

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

10 TIPS FOR SCIENCE CENTERS AND MUSEUMS

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, some science centers and museums had developed online and digital programs, but more often science museum's digital engagement efforts focused on incorporating technology into exhibits within museums walls. During the pandemic, the closure of public spaces prompted science museums to be innovative in their approach to reaching their audiences digitally. From online quizzes and podcasts to virtual field trips and livestreams, science museums found creative ways to share their knowledge and expertise from afar. As physical spaces have re-opened, digital engagement can and should continue to be a part of the strategy for science centers and museums.

Taking what we learned through our Digital Engagement Inquiry Project, the Association of Science and Technology Centers has compiled the top 10 tips for museums looking to continue and increase digital engagement:

1 Quality-over quantity-is key

Museum guests are looking for highly engaging and personalized experiences, which require precious time and resources. Limit yourself to using 2-3 digital engagement projects at a time so you can build focused and intentional digital experiences.

2 Don't undervalue your digital content

Don't be afraid to charge for accessing digital content under the right circumstances. To keep your digital audience growing, strike a balance between offering paid and free digital engagement opportunities.

3 Ensure your content is accessible

Everyone benefits from accessibility. Many of the tips for creating accessible digital content are simple and expand your content's reach. Designing for accessibility allows people to access your content in their preferred ways.

4 Create opportunities for staff to grow their skills and collaborate across teams

Successful digital programs require many different skill sets: online teaching, digital marketing, video editing, accessible design, and beyond. Provide your staff with professional development options that grow their skills in new domains. Tap into the expertise of your current staff to provide mentoring opportunities and increase collaboration across teams. Maintaining open communication among your teams will only benefit you, especially in your digital programs.

5 Get to know your digital audience

Because creating digital experiences increases your museum's geographical reach, your digital audience may be looking for something different than your onsite visitors. You should use both informal and formal audience research to get an understanding of what kinds of digital programs will resonate with your virtual guests.

6 Set goals and have a plan for how you will measure success from the beginning

Before you begin sharing your new digital programs, create an outline of what success looks like and how that will be measured. But don't overcomplicate it! Digital systems often already have built-in data collection and analytics tools, which you can rely on to help guide and promote your digital program creation.

7 Effective project management gives staff the flexibility to be innovative

Manage your digital programs like special projects. Having a clear definition of expectations, timelines, and goals will free your staff up for problem-solving and innovating on your digital programs.

8 Treat your digital offerings as an introduction to your museum

Consider your digital offerings to be just as much a part of your museum as the physical exhibits on display within its walls. To keep visitors and guests coming back, or attract them to your museum for the first time, make sure your virtual guests have a strong understanding of your museum's mission and what you have to offer.

9 Include local connections and organizations in your digital plans

Digital programs allow museums to engage with nearby schools and organizations beyond the usual once-a-year field trip to the museum. These kinds of local connections ensure your digital programs are being seen and can lead to further engagement in the future.

10 Connect with other museums and experts

Collaboration between museums and experts will lead to long term sustainability. Don't be afraid to ask your colleagues at other museums about their digital experiences and what has been successful for them. And vice versa, make sure you're sharing what's working for your museum and guests with your colleagues in the field.

The ASTC Digital Engagement Inquiry Project was generously supported by the Overdeck Family Foundation. The ASTC team launched the Digital Engagement Inquiry Project to learn about our members' experiences, challenges, and opportunities when it comes to digital engagement. These tips were developed from the virtual discussions, expert interviews, and literature review that were created as part of this project. You can learn more and access additional resources produced on our project webpage:

<https://www.astc.org/digital-engagement>