How To Introduce Digital Transformation To A Museum

Carolyn ROYSTON, 1965, United States, Simon Delafond, Imperial War Museums, UK

Abstract

The session will consider the changing role of digital media teams in the museum sector. It will explain the digital transformation strategy of the Imperial War Museums' Digital Media department and use five examples where we've introduced transformative digital processes or techniques to different areas of the museum. We'll discuss how this approach can be applied and adapted to other organisations, regardless of size or type of institution.

Each example will consider:

the objectives of the individual project
how a digital process was used
the success of using the digital process in the project
the lessons that can be applied to organisations of different sizes

- Agile project management
  We'll talk about how we used agile project management to build consensus across multiple Learning teams at different sites, and how that enabled the successful delivery of a project in a department that had a long history of failed projects.

- Product management
  We'll explain how introducing a product management function has changed the relationship between Digital Media and the museum's Commercial division. We'll talk about the role of a product manager and how we can use conventions from companies like Google and eBay in a museum context.

- Web Commissioning Group
  We'll show how the establishment of a Web Commissioning Group has changed the museum's approach to web content and its production. We'll talk about the way we've run the meetings and how a common vocabulary for audiences, content formats and metrics has enabled the museum to manage and prioritise the production of content.

- Collections Access
  We'll talk about how we've re-imagined the museum's Collections Access function as a digital-first product that includes social media, comments on the website and bespoke web content as well as the traditional telephone, email and in-person service.

- Computer Club
  We've introduced a Computer Club and run monthly sessio

BENEFITS:

- Investing money is the process of committing resources in a strategic way to accomplish a specific objective.

- Compound interest is the eighth wonder of the world. He who understands it, earns it. He who doesn't, pays it.

- When digital transformation is done right, it's like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, but when done wrong, all you have is a really fast caterpillar.

- The Last ten years of IT have been about changing the way people work. The next ten years of IT will be about transforming your business.

Keywords

In the past year, the Digital Media department at the Imperial War Museums (IWM) has updated its Digital Strategy, first published in 2010, and introduced a new Digital Transformation Strategy. This updated strategy is driven by the growing digital demands of our audiences, external financial pressures requiring more efficient and effective delivery of services, and the speed with which digital technologies are permeating every area of museum activity. It aims to provide a framework that will drive the museum forward by applying a range of transformative digital processes and techniques to key areas of activity across the museum.

In this paper, we detail some examples of digital transformation at IWM that include: the introduction of product management; applying an agile project management methodology to project delivery; creating a new approach to digital content authoring, development and delivery; re-designing and re-imagining our collections access enquiry service as a digital-first product; and introducing a Computer Club to develop digital skills for staff.

With each example, we consider:

- The objectives of the individual project
- How a digital process was used
- The success of using the digital process in the project
- The lessons that can be applied to organisations of different sizes.

Examples of Digital Transformation

Product management

We have recently created three new Digital Product Manager positions in the Digital Media department. Previously these roles would have been Project Managers or perhaps Digital Producers. Although this change of job title may seem like a small semantic difference, the adoption of this precise terminology has been vital to digital transformation in the museum.

A product manager, however, has sole responsibility for the end product. It is her job to synthesise the various requirements of the project's stakeholders into a coherent solution. Rather than accepting those requirements at face-value, she interrogates them until she understands the inspiration behind them. If a stakeholder asks for an interactive map, a project manager would schedule time with a designer and a developer. A product manager would ask why an interactive map is required, what an end-user is trying to achieve, and suggest other ways location data could be presented.

A product manager is the voice of the end-user, always considering how someone will actually use the end product. This often puts her in opposition to business requirements so she needs to be able to articulate the reasons behind every decision and show examples of similar successful functionality. She therefore needs to be an expert in the medium and use that expertise to suggest solutions that balance the needs of the user and the business. In our department, the product managers also have the same responsibility for delivery as a project manager.

Product management is an attitude rather than necessarily a role so although we've hired people to be product managers, anyone who is responsible for digital delivery can adopt this approach.

The introduction of product management has also been vital to digital transformation because the product manager role is commonplace in the commercial digital industry. Companies like Google and eBay employ hundreds of product managers (http://jobs.ebaycareers.com/careers/product-management-jobs) of varying levels of seniority. Aligning roles in our department to roles outside the museum sector is useful because it allows us to draw on the wealth of resources (http://svpg.com/articles) that support these roles, but more importantly it has also allowed us to successfully recruit from outside the museum sector. This has brought very valuable and highly relevant experience to our department which could only have come from the commercial sector.

Web Commissioning Group

A meeting is held every six weeks that commissions and monitors the success of new Web content. So far this content has been history articles, but the remit extends to additional content to support exhibitions or marketing campaigns (e.g. an audio slideshow about an exhibition). The meeting is chaired by the Editorial and Product Lead and attended by a senior representative from Public Programmes, Research & Interpretation, Commercial, Collections, Marketing and each of the museum's branches.

As part of the work of the Web Commissioning Group, we have developed digital audience types which we use when commissioning content. The audience types are based on audiences identified by the marketing teams but have been adapted for the digital medium. Alongside the descriptions we have also considered how we will measure the success of content we create for these audiences.

A sample of some of the audience descriptions are:

- **Historyphobes**: are not generally interested in history and have little to no knowledge of historical events; however, they can be engaged by material that isn't obviously 'historical'. Content developed for this audience should be built around hobbies and/or interests (eg. knitting), and should make use of images or film footage that hooks the audience into finding out more.

- **Emoters**: find engagement at an emotional level – emotion, amazement or wonder. Unlike Historyphobes, they have an interest in history. Content developed for this audience should build on the Self-Developers' basic understanding of a topic through the use of personal stories and/or material that elicits an emotional response.

- **Self-Developers**: want a basic understanding of a topic. Content developed for this audience should take a more traditional historical approach, providing visitors with dates, facts and a narrative about the topic.

- **History Enthusiasts**: are passionate about history and are interested in more detailed narratives than Self-Developers and Empathisers. They are not academics, though. Content developed for this audience should be more in-depth than Self-Developer content, but not too detailed to be classified as 'niche'.

- **Critics**: tend to be researchers, academics or amateur historians. Content developed for this audience should be in-depth and detailed in its presentation. Critics are a very vocal group and are looking for debate on historical topics.

The adoption of these groups at a senior level, and their precise focus on audiences, has transformed the museum's ability to publish highly relevant content and to deliver on the priorities for the museum. This has been particularly important this year as the museum is focussed on the centenary of WW1.

Collections Access

The Collections Access team currently answers and assists with enquiries from the public online, via email, by post and over the phone and in an onsite library and the Research Rooms.
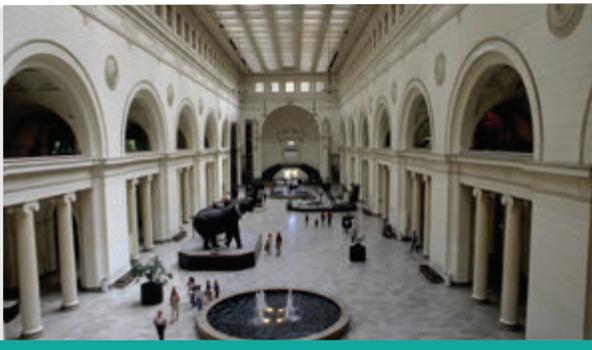
The Collections Access team is stretched and there is currently a significant backlog of remote enquiries. It is also anticipated that 2014 will see an increase of enquiries with the centenary of WW1, putting even more pressure on the department.

It is believed that development of the digital aspects of the Collections Access offer will support the team and enable a more efficient process of dealing with public enquiries, both remotely and on-site to ensure the team's expertise is being put to the most effective use.

The backlog of remote enquiries varies according to the time of year and staff attendance but is currently at five to six weeks.

These are long-standing observations about the service but using our department's expertise has transformed this project into something achievable with precise aims and KPIs (key performance indicators). We have used the agile and product management techniques above to analyse the project and define a strategy to significantly reduce the enquiry backlog using digital solutions.

Although this project is still in the very early stages of planning, it is clear from our initial conversations with the Collections Access team that this project will transform their ways of working and offer new opportunities for new skills and product development.

Agile project management

Essential to the successful introduction of product management has been agile project management and we now use it for every project we manage. Moving ownership of the end product to our department has not always been an easy argument to make, but agile project management has given us the tools to change the relationship between Digital Media and teams around the museum. It has allowed us to explain how we will manage the process, where the decision-points are, and where we need the input of the stakeholders. Much has been written already about using agile project management techniques in the museum sector (Ellis et al, 2008) but it is worth reiterating its value here.

We've used user stories and card sorting (Silvers & Hendee, 2012) to move stakeholders away from long requirements documents and to start thinking about audiences and motivations. We've introduced iterative development (Gorgels, 2013) and demonstrated how quick, simple solutions can often be more effective than long, complex ones. We've worked in 'sprints' where the whole team agrees the priorities, and then reviews progress two weeks later.

Where possible, we've also used the end of a sprint to release a new version of the end-product. The discipline attached to knowing that real people will be using something helps focus the group on what is really important. It also has the effect of reducing the last-minute panic often associated with a release, because everyone knows that there will be another release soon. Releasing early and often also allows us to incorporate analytics into the development process so we can very quickly see if a new feature is working, and change it accordingly.

These techniques have allowed the product managers to transition teams from the waterfall process that were often used for digital projects. It has forced teams to consider the motivations behind problems and flush out conflicting opinions before any work is started. Crucially, it has also resulted in more successful projects with better results.

These techniques are very easy to use and don't require any specialist software so can be adopted by teams of any size.

Web Groups and Processes

We have recently instituted three different Web groups and processes that more effectively manage content for the website. Before these groups existed, Web content was often created without any consideration for audiences, success criteria or reference to the museum's priorities. The groups and processes are:

Web Updates

A mailbox is monitored by our Web Producer and Assistant Web Producer for the following type of requests:

- Day-to-day amendments to existing Web pages or adding new branch pages (e.g. change to form, change in prices)
- New branch pages from an existing template (e.g. page about a new exhibition)
- Content approvals for pages created by another team

Web Content Meeting

We hold a monthly meeting to schedule promotion of existing content on carousels, social media and promotional spaces across the website. The meeting is chaired by the Web Producer and attended by representatives from Learning, Retail, Research & Interpretation and Marketing staff at each of the museum's branches. Importantly, no new content is commissioned at this group.

Computer Club

The requirement to raise the digital capability of staff is critical to the success of our Digital Transformation Strategy. The Digital Media department launched Computer Club last year with the aim of developing digital awareness and skills across the museum. The department runs informal monthly lunchtime sessions with topics that have included learning to use twitter, making trailers with iMovie on an iPad, playing games with non-conventional interactions and basic coding. The sessions are designed to be short, informal and fun, lasting an hour over lunchtime. They aim to reduce the fear that we sensed staff have about using digital technology so we ensure that the sessions don't feel like conventional 'training' but rather an opportunity to have a practical hands-on experience with different forms of technology – both hardware and software.

The sessions have proved enormously popular (on average fifty people sign up which is capacity for the sessions), and they are attended by a range of staff, from visitor service assistants to directors. We recognise people's attendance at the sessions by giving them specially designed Computer Club stickers. The stickers help to raise the awareness of Computer Club amongst staff, as well as being something fun to collect that show how many sessions you have attended.

We are delighted that Computer Club has proven to be so popular with staff and that we have managed to reach the number of people that we have across the organisation, at all levels. Through Computer Club, we have been able to demonstrate the value of providing opportunities for people to engage with different technologies in a non-traditional IT training environment. It has also provided clear evidence to senior management that there is a tremendous appetite amongst staff to learn about digital technology. In addition, it has enabled the Digital Media department to take a leading role in driving the digital transformation programme in the museum and highlights the importance of giving serious time and consideration to the ongoing digital skills development of staff in your institution.

Conclusion

This paper on digital transformation shows how the Digital Media department is applying transformative digital processes and techniques to key projects and areas of activity. It demonstrates how the projects form part of an overall strategic approach that is driving wider change across many areas of the museum. Whilst the projects discussed are specific to the IWM's needs and requirements, it is possible to take the approach detailed here and apply it to any organisation.

The key questions to ask are:

- In what areas of activity can digital solutions help to solve your organisational challenges?
- How do you prioritise the activities and badge them as digital transformation projects?
- What processes and techniques do you need to apply to ensure project delivery in a lean and agile way?
- How do you involve your stakeholders in the digital transformation process and facilitate new ways of working?
- What is the role of the Digital team in facilitating and supporting this process with stakeholders?
- What new digital skills development is required for staff at your institution? How will this programme of work be delivered?

Finding answers to those questions will help to inform you digital transformation strategy and enable you to create a roadmap to plan the next stage of your digital journey.

References

Ellis, D., et al., Agile Methods for Project Management, in J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds.). Museums and the Web 2008: Proceedings, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2008. Consulted February 10, 2014. http://www.archimuse.com/mw2008/papers/jenkins/jenkins.html

D. Mitroff Silvers and D. Hendee: Agile Games for Productive Teams. In Museums and the Web 2012, N. Proctor & R. Cherry (eds). Silver Spring, MD: Museums and the Web. Published March 14, 2012. Consulted January 30, 2014. http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2012/papers/agile_games_for_productive_teams_0.html

P. Gorgels, Rijksstudio: Make Your Own Masterpiece!. In Museums and the Web 2013, N. Proctor & R. Cherry (eds). Silver Spring, MD: Museums and the Web. Published January 28, 2013. Consulted January 30, 2014. http://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/rijksstudio-make-your-own-masterpiece/