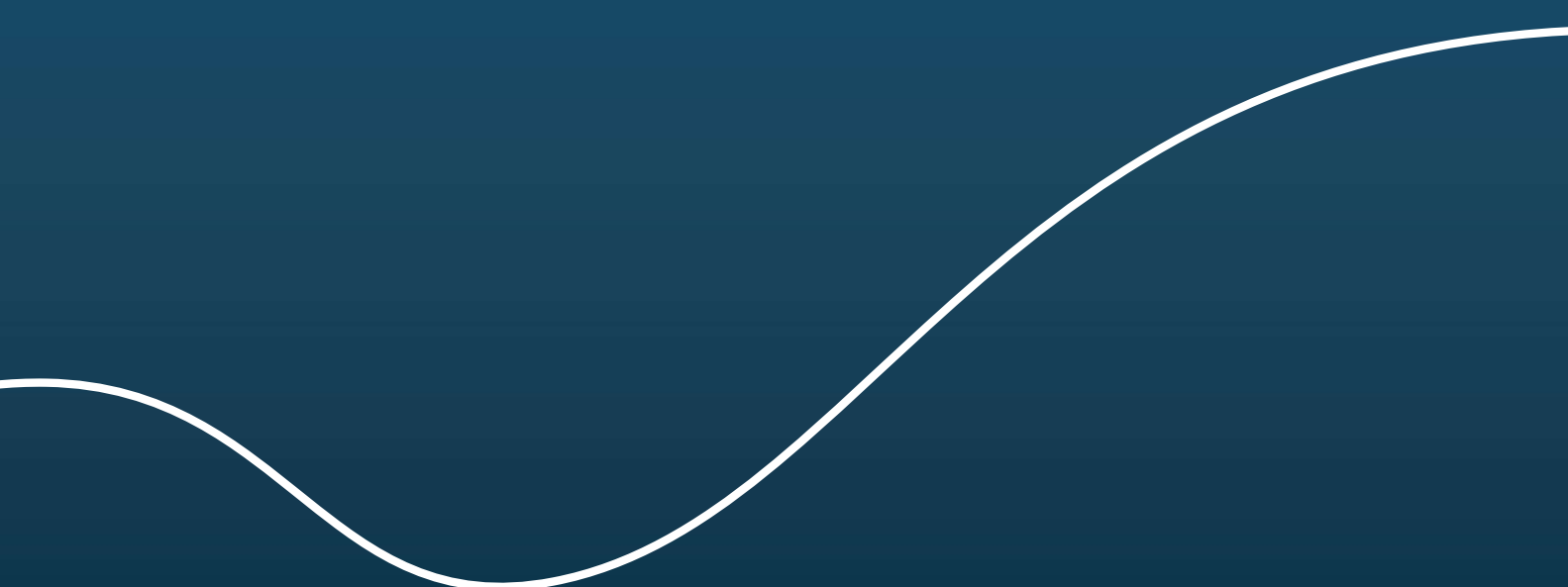


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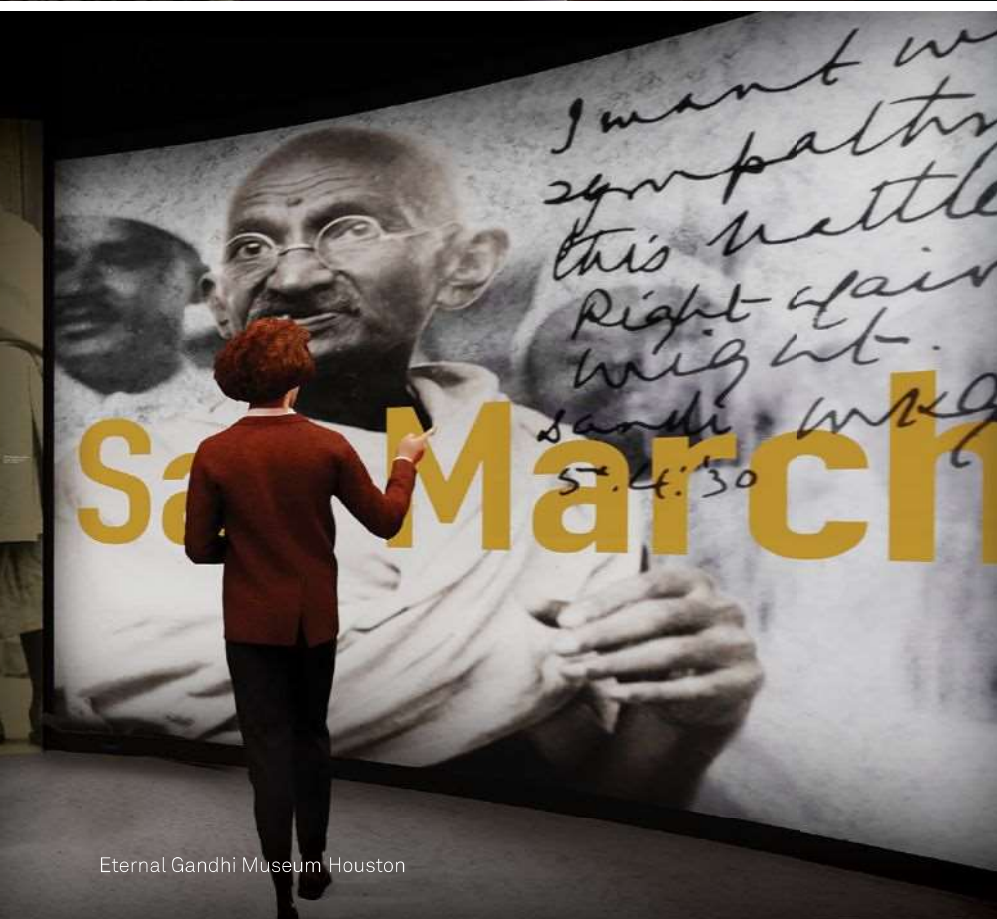
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Disruptive Technology Trends

Our world has changed. The invention and penetration of cell phones and tablets over the past ten years have changed not only everybody's lives – but also their expectations of the world around them.

A new generation is now growing up with all the information available in our world at their fingertips and no knowledge of a world without touchscreens in their pocket. They do not really read: fixed graphics does not interest them. They expect to have their information delivered in a dynamic, fun format. There is more to it than that, though: we've always expected that a new generation has different expectations – what is new and different now is that this is not only true for a new generation, it's true for our entire audience across all generations!

Kids at the age of 2 or 3 are mostly more than comfortable using mom or dad's phones to get the information they are interested in. That information is age-aligned, taking the form of cartoons and other dynamically presented media with movement and color. As they grow up, the only thing that changes is that around the age of 5, they're showing dad how to set up his phone. During this entire formative period, the media they consume changes to reflect their age and interest. No matter what, they expect age-aligned dynamic media.

one size

does not fit all.



It is not just kids. My mom, who lives in the Netherlands, complains when our video calls drop out. I had to remind her that a few years ago, we only had land-line based telephone conversations and explain that these dropouts might just happen when I am driving around Southern California using a cell phone running Facetime with her some 6,000 miles and an ocean away.

I then realized that when I look at various news or social media channels, I too am a lot pickier about what I read too. With the vast amount of information available one has to be, as there is not enough time in the day to read all that I am interested in. That headline had better be written right.

The result of all this technology, and its social implications, is that visitors now want and expect Magic more than ever before – 'the same old' is no longer acceptable.

While these changes happened, there were also some ground changes related to the equipment we use as part of our technology, AV, and interactive exhibits and installations. As we went from CRTs to Plasma, and then to LCD and OLED displays, and from lamp-based projectors to laser projectors that provide for 20,000 hours+ of almost maintenance-free life, prices of all this equipment dropped, resulting in the commoditization of the equipment that has driven our industry for many years. At the same time, computers were getting cheaper and more powerful by the month, and it became clear that the equipment, processes, and methods we had used to build AV and interactive systems were ready for a drastic sea change too.

TRENDS in technology

AV++

a true paradigm shift happened when affordable, standard, off-the-shelf hardware became capable of handling all AV tasks

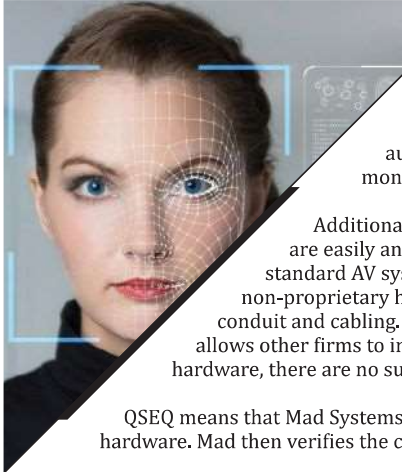
We decided to take the experience that we had gained with computer/IT-based solutions and use that to optimal effect to create systems that no longer need proprietary hardware. This would also alleviate the problems that our clients found with AV technical staff – they were too hard to find, while IT personnel became more accessible and easier to find. This led us to create a new AV system based on non-proprietary hardware, as it was clear that the future was there.

QuickSilver®

QuickSilver®, Mad Systems' IT-based AV ++® technology represents a leap forward in AV systems.

QuickSilver® does not need expensive control rooms, racks, conduit or cable, cable terminations, signal extenders, or HVAC systems to keep it all cool, nor does it need all the meetings and disciplines to pull all that infrastructure together. Instead, it is a complete next-generation AV ecosystem, an IT equipment-based AV system equipped with a revolutionary set of elements and capabilities that includes media servers, interactive servers, I/O devices, motion and other sensors, RFID/ Barcode/NFC/QR code options, immersive video, and immersive 3D audio solutions, ADA options, touchless interfaces, and user interface options. The system is based on nonproprietary computer hardware, which means that spares will be available for a long time into the future. In fact, these systems are maintainable for as long as companies like Intel continue to manufacture processors, which is a vast departure from the previous generation of AV equipment, which was mostly manufactured in small batches for a limited time.





Maris J. Ensing
www.madsystems.com

The new toolkit that comes with QuickSilver allows for new technologies to turn off equipment when there are no visitors in any given area, extends equipment life of devices including projectors, provides for automated remote system checking and monitoring, and gives simple technician-level access to control and monitor individual elements, and soon even semiautomated system design.

Additionally, its plug-and-play structure and the method used for media delivery mean that the system and its content are easily and infinitely upgradeable. QuickSilver can be implemented as a wired or wireless system. Compared to the standard AV system, with its racks and cooling rooms, QuickSilver is a space- and power-saver, and given its ability to use non-proprietary hardware, a money-saver as well. On top of that, imagine the savings you make by not having to install all that conduit and cabling. With a new process called QSEQ® (QuickSilver Equalizer), we even have an implementation method that allows other firms to install pre-configured AV systems using QuickSilver tools. Because QuickSilver will run on a range of different hardware, there are no supply line issues.

QSEQ means that Mad Systems will pre-configure and pre-program the system and send it to the AV integrator or Fabricator to install the hardware. Mad then verifies the configuration, commissions the system, and performs final programming and training.



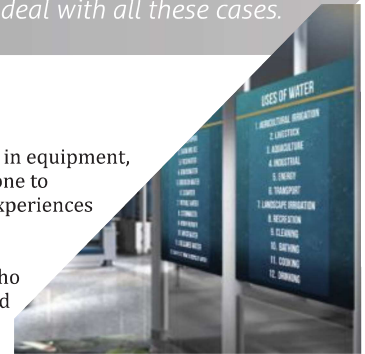
a simple dilemma //

How do we deal with thinkers who want to do a deep dive and people who are just in to cruise? How do we provide the right environment for kids, and for those who need a little help? New trends in Mad's technology deal with all these cases.

The magic of experiences

This has been a quiet revolution – the changes to our audience, the drastic changes in equipment, the Covid-related supply line issues, and the resulting work that Mad Systems have done to prepare us for a new approach to technical systems that allows us to create affordable experiences that create memories.

Experiences are what this is all about. I recently had a fascinating conversation with someone who asked me if I remembered what I got for Christmas last year. When I could not answer, they changed the question to ask if I remembered any experiences with family or friends that I'd enjoyed over the last year...



Just think about it. This immediately shows just how vital the magic that we create truly is. Like me, you probably won't remember that last Christmas present either, but you'll most certainly remember that really cool experience, where it was, what was special, and who you were with. People want the magic of experiences, as that is what creates long-term memories and bonds between people. Selfies rule!

Having designed and built the system to meet our requirements and finding just how flexible the result was, we wanted to find better methods to personalize those experiences without increasing the burden of additional work for the client. That's when we started our work on Recognition Technology based personalization options - RFID and other tech work but have severe limitations.

Recognition Technology

Another significant technology trend developed by Mad Systems as part of its patented recognition-based media delivery solution is Facial Recognition. This technology works with QuickSilver® uniquely flexible nature to provide the client and the customer with a personalized media experience. The mantra here is that "one size does not fit all."

Our Facial Recognition technology is designed to protect the user's privacy while helping operators reach wider audiences with their messaging. A museum visitor, for example, who has preregistered online for their visit may include in that process a photo of themselves and information about their language needs and indicate special interests and any disability. The picture is converted into an encrypted vector diagram - we do not need to keep the actual image. Our recognition systems do not need to be internet-connected, so between the way the face is encoded and the lack of the need for an internet connection, we can create systems that are guaranteed to give our clients and their visitors 100% privacy.

Another advantage of controlling the technology ourselves is the speed of response. One of the issues with third-party recognition systems is the lag between seeing a person and having their media running; existing systems may have lag times from 5-15 seconds or more which is unacceptable in visitor attraction markets. Our recognition technology has reduced lag time to an average of half a second, and that is the time from when the system's cameras "see" the visitor to the time when their personalized media or interactive is onscreen.

Conclusion

Over the past years, new technology trends have allowed for the development of solutions in direct response to the changes we have seen in the world around us. The benefit of these developments to our clients is that we can produce systems that can personalize media delivery and interactivity and meet the expectations of this new audience by delivering affordable, long-term supportable dynamic presentations and creating memorable experiences within reasonable budgets and minimal infrastructure costs. We have already opened a visitor center where the only printed, fixed graphics is the wallpaper; several more are in progress - and that is just a start for this new technology. The sky is the limit!



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