

Connecting and engaging Shelley Bernstein, Chief of Technology – Brooklyn Museum

Introduction

Shelley Bernstein is Chief of Technology at the Brooklyn Museum where she works to further the museum's community-oriented mission through projects including free public wireless access, web-enabled comment books, projects for mobile devices and putting the Brooklyn Museum collection online. She is the initiator and community manager of the museum's initiatives on the social web, she co-created *1stfans: a socially networked museum membership* and organised *Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition*. In 2010, Shelley was named one of the *40 Under 40* in Crain's New York Business Rising Stars.

Brooklyn Museum

Brooklyn Museum is one of the largest institutions in the United States. It has an encyclopedic art collection and is located in Brooklyn – one of the five boroughs of New York City.

At the helm, Director Arnold Lehman has worked to adjust the museum's [mission](#) to be visitor-friendly and community oriented and it's under this new direction that the staff of the museum work to accomplish those goals.

One of the most visible changes comes with the new façade designed by Polshek & Partners, which creates a place where people can gather and play and has become a vital plaza in Brooklyn.

Other changes include installation of better wayfinding within the building, providing seating and creating labels and didactics that are easy to read.



In addition, the museum runs an after hours program called *Target First Saturday*, which is an incredibly successful programme of art and entertainment that is now eleven years old and was one of the first programmes to ever diversify programming within the museum setting.

Examples and experiences

When thinking about enhancing and making the visitor experience a more positive one the first thing that happened, five years ago, was to open up the photography policy to allow anyone to come in and shoot photos for non-commercial uses. Not only did this allow visitors to do what they wanted to do but also enabled the museum to see what their visitors see, watch them play, pose, show them what's popular and what they want to share

Find Brooklyn Museum Community photos here:

<http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/photos/index.php?p=1>

There's also been a video competition several years ago centered around *Target First Saturday*, where people are encouraged to come and record their own *Target First Saturday* video. This was the very first thing that resulted in user-generated content and at the time it was approached with caution. It has become a great way however to enable visitors and members of the museum's community to send messages that the museum can not.

For the most part, the museum finds that in allowing user-generated content, people who participate do so respectfully and follow the rules and guidelines as long as the museum is clear in what it asks for.

Transparency and fostering different viewpoints

The museum works to put both good and bad press back out into the world for discussion on various social platforms, as it's important to hear what its visitors have to say on issues like reviews, budget cuts and the museum's mission.

The museum works to maintain a presence on the social networks when visitors are using the platforms. Often that's not Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Audience feedback

It is important for the organization to seek feedback at every turn. Feedback at the museum is not simply out on the social networks. There are electronic comment books in all the galleries that feed directly to the exhibition pages on the website and, good or bad that visitor feedback will show up on the website. Feedback is reviewed by front-lines staff and changes are considered in order to make the visitor experience a better one.

Enthuse content with life

The Museum aims to enrich content with life, especially on the internet. Personal voice and easy staff identification are used on certain platforms (like the blog) in order to allow the content to be more human and accessible.

As an example, the museum signs its tweets on Twitter with user account identification, so visitors can see that tweets come via Jenny Bantz, via Deb Wythe, via Shelley Bernstein and when people click through they see who is tweeting.

The museum works to take people behind the scenes via the social networks and often uploads photos from shows being installed or sometimes live tweets certain events.

Foster Community Voice in the Building

During the show *Black List Project*, www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/black_list_project/ which featured twenty five portraits of famous African Americans education staff felt that it was a great show, a great opportunity for the museum and perfect for the audience but there was a problem in that it put those people on a pedestal – detracting from the usual community feel. They wanted to involve the community and while most of the time there won't be any technology in a gallery, they installed YouTube's quick capture feature, put it on a kiosk and let people record their own videos direct to a channel.

Find the responses here: <http://www.youtube.com/user/bkmuseumblacklist>

People coming in recorded their own takes on what was happening, and that was being directly projected on the exhibition pages and on the web. Suddenly the show became about the museum's community at large – a big part of their mission.

Reach out and go to where the audience is

It's not enough to have your own content on your website. Most people will never visit your website so upload your assets to sites like Flickr where people can find them and have discussions around them. Brooklyn Museum is now uploading all public domain and copyright assets in their collection to Wikimedia and the internet archive.

Bring social home

It's not enough to just be on Flickr or just be on Facebook or just be out in the social world. When people come into your building, just like *The Black List Project*, they need to feel like they have a chance to participate. In addition, the museum strives to ensure that the same participation is offered on its website through the use of profile creation that enables online visitors to comment, favorite and tag objects in the collection.