

A museum gallery with a large wireframe tower model in the center. To the left are glass display cases with various artifacts. To the right is a staircase. A large historical photograph of a city is visible in the background.

Enhancing the Experience or Creating a Barrier?

*The role and impact of digital technology
on learning in exhibition spaces.*

Jane Rayner, Senior Audience Researcher, Science Museum

Digital technology in exhibition spaces

- Working in a time of unprecedented rate of technological change
- Technology is changing, our audiences are changing, we are changing.
- Must resist the temptation to use technology for the sake of it *'Lets Make an App'*

Enhancing the Experience or Creating
a Barrier?



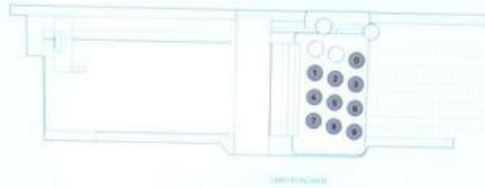
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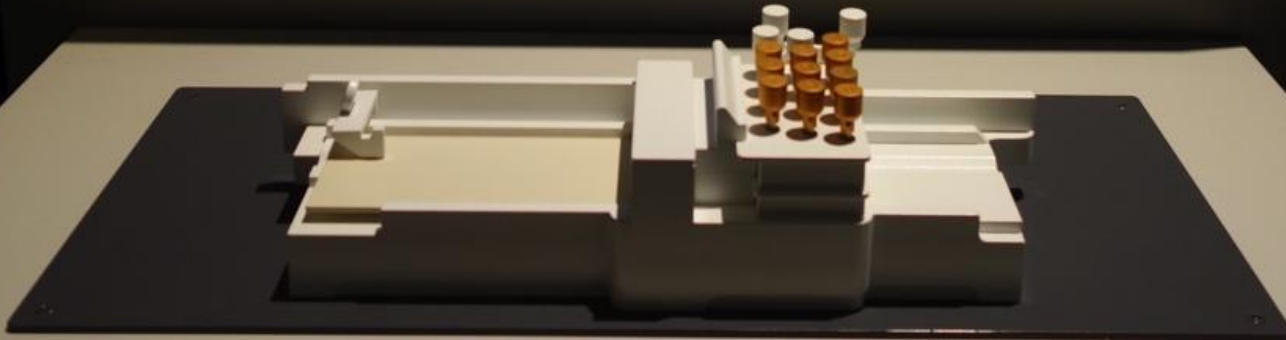


Interactive Models

Holes and spaces
record information



Punch any number



Interactive Models

- Help visitors understand how the objects work.
- Do not encourage visitors to engage with the real objects.
- Visitors can split their focus between two elements of an experience but adding a third could be too much.
- Relative positioning is important.

Transparent Screens



'During World War II I become involved in codebreaking activities for which I conceived and built machines that became known as Colossus. No public mention of these machines was made at the time.'

Thomas H. Flowers, designer of Colossus



Transparent Screens

- More or less engaging depending on the quality of the narrative storytelling.
- Alleviate the problem of constantly changing focus.
- Screens are not actually transparent, more semi opaque.
- Visitors underwhelmed by the technology

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- Visitors can use it, and enjoy using it.
- Design less important than the tone of the activities.
- Still need a group leader to facilitate the experience to get the most measurable learning outcomes.

Conclusions

- Digital Technology is not a barrier to learning in an exhibition if used thoughtfully.
- A blended approach remains a good solution.
- Give objects room to speak for themselves.
- If visitors are given a direct choice they will often choose to look at the screen.
- Relative positioning of elements of the experience is important.
- The technology is only as good as the content.
- Visitors are intolerant of clunky tech.
- Be very clear how the technology is adding value to the museum experience.

Challenges for Visitor Studies

- New methodologies are needed to evaluate the impact of digital technology on learning in museums.
- Seek out partnerships that are of mutual benefit.
- Please share your findings, we certainly will!