ExhibitFiles

Design Workshop

Summary

As part of the ExhibitFiles design process, we conducted a workshop at the Lawrence Hall of Science, Berkeley, California, June 13-14, 2006. Most of the workshop participants were exhibit developers, the primary users of the website.

We focused on two sets of potential features of the ExhibitFiles website: exhibit records, which will make up the core of the site; and user profiles, which will contain information about contributors. We used card sorting to examine content requirements for exhibit records and free-listing to identify elements of user profiles.

This report is meant to be a catalyst for the next round of discussions, culminating in the development of a design vision document, outlining the features and proposed workings of site in more depth.
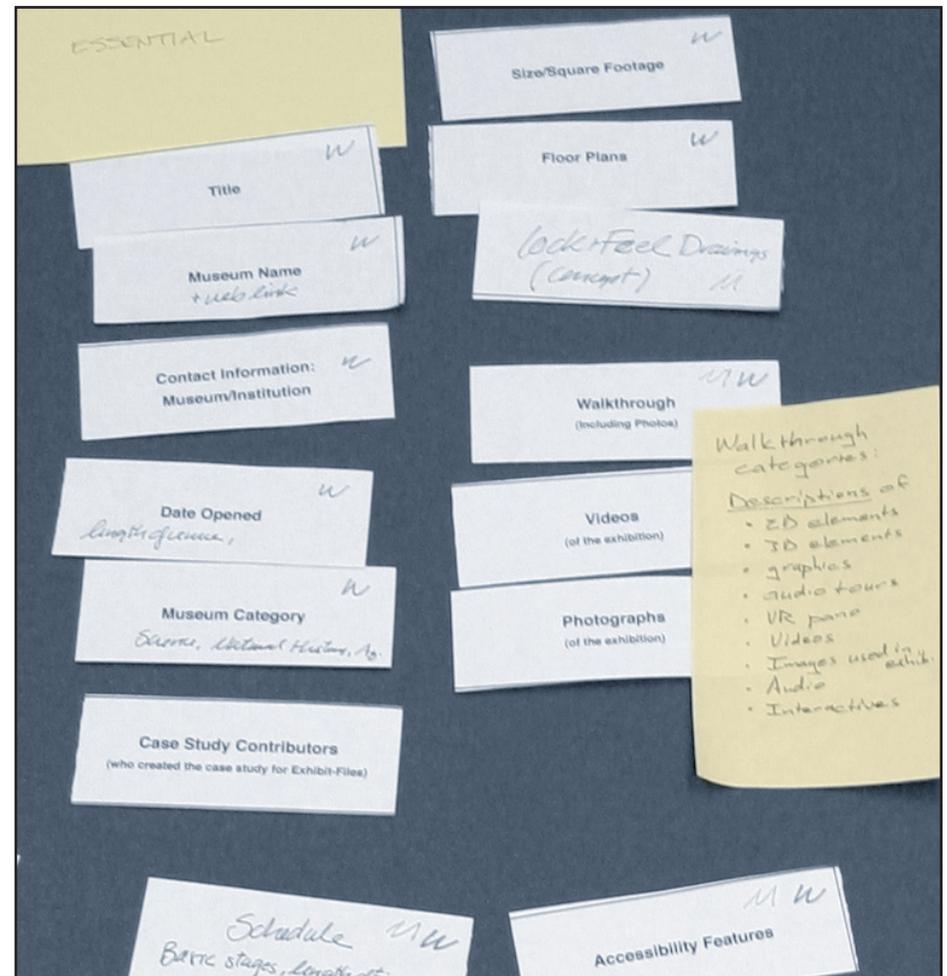
Exhibit Records Card Sort

The primary function of the ExhibitFiles website is to support the exhibit development process. A card sort activity helped us understand how exhibits people think and talk about this process, what they would like to find in the site, and what they are willing (and able) to contribute to it. The results will help us to specify content requirements for exhibit records that will make up the core of the site.

To prepare for the card sort, we made three sets of cards, each with a term related to exhibit development. These terms were drawn from various sources, including Kathy McLean's *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions* and interviews carried out by Randi Korn & Associates. We also provided some blank cards in case participants wanted to add terms.

We broke into three groups and asked each to sort the cards in three ways: elements that are "essential" to the ExhibitFiles site, those that would be "nice to have," and those that are "not essential." The groups also organized the cards within these three categories.

Group 3, (Left to Right) Wendy Hancock, Darrell Porcello, Paul Orselli, and Tom Nielsen discuss and sort the content requirements.

Each group presented its results, and we discussed what the sorts had in common and the ways they differed. Then we talked about what information people expected to be able to contribute themselves.

All three groups tended to agree on many of the key elements, especially those considered "essential" and "nice to have." There was less agreement about what constituted a "not essential" element, and a variety of views about how dense the information should be.

There was also discussion about the meaning of and relationships among some of the terms. "Visitor studies" and "evaluation reports" overlapped, for example. "Background information," some suggested, should address "why we made this exhibition" and perhaps elicit interesting "back-stories." "Development process and challenges" should include time and perhaps schedules.

There was extensive discussion of "outcomes and lessons learned" and ways to elicit implications for the field and "ways we went wrong."

Later in the meeting, the group also talked about whether the site should focus on exhibitions or exhibits (that is, components of exhibitions), or both. There was agreement that the site should accommodate both.

Two of the three groups broke out "walkthrough" as a separate element and clustered various multimedia and other elements within this term (e.g., images, video, audio tours). We've followed their lead and, for simplicity, use the term "walkthrough" on the following page to represent this cluster of elements.

The following page shows the outcome of the basic sorting activity. The largest-size type represents elements that were selected by more than one group, the next largest by two groups, and the smallest by only one group.

To learn more about card sorting, please visit: "Card Sorting: A Definitive Guide" on the Boxes and Arrows website: www.boxesandarrows.com/view/card_sorting_a_definitive_guide

"Essential Elements"

Accessiblity Features

Advisors

Artifact, species list

Awards

Background Information

Basic budget info

Basic Funding Information

Case Study Contributors (author)

Concept Drawings

Consultants (suppliers & Services)

Contact Information (museum)

Contact Information (Project participants)

Current Status (open, traveling, storage, etc.)

Date Opened (closed)

Description of education programs

Development Process and Challenges

Floor plans

Funding and Budget (Detailed)

Main Participants

maintenance (operation costs)

Museum Category (Type of Museum)

Museum Name

Narratives

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Press Kit

Schedule (Basic stages, length of time)

Size/squared footage

Sources (content/references)

Strategies for reaching underserved audiences

suppliers

Title

Topics/Themes

Visitor Studies

Walkthrough

"Nice to Have"

Accessibility Features

Advisors

Awards

Basic Funding Information

Companion Website

Computer Interactives

Design Manuals

Educational Manuals

Elevations

Evaluation reports

Floor plans

Funding and Budget (detailed)

Graphic Standards

Narratives

Online Resources

Services

Sources (content/references)

Strategies for reaching underserved audiences

Technical Details

Technical Manuals

Text/Labels (used in the exhibition)

Lesson plans (used in the exhibition)

Visitor Studies

Graphics (used in the Exhibition)

"Not Essential"

Contact Information (museum)

Design Manuals (documents, specs, etc

Elevations

Funding and Budget (detailed)

Graphic Standards

Lesson plans (used in the exhibition)

Narratives

Online resources

services

Sources (content/references)

suppliers

Technical details

Technical manuals

Text/Labels (used in the exhibition

visitor studies

"Profiles" Free listing

Because the ExhibitFiles will be a community-built and maintained website, we decided early on to require a (free) membership for authoring
and commenting on content elements. This being the case, we've been exploring the idea of creating personal profiles.

Once again, we found ourselves grappling with questions concerning the nature of the information to be shared. In this instance, we asked the participants to break into two groups and "free list" all of the pertinent information that they would like to learn about their colleagues and that they would share about themselves.

On the following page (5), the results from the free listing activity are presented. The types of information that both groups had in common are grouped together in the center column.

While the lists were quite exhaustive, both groups mentioned that they felt the profiles shouldn't be "too long." Also, many felt that categories such as Projects (Exhibits, Exhibitions) or Collaborators allow for only a limited

number of entries so not as to intimidate those who may just be entering the field and may not have such extensive listings to share.

The full group discussion focused on the importance of profiles to learn more about the members (and authors) of the ExhibitFiles site. In addition, the concept of *Favorites* (the content elements from the site that a user didn't author, but likes) was touched on, with the hope that Profiles could be "way in" to the collection. Visitors could view each others selections. The example of Amazon's "listmania" feature was brought up during the discussion.

Another issue and possible site feature that provoked discussion during this activity was whether Profiles should include a direct email function or whether the site should serve some sort of "gate keeping" function (letting participants know that someone is trying to contact them). This led to a discussion about email prompts and reminders: "Should the site let you know when someone visits your profile?," "Should you have the ability to set the frequency of these emails (and others)?"

Group 1

Preferred Method of Contact

Favorite: Rock Band, Movie, Museum, etc.

Photos From Flickr

Attach Resume

Both Groups

Name
Title
Organization
Address
Phone
Email
Photo

Personal Mission Statement

Projects (Exhibits, Exhibitions Added to Site)
Link(s)
Publications
Awards/Distinctions
Other Professional Activities

Collaborators
First Museum or Exhibit Job

Favorites (From the Collection)

Mailing Lists That I Read

Favorite Quote
Email Settings (Reminders)
Best Conference Ever Attended

Group 2

Education
Date Profile Filled Out

Skills (What Are You Good At?)

Exhibits That Have Influenced Me
What's in Your Refrigerator?

Childhood Museum Memories

Design Workshop Participants

Tom Nielsen, The Exhibit Guys
Paul Orselli, Paul Orselli Workshop (POW)
Claire Pillsbury, Chabot Space & Science Center
Jenny Sayre Ramberg, Monterey Bay Aquarium
Beth Redmond-Jones, Aquarium of the Pacific

From ASTC, Independent Exhibitions, and Ideum:
Kathleen McLean
Wendy Pollock
Wendy Hancock
Jim Spadaccini
Kevin Silver

From Randi Korn & Associates:
Jessica Brainard (day two)

Lawrence Hall of Science colleagues and hosts:
Wendy Kitamata, Senior Exhibit Designer/Traveling Exhibits
Coordinator
Allan Ayres, Exhibit Developer
Darrell Porcello, Acting Director, Educational Technology
Coe Leta Stafford, Interactive Media Designer/Researcher

Join the Discussion

If you have comments, questions, additions, or corrections to add, please let us know. Your input will help us build a better site for exhibit developers.

The ExhibitFiles project has launched a development blog:
www.exhibitfiles.org/blog

Copies of this document and other project documents can be found on the blog.