CAMD Case Studies: Emerging Technologies

Museums and Mobile Applications

Technologies used on smartphones and other mobile devices are becoming more widespread amongst the major museums as they look for ways to engage users on a daily basis. As a result, museum visits are going out into the field.

In 2010, Museum Victoria became one of the first museums in the world to release an iPad app that lets users get up close and personal with its exhibits. *Please Touch the Exhibit* takes users on a tour through 10 Melbourne Museum experiences. The app grants virtual visitors access inside the glass display cases, to create an interactive experience with the assortment of the museum's objects on show. Multiple screens and a variety of activities enable users to explore some of Melbourne Museum's iconic objects, like Phar Lap and the Museum's skeleton of a blue whale. Other collections featured in Please touch the exhibit include: Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, the Forest Gallery and the Melbourne Story exhibition.

Originally the app was intended for a Victorian audience, but in the first month of its launch *Please touch the exhibit* had racked up 4,000 downloads from local and international users in places as far afield as China, Brazil, the USA and UK.

This year Museum Victoria has added the *Field Guide to Victorian Fauna*, a free app for iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad. The app invites the user to explore useful and interesting information about Victoria's fauna including: identification, biology, distribution, diet, habitat, scientific classification and endangered status. Wherever they are – a forest, a desert, a rocky shore, at Ararat or Apollo Bay – the user can find information on more than 700 animals at the swipe of your finger. The app is based on the museum's Biodiversity Snapshots field guide, which was created for schools by museum sciences staff. And, in a first for the museum, the code for the app is being released as open source. This means that museums and organisations worldwide can take their own data and build their own local field guide. The app will grow as more records are uploaded.

Australian Museum has produced *DangerOz* which provides images and facts on 40 different animals, as well as a geo-location feature which tells you which of these animals might be nearby. The app responds to the fact that the Australian Museum receives thousands of enquiries each year, many of which deal with people's fears about animals. It was designed for tourists or locals with a passion for the bush or beach. DangerOz was developed and produced by a wide range of staff across all areas of the Museum -

scientists, interpreters, technical, web and editing. The prototype was developed by the University of Sydney School of Information Technologies and the Smart Services CRC. The final app was produced in collaboration with Reading Room Australia.

Inside the museum, the Powerhouse is starting to use iPads to replace LCD and plasmas for audio-visual displays and they've found the smaller screens result in a closer engagement between museum visitor and content. They've also deployed touchscreen games on iPads versus traditional touchscreens, and are getting a higher usage rate among visitors.

The Powerhouse has been experimenting with the mobile web for a few years now, and recently incorporated QR codes in its *Love Lace* exhibit. There is also the *Love Lace* App that can be used in the gallery to add an information layer for visitors without overwhelming the exhibition design with text. The Love Lace website serves as a hub for before and after visiting the museum.

Additional apps in their repertoire include one for their annual Sydney Design Festival, and another for cross-agency school holiday planning.

The use of mobile devices to access museum information opens up opportunities to make museum exhibitions far more immersive and experiental, leaving the fact layer for mobile and online delivery at their leisure.

Screenshot from MV's *Field Guide to Victorian Fauna*.
Source: Museum Victoria