

Social Media Review

by KATE HALEY GOLDMAN

Each issue of *Exhibitionist* journal features a book review. While there are perfectly good books on this issue's topic of new media, there is also a nagging problem of such books feeling out of date before they even go to press. For this issue, the editors decided instead to provide a guide to some of the best resources for staying current on technology. This includes an introduction to the people and organizations shaping our conversations and approaches to integrating technology into exhibitions.

Every museum professional gathers information about the field differently, and that highly individual approach is also appropriate for technology-related content. Social media is identical to news media in providing descriptions, events and products, analysis and thought-provoking commentary, and sometimes pure fluff. Managing the information deluge can be challenging, and it is difficult to find and regularly read the pertinent information. My own area of primary expertise is in evaluation of informal learning environments such as museums and like-minded organizations, but like most individuals, my interests and inspirations vary widely. I'm interested in how technology can support or interfere with visitor experiences, in maker spaces, data visualization, new urbanism and the intersection of art and science. What follows is a brief overview of a few modes and content providers that work particularly well for me in learning about technology and keeping up to date with implications for museums.

Blogs and News Websites

I gain much technology knowledge, appreciation, and inspiration from blogs

and news articles in nearly-related fields such as urban redesign, and studies of the impact of new media. Using different lenses and news sources expands my thinking and gives it connections, nuance, and range.

Museums and Design

- Nina Simon's *Museum 2.0* has provided provocative and deep content on a regular basis for years about what it means to be a museum. <http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/>
- The *Center for the Future of Museums*, from the American Alliance of Museums, has a blog at <http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/> that addresses some of the main issues facing museums, such as changing community roles and accessibility.
- Ed Rodley writes about museums, design experiences, and technology at Thinking About Museums <http://exhibitdev.wordpress.com/author/erodley/>. His discussion about the flaws in thinking in the recent *New York Times* article "High Culture goes Hands-On" (Dobrzynski, 2013) was particularly rich.

Technology Inspiration

The straight-out technology sources post extensively, and trying to keep up with developments can be downright daunting. Nonetheless, both TechCrunch.com and Mashable.com cover every imaginable nuance of the technology scene and serve as a good tech news reference point.

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If you would like to comment on this article or others in this issue, please log on to the NAME listserv at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NAME-AAM/>.

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Specialized technology information

- At times, it's useful to go deep with technology that may prove useful to exhibit design. I find the hacks to the Kinect at <http://www.kinecthacks.com/> to provide inspiration for new interactions with exhibits.
- Likewise, the Internet of Things, which connects everyday objects such as houseplants to the internet is having explosive growth. I regularly read <http://postscapes.com/> to keep up on projects in that arena, knowing that this technology will make its way to visitor experiences.

Demographic Patterns

- Pew Internet and the American Life Project at <http://www.pewinternet.org/> and other news sources provide insight into the changing landscape of technology immersion and demographics, from reviews of indoor tracking and Google Glass, to the technological habits of teenagers struggling with content.
- The *Atlantic Cities* blog (<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/>) gives in-depth portrayals of the rapid and vast changes our urban environments are undergoing, and I believe it to be key reading for those thinking about museums' role within a community.

Design Process:

- Dana Mitroff Silver covers *Design Thinking* for museums on her blog <http://designthinkingformuseums.net/>, and while most of her writing is directly related to designing museum software products, the blog is relevant and thought-provoking for those outside software development.

Also on Design Thinking, IDEO leader Tim Brown blogs on design thinking at <http://designthinking.ideo.com/>.

RSS/Feed-readers

With the recent demise of Google Reader, many long-term subscribers are searching for other products that provide a similar service. Feed-readers have several benefits: 1) They allow monitoring of more content than could be reviewed on a site-by-site basis; 2) they track blogs that post infrequently, which one might otherwise not check back on; 3) they allow ease of checking on one's phone or other device. I find readers incredibly useful for keeping tabs on those individuals I admire greatly who are infrequent bloggers. In addition to my use of the feed-reader Feedly, I also find Zite (<http://www.zite.com/>) to be enormously helpful in aggregating meaningful content that I otherwise might miss.

You-Tube/Vimeo:

Much of what's innovative in tech is not written about, but shown. I monitor the YouTube submissions of the Augmented Reality conference ISMAR, the data visualization conference VISWEEK at <http://ieevis.org/>, and the SIGGRAPH, the main international conference on computer graphics and interactive techniques. The Twin-Cities based Eyeo conference has many of its presentations available on Vimeo at: <http://vimeo.com/eyeofestiva>. While there are thousands of

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entries on YouTube, often a few intrepid individuals have pulled together a top 25 list, and I play through the videos of the newest developments while I'm filing paperwork or in other relative downtime. I appreciate the ability to string together playlists, so that I can create a series of examples (such as on multitouch tables) that I can then review and discuss with colleagues.

Twitter

For those who use it, Twitter can be a professional lifeline, not only identifying what colleagues are reading and seeing, but assisting in identifying the individuals and dynamics of fields in close relation to yours. For certain conferences, such as Museums and the Web and the Museum Computer Network, fully half the conference discussions are held on Twitter. The pace and amount of signal-to-noise ratio can frustrate some new followers. One strategy to deal with this is to follow a select few informative tweeters. Dan Spock (@DanSpock) tweets links to major stories in the museum field, while @TylerGreenDC covers national art museum issues for the journal *Modern Art Notes*. Another strategy is to follow individual hashtags, tags that flag specific content. The tag #mtogo for instance, signals content related to mobile phone in museums. Dana Allen Greil (@Danamuses) keeps a glossary of museum-related hashtags on her site: <http://danamus.es/2013/05/28/glossary-of-museum-related-hashtags/>.

List-serves

While email list-serves may seem dated in comparison to other technologies, some of the most relevant conversations still occur on listserves. The museum

technology community uses the MCN list-serve at <http://www.mcn.edu/mcn-l>, and the science-center list-serve at <http://www.astc.org/profdev/listserv.htm> posts discussions and problem-solving daily. Other sources include the NAME listserv at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NAME-AAM/>; the NAME Facebook page, Exhibit Files at www.exhibitfiles.org, and appropriate Linked-in groups.

Just Getting Your Feet Wet with Social Media?

Above I've described some sources that are most useful for my corner of the museum profession. Whatever your discipline—exhibition development, education, curatorial research—the sources I've named above such as YouTube, RSS Feeds, blogs and listserves—are only vehicles for content and information. To tailor these resources to your areas of interest and expertise I recommend setting aside some open-ended time to look at the resources discussed here, and to follow those leads to others. Reflect on where your best ideas have come from, and allow those sources to guide your surfing. Use a reader, or bookmarks, or some sort of automated system to track the most promising content providers.

Your Turn

What are some of your favorite ways to stay current on trends in exhibitions or technology? Please share with us by emailing the NAME listserv, tweeting @NAMEexhibitions, or posting a comment on NAME's Facebook page. Your comments can help all of us who are exploring this new world of social media resources for museums. ✨

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