

Trabajo del Curso

**PLANET WORD MUSEUM:
A PROPOSAL TO BUILD AND MANAGE CROWDSOURCED CONTENT**

Rachel Heckscher
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Profesor Carlos Suárez-Balseiro

Description of the selected organization and the community it serves:

Planet Word is a new, non-profit museum in downtown Washington, DC, dedicated to celebrating language, words, and literacy. Intended to “bring language to life through revolutionary technology, interactive exhibits, and voice activation,” the multimedia installations depend heavily on extensive and elaborate hardware and software. Located at the now renovated Franklin School—a National Historic Landmark—Planet Word was originally scheduled to open in late 2019. The opening was pushed back to the spring of 2020, and then a worldwide pandemic placed everything on hold. As city regulations eased, Planet Word finally opened under careful Covid19-safe conditions on October 22, 2020. Two days later, due to another increase in local cases, the museum temporarily closed again.

Upon entering, each visitor is given a “stylus” to keep or return at the end of their visit. Starting on the fourth floor, visitors follow a path from one exhibit to another, with each exhibit installed in a separate room. The stylus can be used in several exhibits to tap onscreen buttons that allow the visitor to answer questions, advance to a different screen, or choose an activity or category.

Planet Word has been working to earn traditional media coverage and to develop a social media following. The staff have hosted online poetry readings, author talks, comedian nights, games nights, and classes. At the moment its Facebook page has 2590 followers, and its Facebook posts receive approximately 8 “likes” per post. On Instagram¹, the account @PlanetWordDC has 3,344 followers and each post receives dozens if not hundreds of interactions. Although there have been livestreamed events aplenty, the YouTube and Vimeo channels for Planet Word only have 3 and 4 videos respectively. [For comparison, an older non-traditional museum in the area, the American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) in Baltimore, has 95 videos and 585 subscribers on YouTube, over 48,000 Facebook followers, and 24,900 Instagram followers.]

Planet Word is truly a museum for the general public, for all ages, for people from any language background and any sensory ability or disability. I do not know if there will be an entrance fee, but during its one month opening, the museum was free to all who were able to access its online reservation system. Donations, of course, are welcomed. Conceived by an educator, the museum has many “partners” in the education and homeless communities, and is clearly intended to be a museum that all schoolchildren in the DC area will visit in their youth. Large meeting spaces and corporate sponsorships also imply there will be elite events in the evening hours when the museum is closed to the public.

Rationale and description of proposed reference product:

Opening during a worldwide pandemic is something most organizations would not survive. But Planet Word had already built a reasonable following before its doors opened, and its foundation is built on its prestigious board of directors, its savvy and extensive advisory board, and numerous other factors.

The museum’s website, however, is not compelling. I suspected that one reason for this was that the museum’s unusual concept and its unusual collection—almost entirely digital with

¹ For a sample @planetwordDC post, click on https://www.instagram.com/p/CIQqJJchiPA/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

multimedia elements including software, hardware, audio, video, light shows, images, and text—was not yet catalogued, and would be very challenging to catalog. I was correct that the museum has not yet chosen a system for its catalog, although they do have a digital content manager who I will be speaking with on Monday, December 21, 2020. Exhibition Content Manager Emily Graf currently used Excel spreadsheets to manage her collection, and indicated to me during an extensive phone meeting that she is interested in learning more about other cataloging options. At the moment, visitor's handwritten contributions (on colored paper) are collected and kept in boxes.

Other assumptions I made initially turned out not to be correct, and this influenced my project significantly. First, I was incorrect in assuming that Planet Word did not have any crowdsourced content. In one exhibit, they provide paper and pens and invite visitors to share words in response to any of eight different prompts², and they offer a recording booth where visitors can record a short video in response to fifteen other prompts³. I was also incorrect in worrying that the museum had not involved local, more grassroots artists and community members in the design of its mission. To its credit, Planet Word has a large advisory board that is linguistically, geographically, and professionally diverse, and its special events, exhibits, and online videos feature several homegrown luminaries.

So, I have adapted my proposal to a straightforward idea that I believe will dovetail with the organization's social media presence in addition to solidifying the museum's own management of its collection. This will be an important step in preserving the museum's history, maintain a strong legal footing with regard to intellectual property rights and copyrights, and give virtual access to researchers, students, promoters, and museum employees to more of the museum's collection, past, present, and future.

Proposal: For Planet Word to select a visually appealing, web-based Collections Management Program that will allow it to:

- Catalog and preserve its current and future exhibitions
- Selectively make crowdsourced audio, video, and photo files available to social media, communications, and curatorial staff, and to others for special projects
- Share content as desired with other information organizations
- Utilize trained volunteers, in digitizing and indexing handwritten visitor contributions
- Enhance, study, and curate its own crowdsourced content

I used my online connection to the Facebook Group Museum Social Media Managers to gather software suggestions for my Planet Word proposal. CatalogIt caught my eye as the least expensive option with a simple user interface emphasizing the visual image. I explored further, read reviews, and found its many features to likely serve Planet Word well. CatalogIt employees

² Prompts for handwritten words: One word I love the sound of is... One word that describes my family is... One word I love from another language is... One word that reminds me where I'm from is... One word I use to describe myself is... One word that makes me feel better is... One word someone special calls me is... One word I wish people were more careful with is...

³ Recording booth prompts: My Family; My Friends; My Identity; A Book; The News; A Song; My Work; A Poem; My Personal Motto; My Native Language; A Conversation; Bullying; Slang; My Favorite Word; Something Else

responded quickly to the many questions I sent by e-mail and encouraged me to set up a free account, which I did, and told me about upcoming additions to the software.

In the years since Cassell and Hiremath (2013) proposed “collaboration, social networking, customization, and seamlessness” as “the four main sounding notes of the 2.0 universe,” the characteristics of digital tools in the reference ambit have blurred and blended together, with more and more tools available to users. My proposal is intended to help Planet Word continue to create content in collaborative ways and expand its use of crowdsourced content, providing material for its social media outreach, enhance its website, and grow its foundation of reveling in the joy of language, both virtually and in person. Operating during the pandemic has been a testing ground for some of its unique technologies, and has forced the invention of new ideas that can serve the museum as it grows.

Resources needed to carry out the proposal:

- The commitment and support from the museum’s executive director and board of directors, starting with a guidance policy on curation, censorship, inclusion, exclusion, access, sharing, and utilization of crowd sourced material.
- A yearly subscription to CatalogIt for a collection of over 25,000 items costs \$360 up front, plus \$5 per month for extra users. Larger collections or monthly billing costs marginally more.
- The work of digitizing, cataloging, and possibly transcribing Planet Word’s crowdsourced collections will take considerable time. The nature of CatalogIt would allow this work to be done by volunteers in a disseminated manner, with training and volunteer management done by the Exhibition Content Manager.

Evaluation:

Evaluating the use of the cataloguing tool should take place on different levels.

- Collect quantitative data on the time invested in data entry, social media impact, website analytics, and satisfaction with the software (survey of volunteers and employees).
- Proactively gather qualitative feedback from communications employees, Digital Content Manager, Exhibit Content Manager, educators, volunteers, museum visitors, and others. This can be done through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and discussions at meetings.
- Study how crowdsourced content is being used in new ways, e.g., incorporated into new exhibits, expanding the multilingual collections of the museum or the use of multilingual content in exhibits (virtually or otherwise).
- Determine how the catalog is being used by artists, curators, and researchers, including requests for access and material loans.

How the project takes advantage of computer technology:

CatalogIt is a web-based collections management tool, which reduces the need for onsite backup. The CatalogIt app allows for simultaneous use including data entry and photography at numerous locations by different people on cell phones or tablets. Items can be shared on the Hub if desired. Both the app and the Hub have good user interfaces on computer screens and mobile devices.

Demo:

My demo is in the form of a PowerPoint slide set available online at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cAmrJvpcy7LzOs1ZmZCscMrRBm3hyPyS/view?usp=sharing>

References:

Cassell, K. A., & Hiremath, U. (2013). *Reference and information services: An introduction*. Neal-Schuman, an imprint of the American Library Association.