

Transcript: Julianne McGraw podcast

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SPEAKERS

Hannah Mason, Julianne McGraw, Jake Young

Jake Young 00:05

Thanks for coming along to listen to this Arts Marketing festival podcast. Scotland Digs is Scotland's annual campaign to promote the summer archaeological dig season to members of the public. But what happens when excavation open days, volunteering opportunities and site tours are put on hold. In this chat, Julianne McGraw communications manager in the Dig It! team at the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland talks with Hannah Mason about taking Scotland's digs digital and how they adapted their campaign strategy, including the web pages marketing, budget and social media activity to support archaeology groups across the country during lockdown. Here's Hannah and Julianne.

Hannah Mason 00:46

Hi, Julianne, can you explain who you are and what your organisation does, and what you do as a communications manager.

Julianne McGraw 00:54

So as you said, I'm the Communications Manager at Dig It!, which is a project set up to celebrate and promote Scottish archaeology, which is now coordinated by the Society of Antiquaries, Scotland, and we're primarily funded by Historic Environment Scotland. So I work with our events and communications officer Sally Pentecost to basically celebrate Scottish archaeology, talk about all the great things are happening across the country and pull it all together in one central place. And one of the ways we do that is the annual Scotland Digs campaign, and which was adapted to Scotland Digs Digital this year.

Hannah Mason 01:30

When it's not digital, what does Scotland Digs do what's does it encompass and how many people come along and join in?

Julianne McGraw 01:36

The first year we ran it was last year. So that was Scotland, Digs 2019, it was kind of a test year to see is the sector interested? Are they going to get involved, are members of the public gonna kind of get it? So that was kind of run with very little budget. But yeah, the idea is, as I said, to, to get all the great work that happens all across the country in one place, it happens all year long, archaeology never

stops in Scotland. But this was a way to get it as a kind of lightning rod for events and all the news and live updates. And to stress people that a) this happening and b) it's for you, we're everything we do links to Scotland's archaeology strategy. And one of the things to stress is that ideas generated by archaeology are embedded in our business our literature, culture, religion, and politics. So we're always trying to keep that in mind. And with everything we do, but kind of edit.

So this kind of base level, the campaign was using the hashtag #ScotlandDigs19 to gather the posts that were being put out by archaeologists or students or members of the public who are going along to digs. And collating them we use Juicer on our website, which is great, I think, yeah, you can get a free feed, if anyone's interested in kind of collating social media posts, and you can pay like a little bit more, I think, 90 pounds or something, and to take the branding off, but it's a really great tool. So kind of pulling them into one place and look at how dynamic this is, and doing things like listing all the top finds on our website. Yeah, that went down really well. There were organisations across the country involved. There were lots of, millions of, gosh, impressions. So we're hoping to go bigger in 2020 by sending people to digs to get videos and photography done and a bit more paid marketing this time. But yeah, obviously COVID stepped in.

Hannah Mason 03:33

Have you adapted the product in light of COVID and all the lockdowns and then the changes in working.

Julianne McGraw 03:39

So we were quite lucky in the timing. And that lockdown came about in March and the campaign follows the summer like start of the official start of summer in the end of summer. So we had a couple months to shift gears. Because it's not really about us. It's about what everyone else in the sector is doing. We had to keep an eye on what they were putting out how many of them would be furloughed, for example. And we noticed that, so obviously, all kind of community-led excavations, open days, volunteering opportunities and tours were put on hold. But several organisations reacted really quickly with doing pop quizzes, and online tours, Q and A's, stuff like that. So rather than kind of cancelling the campaign, or just doing kind of throwback, and we changed it to Scotland Digs Digital, to bring a sense of cohesion to all these activities, because it's just lots of little things happening here and there. And I think by pulling it together, you get this bigger picture of what's going on and how important it is. And this is to support these organisations across the country.

Lots of them are little volunteer-led groups that are so passionate, but they don't have a marketing budget or team to help them promote their work. And a lot of them just want to get the event out there. So we kind of step in and say well, can members of the public come along? How much does it cost? What's the accessibility like? So talking to them about stuff like that. So at the start, rather than sharing live social media posts from excavations, we asked anyone who was still working in lockdown if they could talk about what they're doing. So that would kind of highlight the before and after of a dig, which is obviously a huge part of it. archaeology is not just digging. So there are people looking at Flint, kind of what was happening, like how you would plan out before a dig before you got there.

We wanted to kind of demystify these aspects of archaeology so that when things did start up again, people felt more comfortable going along that they understood the process. I mean, we're always trying to do that, but it was kind of that year to really push that. And then we also kind of scrapped our editorial calendar for the website, and asked archaeologists to again, write about these behind the scenes, things. And we offer payment to everyone who writes an article for our website, as well. So we didn't want to be asking people to do us favours, especially at this time. Obviously, if people can write it as part of their day job, they'll usually pass. But I think that's really important. So if you visit the website, now we've got articles up on so development-led archaeology, for example, which was important for us to stress because I think a lot of people were quite confused, like there was archaeology still happening early in lockdown. But that goes along with construction, which was allowed to continue, obviously, safely. And one's explaining field walking, I don't know if you know much about field walking?

Hannah Mason 06:33

I know nothing about field walking.

Julianne McGraw 06:37

So when farmers go to the fields and turning up the soil, they can turn up pieces of stone and flint and pieces of stone tool that are 1000s and 1000s of years old dating back to the Mesolithic. And sometimes the only evidence we have of these people is these little tiny pieces of stone tools. There's a group in Aberdeenshire called Mesolithic Decide, for example, and they kind of line up along the field and walk it basically literal field walking. And they they'll kind of mark down what we found these artefacts and they can thought out like this would have been an important spot, but it's completely open to volunteers and anybody can go along. And I think people are quite surprised when they when they hear. And they're kind of this group is changing what we know about the Mesolithic in Scotland. It's, it's wonderful. And we've got articles on Zoo archaeology, which kind of debunks the whole dinosaurs? What did she say Dogs not Dinos? I think is the title of it,

Hannah Mason 07:41

I think it's really nice that you have all this sort of information and ways for people to access sort of things that they hear about, but don't really know what it is. So have you found that lots of members of the public are really engaging in all that content?

Julianne McGraw 07:58

Yeah, are. That's one of the most popular, it's usually the articles are one of the most popular bits of our website, they're quite new, we only started doing them last year, I think. But it's been a great way to get information like that out there. I think. We used to just really focus on events and the social media side of it. But there's so many people in the sector, who are archaeologists and volunteers, and they're just filled with knowledge. And sometimes they'll just stick something up on Twitter, it's like, That's amazing. Can you can you expand on that, please, was really important. So we're really, really lucky to have a good network, and I was gonna say we use Trello to coordinate that and shift things around. That's the free project management tool.

Hannah Mason 08:44

I was gonna ask how sort of the members of the public and the people that are engaging, are finding using all of these new tools and digital technology? Are you finding that they're quite adept to that?

Julianne McGraw 08:57

Yeah, our audience, we usually are aiming for a kind of younger audience. And there's a lot of other organisations in Scotland doing kind of great work with children and kind of older adults. So we're kind of hitting that that middle range and they're, they're quite comfortable with it anyway. And because we're a national project, we you know, we weren't really sticking up billboards on on sidewalks and in a bus ads anyway, we were quite digital to begin with. And we've not come out with any kind of crazy app or anything. It's kind of simple. The core of these articles is simple kind of 700 word articles, meant to be read by anyone if there's any crazy terminology, we explain it and basically just hashtag that you can follow and get in touch with these people. But yeah, you might only just hear about on a like on a press release comes out and it's on the BBC or something.

Hannah Mason 09:58

Who are the main partners that you've worked with and have you collaborated with lots of local organisations or organisations further afield?

Julianne McGraw 10:08

Lots and lots and lots of local organisations, and there's about 50 of them we contact at the start. So that's kind of our bread and butter, it's not really about Dig It! as a project, it's about championing the work of these, these groups. So we start off the project by contacting. So, like landscape partnerships, commercial units, and these volunteer led groups that we've talked about, know what's happening, we have a social media pack that we send out, that kind of explains the, the goals of project and how to make their social media content more accessible. And then we kind of work with them throughout the project. And at the start of the kind of when we launched it in June, we got in touch with people who maybe wouldn't be producing the kind of regular content throughout the campaign, but would help us amplify the message right at the start. So like museums, Galleries Scotland, and Edinburgh Old Heritage Trust, and kind of our friends in the sector. So we've not got a massive budget for a national campaign. So we make the most out of our contacts.

Hannah Mason 11:15

So I think having that sort of collaborative working, and networking is really, really important at the moment, especially since we're also sort of locked down and separated from each other. So I'm gonna ask you about your challenges, what are the biggest challenges you've had to overcome? And were there any things that didn't go quite right? And you know, you managed to overcome them? How did you do that?

Julianne McGraw 11:39

The website was one of them. We had plans, we didn't have any new web pages really in 2019. So our plan was to go big for 2020. And kind of had to scrap everything, and lockdown happened. And we wrote, we wrote everything it turned out for the better actually, because we adopted the pages so that they could be used to promote a dig season with and without digs. That's the biggest challenge, isn't it

really, at the core, it was promoting a dig season without digs. So we made sure we had a map of it was supposed to be a map of live digs that was turned into a map of live events in which area, we kept a list of news stories, and we used Juicer to gather the posts, and we had a list of events, again, that was just adapted to, to online. So we were able to move really quickly, because I guess we had the lead in time so that when it came time to make the announcement, we could, yeah, we could just present it as it is. And it means we can use.

So as the summer went on, some digs did start happening, just to complicate things. So but because we had so much we'd built the pages, and with so much flexibility, it was quite easy to integrate them. And next year, whether it's a normal dig season or a bit different, we should be able to kind of go ahead with pages that we've already got. And I should say that was Sally Pentecost was kind of the one leading on the web pages. So she did a great job. And we've already kind of touched on before but budgets always a bit of a bit of a challenge. All our social media posts were organic. And we as I said, we made the most of the connections we have in the sector. So I helped coordinate the Scottish Heritage Social Media Group.

So it means we've got really good network across the country. And everyone's like, so just so lovely and keen and, and eager to help. Usually, if you ask people, though, give them enough of a lead in time, they're quite happy to kind of have something like particularly for the launch, just one day, we're like, you've got something archaeological in your collection, just stick it online, they're quite happy. We try and maximise press coverage, that really helps the national side. So we spent a lot of time adapting our press releases for local and national coverage. And that works quite well for us. And one of the other things was, I can't think of a good way to say this, but reading the room, if that makes sense. Um, so for example, when the start paid for profit campaign came around in the summer, I don't know if you if you heard about that.

Hannah Mason 14:23

No, I didn't. Can you explain it a little bit.

Julianne McGraw 14:26

So it was trying to hold organisations like Facebook accountable for letting hate speech go on. And on the websites that it was. I think Facebook was probably the worst, the worst offender. And so keeping an eye on that it was just not the time to be using our budget to create Facebook ads. We didn't want to give our budget to these big organisations when kind of people were losing their jobs. It just felt a bit tone deaf. So for example, instead of paying for social media ads and kind of print ads as well, we decided to pay three Scottish-based artists to illustrate three common discoveries, the range, or range of things of digs that had gone on in the summer, they took that from as inspiration and created three scenes, which you can see on the website. They're really good, they're really talented. So we paid them for their work. And it meant that these volunteer-led groups can use their artwork afterwards to promote their events or anything they like, really. So that was important to us.

And I'm sure everybody's come across these issues as well, kind of just being sensitive with what you're writing. Yeah, kind of maybe tone down some of the messaging. But what a great summer for archeology. You know, we don't want to be shouting out about that. Or saying things like from the

comfort of your own home, just little things like that, like not everybody's got a comfortable home right now that they're, that they're into little tweaks like that, and putting out press releases when they're making big lockdown announcements as well. So just making sure that I think it's important to make sure you and your team are informed. So there's groups like the Museums Social Media Managers if you kind of want to know what's going on, on this good e-newsletters, like the Digital Things, one, there's Tourism Alliance was really helpful for keeping track of timings because I don't know if it's the same with you, but the briefings would almost change daily. So it was like trying to if you had to get an announcement out that day, it was like, do I have to get it out this morning, or wait until the buttons died down? And then there was, I think, like most projects, challenges we didn't overcome. So we we didn't hit all our targets. I don't know if you found this, but setting targets is a bit weird this summer.

Hannah Mason 17:07

Yeah, definitely.

Julianne McGraw 17:10

So because everybody was online at the start of lockdown, and then it dipped after. And because we switched what we were going to do with our budget. And that changed things as well. But I'm happy with the, with the approach we took there. And we also make sure that we built a lot of time after the campaign to analyse kind of what worked and what didn't be really, really honest. So for example, and not as many commercial units, which are the kind of archaeologists that get called in when it's a building site, for example. And they have to have to keep an eye on it. So they were they were digging, passiontide digging, it's more than digging, they were working on kind of through pretty much the summer. And but they didn't get involved as much as we'd like. So we're going to try a more personal approach next year and get a longer lead and time to build that relationship with them. And we also had a fundraising page that just flopped. We were trying to direct people to any archaeology group who was fundraising, but not that many took us up on it. And it was a bit of an experiment. It's not really in. That one doesn't align maybe so much with our vision, mission and values. And it's not where we tie into Scotland archaeology strategy. So I can, looking back, I can see why that happened. But we kind of felt like we wanted to help if people needed it, but members of the public weren't biting and yeah, archaeology groups, I think they weren't super interested. But so we probably wouldn't do that again next year, especially if there's no dig season. But we didn't lose anything by running it. And we'll get feedback from the groups hopefully and see, see what they thought.

Hannah Mason 18:51

Yeah I think it's important because there's always something to learn, isn't there? Even if you do try something, it doesn't work out. It's still worth giving it a go. Just to see, you know, just to see if something new is gonna work out. And and yeah, I think that's lovely. That's brilliant. So you were talking about reading the room. And some of the tips that came out there were really good. Are there any other tips that you give people on, you know, how to sort of be able to pivot their communications in this sort of evolving and ongoing situation?

Julianne McGraw 19:28

I think keeping flexibility in mind from the start, which is, as I said, we were lucky in that we had a couple months till the start summer, I think maybe this would have looked really different I think if the

summer dig season started in April or something. But we were able to build the web pages so that they looked good with both online events and kind of physical things that people could go on to and we pick the hashtag that would work -# ScotlandDigDigital works. Even if digs are happening, because you're posting digitally, it kind of it sounds simple, but it's been really helpful. And keeping the longevity in mind with all the pages and the resources that come out, obviously, will not be in this pandemic forever. And we'd like to not have to scrap the pages.

So, as I said, we can use the same ones again next year, regardless of what the COVID situations like. And that's a budget consideration as well. We can't be rebuilding new web pages every year. So that was quite important for us. And the thing, the other thing that's important is keep going back to the why, of what you're doing, and your purpose and what you're building. I think it's easy to just say, Oh, God, we have to go digital now. So just jump into something, a campaign or, or just something new. But through every step of the process, we made sure we were looking at Scotland's archaeology strategy, and our vision, mission and values, make sure making sure every step of it kind of tied that way, which I kind of talked about before how the fundraising thing kind of flopped. And yeah, that was maybe me taking my eye off all of that. And the kind of last thing I would say is just be kind to yourself and your team. eek. But I think it's just good to remind yourself that it's a strange time. And I think everyone's doing the best they can and not be too hard on themselves, if they don't hit their targets or are coming out with like, the most innovative digital thing that's ever been invented in the heritage sector. It's okay to kind of just get by at the moment.

Hannah Mason 21:52

I think that's a brilliant tip. And I think, yeah, there are think pieces out there. I don't think you can ever remind people too often to be kind to yourself, because I mean, it sounds like you've been like really, really busy over this, you know, over this year, and over this summer. Would you say that, that this situation has meant that your work has been like more busy or, you know, moving all on onto digital has that been? Is that really impacted your work and made it tougher? Or has it just been a really fun challenge?

Julianne McGraw 22:31

I think it was in, in a lot of ways, it wasn't too different to what we normally do the groups we talk to you all across the country. So we don't usually have the budget to kind of travel around and feel them and chat to them face to face. Um, I think it's I think we were hoping to go bigger this year. And I think they're kind of limits to what you can do online, obviously, there's audiences you can't reach online. So in that way, it maybe made things easier. And that we were just scaled back. And everyone teams, probably I would say more comfortable with digital actually. But then it in other ways, we wanted to make sure we were acting kind of appropriately and ethically to what was going on. So that's kind of where the artwork idea came from. And that was different and challenging for us. So yeah, we were lucky in the way that that a lot of our works online anyway. And just like I'm so impressed by how people who and totally had to shift what they do, and how they reacted in the middle of a pandemic and, and put things online for their audiences. Yeah, hopefully this year, with all the stuff we've done online, it will get people kind of one step closer to coming along to an in person event.

Hannah Mason

It is really inspirational to hear about how you have managed to continue to keep people's enthusiasm and bring new audiences to archaeology and I'm really looking forward to seeing how it pans out next year and hopefully people will be able to go to digs live so thank you so much Julianne

Julianne McGraw

Thank you for having me I really enjoyed that.