DEVELOPING WEB-BASED EXHIBITS

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EXHIBITS

WHAT ARE 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

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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?

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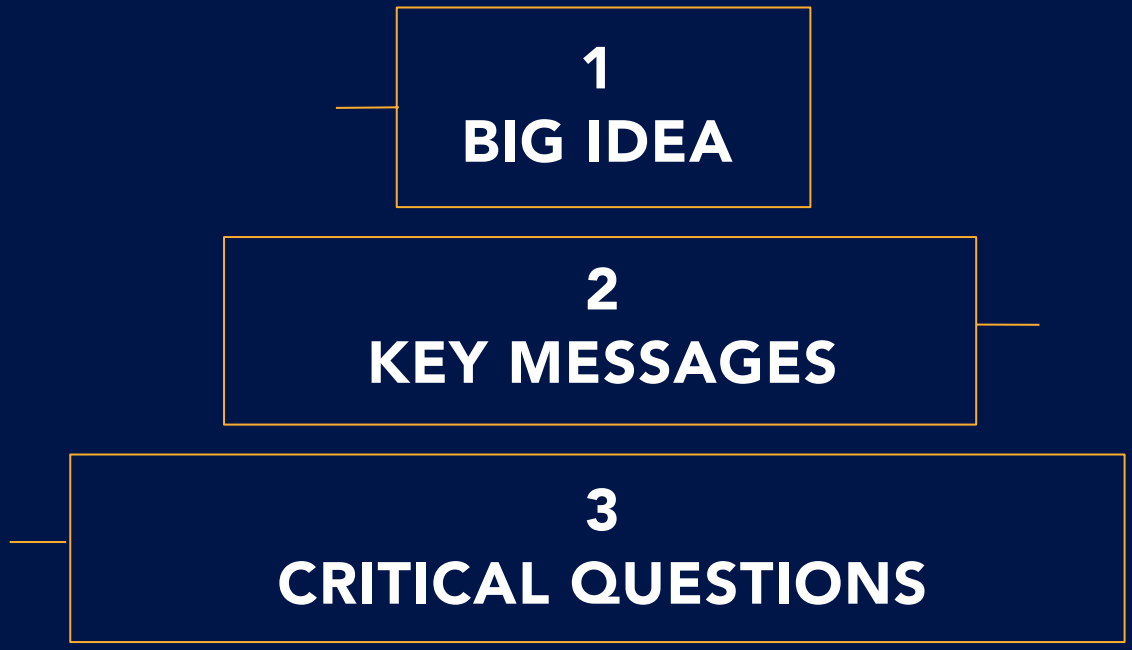
INTERPRETIVE HIERARCHY

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.



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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?

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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.

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ALTERNATE IDEAS FOR PHYSICAL ITEMS

Mechanical Interactives

“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.

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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.

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WHAT WILL WORK?

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.

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TEXT

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.

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

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.

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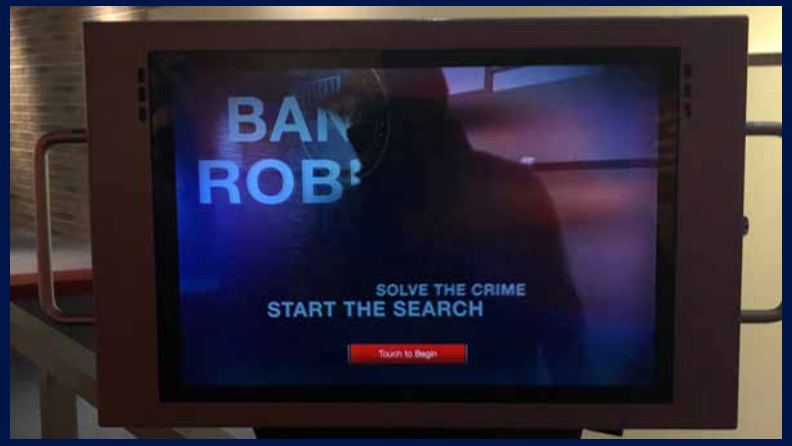
DIGITAL INTERACTIVES

WHAT'S THE SAME?

- Visitors can actively engage with the content.
- Activities are not confined by real-time reactions.



The FBI Experience

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.

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DIGITAL INTERACTIVES

WHAT'S THE SAME?

- Graphics are an important part of the experience.

Magnificent Obsessions, Smithsonian Libraries

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."

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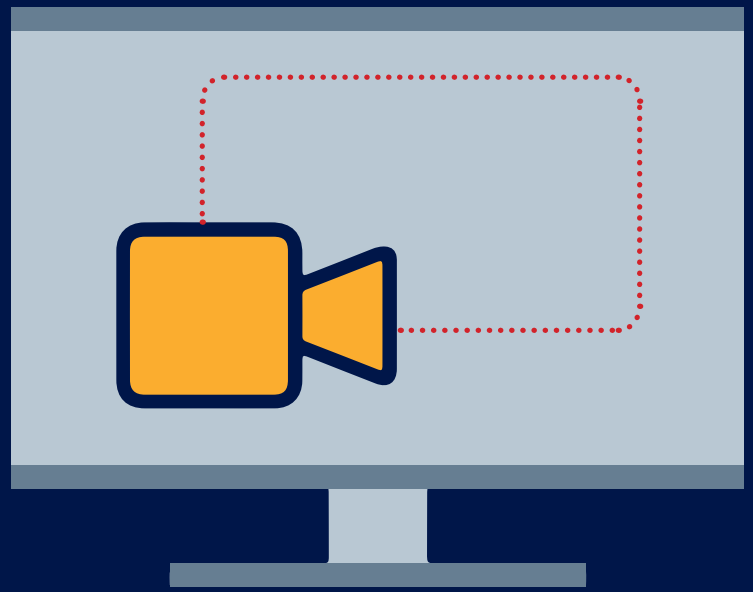
MEDIA

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.

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MEDIA

WHAT'S THE SAME?

- The storytelling approach stays the same.

Tracing American Journeys, NMAH

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.

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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.

Baby Robin, Paul Wayland Bartlett, SAAM, Gift of Mrs. Armistead Peter III

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.

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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

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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.

3D Digital Sculpture of a Giant Anemone, Smithsonian Exhibits

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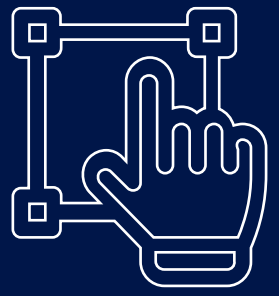
POTENTIAL WAYS TO SHOW SCANNED OBJECTS

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.

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GETTING STARTED

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.

Image: Freepik.com

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