

VALUE ADDED: Making and Presenting Content for the Web

11 July 2012, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art

Event Summary

Axis, at the request of the North East Contemporary Visual Arts Network developed an online media event designed for staff working in visual arts organisations, galleries and artist-led spaces – this event was open to anybody who was interested in developing web content that can better support their business aims and artistic programme.

This workshop was focused on creating and presenting web content that users will actually want to read and view. The aim was to give attendees the knowledge and skills to make users **STAY** on their websites and return again, giving existing audience-members a deeper insight into what they do and encouraging others to take an interest for the first time.

The workshop set out to encourage a user-centred approach to making and presenting content for the web, with a range of practical activities, presentations and tips designed to help sharpen attendees existing skills.

How do you access online content?

At the beginning of the workshop attendees were asked to consider the ways in which they themselves access web content, to get a better understanding of the ways in which people visiting their own websites may have got there and how they choose which websites to access.

When asked how they access the web all of the participants said that they used a laptop or PC, and most also access the internet on a smartphone, with just under half also using a tablet device. This would seem to suggest that, whilst website content is very important to people visiting the site, it is vital that the websites are responsively designed, meaning that they can be adapted for any device and still be user-friendly. It is also important that information is adapted for each platform as we discovered that among participants over 15 different platforms, from Facebook and Twitter to internet browsers were being used, each of which requires a slightly amended style of content. When asked where they were when they accessed the web most participants seemed to access online content whenever they could, all accessing the web at work and home and most using smartphones or tablets whilst on the move through wi-fi connections, one participant even admitted to checking online content whilst in meetings. In these days where people can access the internet wherever they are it is becoming even more important to gear the content being presented on the web towards casual browsers, streamlining information and cutting it into bitesize chunks so that they can access information quickly on the move.

Participants were also asked what kind of content they accessed and how they found this content on the web. Most participants used the web both for work and leisure, and mostly for things which were personal interests, most significantly art but also music, food, gardening etc, showing that people are accessing a wide range of

information. Many noted that they looked for practical information, such as event listings, travel information and up to date news. All of the participants said that they found new content and particularly new websites through search engines such as Google, and most also used social media to find suggestions and links to useful sites which came recommended from known sources. Only a few people followed links in membership newsletters or e-mails, preferring to come across content on their own. This would seem to suggest that peer and visitor review or recommendation is the best way to get your online information seen by new visitors.

Who is your audience?

After considering the way in which they themselves access online content, participants were asked to draw up a profile of their existing typical visitor and then one for a visitor who they currently don't attract a lot but would like to visit their venue and website in the future. Participants then drew up a journey for how each of these users would typically access their online content.

Most participants noted that they got a lot of their existing visitors to come to the gallery through their own advertising; newsletters, Facebook, Twitter etc. showing that keeping these channels up to date and engaging can give a real boost to visitor figures both for your website and your venue. They also saw existing visitors interaction with these channels (re-tweeting, attending a Facebook event etc) as a key method of attracting new visitors from their desired customer bases. Some venues also felt that they would like to attract tourists and felt the best way to do this was through links to tourism websites and a presence on Google maps.

Measuring and tracking success

Once the attendees had identified who their audience was, what information would attract them to their website and which platforms were most useful to engage with their desired audience Axis looked at ways in which they could gather information about the people visiting their site and use this to their advantage.

Currently attendees are using some analytics systems, mostly Google Analytics for their own websites, whilst monitoring Facebook and Twitter simply through checking the amounts of "likes" for each post and looking at the kinds of people that have "liked" their pages. A few also used campaign monitors if they produced a mailout, to see how many of the recipients were opening their e-mails and newsletters and one participant used stat counter to monitor site visits.

Axis then posed the question of what exactly was the point of collecting the data, what data needed to be collected and how you could use that data to inform your use and development of your online content. A 4 step process was suggested to help organizations make sense of using their online statistics;

- Identify an aspect of the website that you would like to concentrate on (more visits, longer average time spent on site etc)
- Measure current trends through your analytics system and set yourself achievable goals for how much you would like to improve this in a set amount of time.

- Make any changes you feel will help you in achieving this goal and begin to monitor the way this statistic changes over your given period.
- Use any significant findings to help you assess whether these changes are useful or if there is more work to be done.

These simple steps may seem obvious but people are often neglecting to practically apply the findings of their online stats, and they are the most effective way of review the success of your online content, and highlight areas for improvement. The data generated can also be used to provide feedback to stakeholders, gauge the correct placement of online content and understand how visitors are accessing vital information on the site.

There were also some suggestions of analytics tools which provide a comprehensive service and are recommended by Axis, such as;

- Google Analytics (which currently holds over 70% of the market share)
- Web Trends
- Omniture
- Coremetrics
- Clicky
- Stat Counter

Social Media sites with inbuilt stats functionality include;

- Facebook- Facebook Insights
- Twitter- Twitter Counter
- Youtube- Youtube Insights
- LinkedIn- Profile Stats
- Flickr- Flickr Stats

There are also many external analytics tools available for each of these sites. Taking a look at Twitter alone there are;

- Tweet Stats- Tweets per hour/month, and reply stats
- Twitter Grader- Compares and ranks you against other users
- Tweet Volume- Frequency of selected keywords/phrases
- TwInfluence- Influence and reach of tweets
- Trendistic- Trends, and sources of trending topics
- Twitter Counter- Overview and graph of Twitter stats

Currently there is a lot of progress happening in the field of analytics, and Axis highlighted some key areas which are being developed at the moment;

- Site speed metrics
- Increasingly sophisticated Social media metrics
- Multi-channel funnels
- Improved dashboards and reporting

- Flow analysis

Writing for the web

The bad news about the way people now access the internet anywhere, at anytime is...

- People grab information and then go
- People scan and skim
- Visitors leave a web page within 10-20 seconds

However by making some changes to the way in which you write and present content on the web, you can influence the way people access information on your site and their behavior while they are online. A simple guide to producing text for online content can be following Orwell's Six Rules:

- Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Break any of these rules sooner than saying anything outright barbarous - Politics and the English Language, 1946.

Here are some basic rules Axis have provided that will help you when producing online content;

- Keep text short
- Write short sentences
- Break up your paragraphs
- Use meaningful headings and sub-headings
- Leave plenty of space
- Demonstrate your credibility - make sure grammar, punctuation and spelling are correct
- Use a clear, easy-to-read font
- Avoid upper case Include links (to encourage browsing)

Attendees were given the task of editing some exhibitions listing for the web, with guidelines that it should be less than 150 words long and only contain key information, with the most important information coming within the first two paragraphs. Through this exercise participants saw just how much information was going into their written work that could be left out of online content, without limiting the important information for the reader.

Rich media content

Emma Huston played some videos for the attendees and asked them to discuss their thoughts on them, what could be improved and what lessons they could take away. Participants learnt;

- You have to use the right person- just because someone is the artist discussed of an expert, doesn't mean they come across well on film.
- Location is important- reflect the tone and topic of the content in the setting for the video.
- Background music can set the scene- but be careful to use music that is in keeping and subtle so it doesn't detract from the content.
- Keep it simple- too many different shots or angles can make the video seem messy and chaotic...
- ...but at the same time don't just have someone talking to camera- include shots of the subject matter (be that and artist or venue) to add context.
- Try to keep it under 3 minutes- no matter how good a video is not many viewers will watch a video over this length, keep it short and to the point.

Emerging trends

Things to remember:

- Make your content like water
- Consider the context
- Think about 'BIG' data
- Think responsive
- Let go