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Assignment One: User Research
Museum Accessibility
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Metropolitan Museum of Art:

On our individual visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) we each tried to be observant to what the museum already offered in the world of accessibility for the disabled. Each one of us observed different and similar aspects the Met had to offer. We started with the floor plan of the galleries, coming up with inquiry to how the mapping of the museum could be better. By making the elevators and ramps more visible, the displaying the guides in other language, providing direct guide to popular exhibits.



During my visit I paid attention to what was easily accessible and what was not for a wheelchair. The width of a doorway, space in a gallery for mobility and the kickout on display cases for wheelchairs to ride up close to visit the art. What I found was that the Met does a good job providing space and access for wheelchairs. But I noticed, while wondering around the main floor galleries, was that the elevator was hard to find. In fact, I almost missed it. Of course there were the main entry stairs and an odd escalator off the side, but I had to journey through a few galleries before coming upon the elevator. When consulting the map, I found the bathrooms, the exits but the wheelchair accessible lefts were tricky to locate. This was our groups main starting area for research into accessibility.



Precedents and Academic References:

While our group met to talk about the lecture panels from class and what new things we discovered about museums or other programs that specialize in accessibility we broke up the direction of our research. I found most of my research lead me down the path if universal design. During the Museums and the Web, an annual international conference in the field of museums and their websites. Christine Reich from the Museum of Science in Boston wrote a papers in 2006 that she presented at the Museum and the Web conference entitled, “Universal Design of Computer Interactives for Museum Exhibitions.” Reich introduces her paper by saying

Museums are places where visitors of all abilities and disabilities are invited to learn. This diversity offers a unique challenge - how can museums ensure that everyone can benefit from the learning experience? Universal design, which is the “design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Center for Universal Design, 2002), puts forward a potential solution.

Reich concludes by saying the museums can design positive learning experiences for all ranges of abilities and disabilities all you have to do is provide the opportunity to learn.

Steve Landau talked about the importance of understanding and utilizing universal design when developing tools that communicate to a crowd. Designing tools and interactive displays that empower visitor with or without disabilities. By doing this you not only engage the user with a handicap but also creates an more enjoyable experience for the caregiver or family member that is accompanying them.



In the spring of 2013 Matthew Fisher and Matthew Donadio hosted a workshop during the Museum and the Web conference in Portland, OR. Their workshop entitled, “Designing for Everybody: Accessible, Responsive, Universal Design in Drupal” demonstrated how to design and build websites the open source program Drupal, a Content Management System that is accessible, responsive and integrate Universal Design principles.

Drawing from a range of experiences, most notably the 2013 online exhibit for the Smithsonian National Museum of American History entitled “EveryBody: The History of Disability in America”, Night Kitchen Interactive President Matthew Fisher and Lead Developer Matt Donadio will demonstrate best practices in using Drupal to create websites that move beyond basic accessibility standards, are responsive to desktop, tablet and mobile platforms, and integrate Universal Design principles throughout. (Fisher & Donadio)

Fisher and Donadio workshop also touched on universal design through a Content Management System that made the site accessible and responsive. Demonstrating through some of their of experiences, such as their 2013 online exhibit for the Smithsonian National Museum of American History entitled “EveryBody: The History of Disability in America” by using Drupal to create websites that are beyond basic accessibility standards, that are responsive to all platforms -- desktop, tablet and mobile platforms -- while deploy Universal Design principles throughout.



When Alan Brightman and Richard Ellenson accompanied the advisor panels during the September 11 class, they brought up many thoughtful point on technology being used for the disabled. One

standout phrase was, “build on what is already out there.” This statement struck interest for me and I began looking into programs outside of the museum setting. My research had me stumbling across DIYAbility, a series of workshop to introduce teenagers with physical disabilities to the world of DIY maker culture. This cleverly organized series of workshop combined current technology and hands on learn for teens. I found this DIYAbility’s methodology that anyone can be a hacker and creative to be a good example of universal design inside or outside of a museum.

Persona:

Name: Robert

Age: 20

Gender: Male

Occupation: College Student, studying Illustration

Disability: Multiple sclerosis (MS)

Support Device: Walking Cane

Transportation: Public Transportation

Met Experience: Robert just started his second year in college at the City University of New York, studying art in hope to be an illustrator when he graduates. His drawing professor assignment for the weekend homework is to visit a museum. Robert has always wanted to visit the Met, and see his favorite painter Edgar Degas. Robert uses a cane to help him walk, but he has a hard time moving through large crowds, up and down stairs and through revolving doors. He gets tired easily and has to rest. He has never visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art because he has been intimidated by the front entry stairs. Robert plans his visit by visiting the Met website and finding out about different accessibility options he might have while he walks around the different galleries. He learns he can download the Access Map on his phone and use that to plan his visit. He learns that there is benches in different galleries where he can sit and rest and look at paintings. He find that he can use Audio devices to learn more about the artwork. Robert is very excited for his visit to the Met!

Resources:

Museums and the Web Conference: www.museumsandtheweb.com

Christine Reich: www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2006/papers/reich/reich.html

Matthew Fisher and Matthew Donadio:

mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/proposals/designing-for-everybody-accessible-responsive-universal-design-in-drupal/

DIYAbility: www.diyability.org