DEVELOPING WEB-BASED EXHIBITS
There are a lot of different terms used to describe web-based exhibits. These are just a few examples and how they are often used to describe an online exhibit experience.

**Virtual Exhibit** An online tour of an existing exhibit, often with a fly-through of the gallery

**Online Exhibit** An exhibit that only exists online

**Exhibit Website** Not an exhibit, but a website that enhances an exhibit in a museum
VISITOR EXPERIENCE GOALS

As with a physical exhibit, it’s important to define the visitor experience goals for a web-based exhibit.

- What do you want online visitors to get out of the experience?
- Will it replace a physical exhibit or supplement it?
- How do you picture visitors using it?
- How can you add value to the experience in ways that might not be possible in a physical exhibit?
Whether your exhibit is in-person or online, it’s important to create a strong interpretive hierarchy with a clear big idea statement, key messages that you want visitors to take away, and critical questions to address.
Using Interpretive Tools in a Web-Based Gallery

Interpretive tools are the methods and techniques used to tell a story in an exhibition in a physical gallery.

How can we adapt these tools when the gallery is a website?
WHAT WON’T WORK?

(Let’s get the negativity out of the way.)

Visitors won’t be able to manipulate physical items, such as mechanical interactives and tactile models.

• Instead, determine which visitor experience goals these interpretive tools addressed and find a different way to meet those goals.
ALTERNATE IDEAS FOR PHYSICAL ITEMS

“Try at home” activities

- If it ties to a specific page, keep the “Try this at home” interactive on that page.

- If it’s more of an overall tie-in, consider having a “Try at Home Activities” section.

- Make sure “try at home” activities use common items that visitors could reasonably expect to have on hand.

- Make sure that the activity isn’t the only way to get key information—not everyone will do the activity.
ALTERNATE IDEAS FOR PHYSICAL ITEMS

Tactile Models

For tactile elements for blind and visually impaired visitors, remember to make your website accessible using verbal descriptions and alternate text.

- Accessibility is a best practice! Aim to make all exhibits (both physical and web-based) accessible.
Many of the tools used in physical exhibit can still be applied in a web-based exhibit.

• The following is a brief overview of how these tools can be used in similar and adapted ways.
WHAT’S THE SAME?

• It’s tempting to use a lot of text in an online environment—but keep it short!

• Text should be one of many tools.

• Text needs to be easy to read.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT?

• **Linking Concepts:** You can link concepts by including hyperlinks to other parts of the exhibit.

• **Order of Experience:** You can (to some extent) control the order in which visitors encounter text.

• **Additional Materials:** You can link to additional materials with a “want to know more?” link.

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*Don’t chase visitors away!*

Keep visitors on your site—have links open in a different window or lead to other parts of your site.

Provide previews so visitors know what to expect if they click.
DIGITAL INTERACTIVES

WHAT’S THE SAME?
• Visitors can actively engage with the content.
• Activities are not confined by real-time reactions.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT?
• No lines and no time limits! Visitors don’t have to wait their turn because they are using their own device.
• You can spread interactives out based on content, not access to outlets/places to put a monitor.
• Bandwidth: not everyone has the same access to the internet. Some people are going to be on great systems, others will have a bad connection on phone with a low battery.

The FBI Experience
DIGITAL INTERACTIVES

WHAT’S THE SAME?
• Graphics are an important part of the experience.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT?
• **Scale**: The graphics needs to work on a small screen instead of a gallery wall.
• **Depth**: Images can be layered, but the overall presentation will be flat.
• **Resolution**: Web graphics can have a lower resolution and still look good.
• **Animations**: Graphics can have animations to show processes, changes over time, etc.
• **Interactivity**: Static graphics can become “clickable.”
WHAT’S THE SAME?

- Most media content that would be used in a gallery can also be used in a web-based exhibit.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT?

- **Preferred Placement:** Media can be included throughout the web-based exhibit purely based on where it best suits the story; power sources and monitor availability are not requirements.

- **Scale:** Everything must be sized for a smaller screen; larger formats and multi-screen installations will need to be reworked into a different experience.

- **Slower Internet Speeds:** Media needs to run (without freezing or crashing) on a slow internet speed.
WHAT’S THE SAME?
• The storytelling approach stays the same.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT?
• **Objects**: Objects will have to be replaced with scans or images.

• **Media**: Media can be interspersed in different ways throughout the exhibit, not just where there’s a power source.

*Tracing American Journeys, NMAH*
OBJECT-CENTRIC APPROACH

WHAT’S THE SAME?
- It is still the object from your collection (or a loan, etc.).
- You can still use the object as a way of telling the exhibit’s story.
- You can still show the object with a graphic showing a detail.

WHAT’S DIFFERENT?
- **Conservation:** Conservation is less of a factor because the object only needs to be handled for photography/scanning.
- **Physicality:** Visitors can’t get up close with the real object.

*Baby Robin, Paul Wayland Bartlett, SAAM, Gift of Mrs. Armistead Peter III*
WORK WITH WHAT IS VISIBLE IN THE IMAGES OF OBJECTS.

- Visitors cannot move around the object, so make sure you only reference things that are visible from that perspective.

- If you want to talk about something not visible, find an image that helps you make your point.

- Use annotations to point out specific details, such as brush strokes on a painting or interesting background details.

Consider making a game for visitors to find the details and click on them to reveal the annotation.

Roses, Abbott Handerson Thayer, SAAM, Gift of John Gellatly
3D SCANS

Visitors can experience objects in new ways that might not be possible in a physical exhibit.

• Visitors can manipulate the image.

• You have greater flexibility in what you can show.
**POTENTIAL WAYS TO SHOW SCANNED OBJECTS**

**MANIPULATING THE OBJECT**
- **Picking Up Objects:** Visitors can potentially "pick up" and rotate a 3D scan. This could also be done in a preloaded animation.

- **Zooming In/Zooming Out:** Visitors can zoom in to see details or zoom out to view the entirety of a large object, such as a building or an airplane.

**MULTIPLE VIEWS**
- **Compare and Contrast:** Objects can be displayed side by side for visitors to examine in ways that might not be possible in gallery due to size or conservation limitations.

- **Show Multiple Pieces:** Multiple parts of the same object can be displayed at the same time (e.g., the top and bottom of the object)

- **Cross-Sections:** Depending on the type of scan, you may be able to show cross-sections or internal aspects of the object.
Visitors can experience objects in new ways that might not be possible in a physical exhibit.

- Before developing the content for your web-based exhibit, work with a web designer to **define the best user experience (UX) and user interface (UI)**.

- **Consider** how users will interact with the exhibit and how the exhibit will be structured.

- **Develop** the content and design in tandem, as you would with a physical exhibit.