

Case study

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# Manchester Museum blogs

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## Background

*The first blog at Manchester Museum was LindowManchester in 2007. It tied in with the exhibition Lindow Man: A Bog Body Mystery and as the exhibition took a poly-vocal approach, presenting multiple perspectives onto the subject matter, it seemed like an appropriate starting point and entry into the blogosphere.*

This online discussion of a mysterious death from over 2000 years ago inadvertently started a new chapter for Manchester Museum. Today we have almost 20 blogs. Our most popular include *FrogblogManchester* with over 155,000 views and *EgyptManchester* with over 260,000.

It's fantastic to see such high levels of readership being achieved, with anecdotal feedback that elderly visitors who can no longer manage a physical visit to the museum are really enjoying the alternative connection that the blog provides.

Many years ago, while our collections were being gathered, information and the way it was shared in the world was very different to the way we experience it today. Thanks to the internet, information and the answers to most questions is now literally at our fingertips. So although our collection has changed little in recent years, the way we engage with it has certainly changed considerably. It's our responsibility to get that same (or newly emerging) collection information across in ways that suit our visitor.

Blogs allow us to broadcast but more importantly blogs allow our visitors to participate and get involved. The passionate niche audience may be small in relative terms but it can be extremely engaged. While, for example, there may only be a small number of enthusiasts of a particular species of lizard in Manchester, globally this extrapolates to a significant and highly engaged audience, and indeed community.

## Objectives

- Provide a means for our visitors to experience the behind-the-scenes work of which they would otherwise be unaware.
- Communicates our activities and events while keeping our collection at the heart of the discussion.
- Engages with subject specialist networks and provide means for direct contact with curators.
- Defines and facilitates space(s) for communication and community.

## Target audience

This varies across our blogs but in general there is a focus on the niche or subject specialist audience - approached in such a way as to interest and involve, rather than intimidate or exclude our existing audiences.

## Process

The blog can either be suggested by the blogger or the communications team may identify a purpose for a blog and approach members of staff.

- Discussion with prospective blogger(s) to establish the aim and scope of blog.
- Establish what level of training and support is required, how this will be provided and who by.
- Introductory training session based on specific needs of blog and blogger: practice sessions, familiarisation with basics of posting, value of connecting with other blogs, functionalities of platform; i.e. posting by email, managing contributors, statistics and so on. The importance of regular posting is also underlined at this stage.
- Draft a publishing schedule and regular follow ups to help make it work!

## Key points for effective practice

The blogger should feel free to dictate and direct their own content. However, there are occasions where we would ask our bloggers to support a particular initiative or message but for the vast majority of the time bloggers take full ownership.

This autonomy is not without an institutional responsibility. While speaking from a personal point of view our bloggers are primarily representing Manchester Museum and the University of Manchester and should ensure an appropriate tone is maintained at all times. It is important to remind bloggers, especially during initial stages that despite the informal approach to communication, blogging is publishing and should not to be taken too lightly.

As with other social media platforms the aim is to provide a connection on an individual level. The sense of our specialist expertise and knowledge is enhanced by this personal perspective.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Helping our curators to reconnect with what initially interested them in their subjects and to communicate this has made blogging feel like one of the more enjoyable responsibilities and has provided us with a wealth of emotive and engaging content.

<http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/community/blogs/>

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