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## WHAT CLICKS? KEY LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

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As the *What Clicks?* project drew to a close, members of the project team met to discuss the key lessons they had learned from the many facets of the project. They challenged themselves to identify the bigger ideas that will continue to drive the MIA forward rather than the many tactical lessons derived from the work. They were particularly interested in exploring ideas that have the potential to benefit colleagues in other encyclopedic art museums. To organize the discussion, the group focused first on each type of technology, then on the marketing initiatives, followed by a review of the overall lessons that can be drawn from the project. Following are the key lessons identified by the project team.

### Key Lessons from the Museum Directory Studies

The Museum Directory is an electronic directory near the main entrance to the museum that provides answers to common questions a visitor might ask. The Museum Directory's contents include information about special exhibitions, permanent collection galleries, lectures, films, Family Days, tours, membership and amenities, such as restrooms, coat checks, and cafes. The *What Clicks?* team evaluated the Museum Directory through pre and post visitor surveys, user statistics, an on-site usability lab, and interviews with MIA staff who work most directly with visitors (Visitor and Member Services staff and volunteers and security personnel).

Following are the major lessons from the *What Clicks?*

Museum Directory studies:

**1. *A keyboard and an attract video invite interaction.*** Visitor and Member services staff and volunteers, as well as MIA security guards, had noticed that many visitors simply walk by the Museum Directory, seemingly unaware that they could access information that would aid their visit. The initial Technology Awareness Survey further confirmed that only 35% of visitors were aware of the Museum Directory. In an attempt to increase visitor awareness of the Museum Directory, the project team installed an attract video near the Directory. The addition of keyboards to the three Museum Directory monitors also served as a signal to visitors that there is opportunity for learning and interaction. These and other efforts boosted Museum Directory awareness from 35% in 2002 to 44% in the 2003 post survey.

**2. *Timely, relevant information increases user satisfaction.*** It was clear from the 2002 user surveys that visitors wanted the Museum Directory to provide timely information that would inform their current visit. By adding a Daily Events Calendar, an "Art Finder" function, and more information about current happenings in the museum, the *What Clicks?* team increased overall satisfaction ("extremely or very satisfied") from 59% in 2002 to 77% in 2003. In addition, more visitors in 2003 said they found the information to be "extremely or very" clear and the percentage who said they found what they were looking for on the Museum Directory increased.



**3. Comprehensive evaluation helped identify and fulfill an unmet need: the ability to locate art in the museum.** Museum staff who work most closely with visitors reported that one of the most frequently asked visitor questions is how to locate a specific type or work of art. In addition, one in four Museum Directory users in the 2002 study said they wanted the Museum Directory to show them where specific works of art are located in the museum. Following the development and installation of an “Art Finder” function in the Museum Directory, 24% of users said they indeed were motivated to use the Museum Directory “to find a specific work of art,” which was a new choice in the 2003 survey question.

**4. Centralized data sources increase Museum Directory accuracy, eliminate redundancy and improve staff efficiency.** Prior to the *What Clicks?* project, information on the Museum Directory was derived from multiple sources and not updated in a consistent way. During the enrichment and redesign phase, the team removed outdated information, replacing it with current information that is drawn from existing databases (the Web site’s Exhibitions and Events Database and TMS, which is an art collections management database). This change eliminated the need for redundant and sometimes inconsistent updating.

## Key Lessons from the Interactive Learning Stations Studies

Currently, the Minneapolis Institute of Art has 17 Interactive Learning Stations installed immediately adjacent to many of the galleries. Each ILS concentrates on a specific area of the MIA’s permanent collection (e.g., photography, Prairie School

architecture, African art, etc.) and is designed to encourage visitors to connect what they learn from the programs with the actual works of art. Because the MIA has a more extensive distribution of Interactive Learning Stations throughout the galleries than any other art museum, the Institute was well-positioned to advance the field’s understanding of this technology form. The *What Clicks?* project team employed a combination of museum visitor surveys, focus groups and user statistics to evaluate the Institute’s Interactive Learning Stations. The 2002 studies clearly demonstrated that, while visitor satisfaction with the Interactive Learning Stations was very high, visitor awareness was low. Consequently, the team focused primarily on physical changes during the enrichment and redesign phase. Based on the 2002 results, the team also added a focus group study to test visitor reaction to small LCD video screens located near specific works of art.

Following are the major lessons from the *What Clicks?* Interactive Learning Stations studies:

**1. Interactive Learning Stations need to be visible and inviting to attract users.** The 2002 surveys demonstrated that eight out of ten users said they preferred the ILSs to be located “right in the gallery close to the art.” In addition, users overwhelmingly reported that the Interactive Learning Stations “enhanced their appreciation and understanding of the art.” The MIA’s Interactive Learning Stations, however, remained unnoticed by nearly 60% of visitors. The *What Clicks?* project led to many efforts to increase ILS visibility such as better lighting, larger screens, and additional seating.



**2. *Visitors continue to ask for object-specific information next to the works of art, and the LCDs are a very effective alternative.*** Because users said they preferred that the ILSs be close to the art, and that they would like the information tied closely to specific works of art in the gallery, the project team used a focus group study during the enrichment and redesign phase to test visitor reaction to small video screens with focused content located in direct proximity to specific works of art. Focus group participants, including both veteran museum goers as well as less frequent visitors, enthusiastically said the video displays contributed to their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of their gallery experience. The MIA's overall direction was further confirmed in the 2003 follow-up studies of Interactive Learning Station users, which documented an increase in the percentage of visitors who said they want information tied closely to specific works of art in the gallery.

**3. *Curatorial buy-in and involvement is essential for integration of technology into the galleries.*** Early on in the *What Clicks?* project, the team recognized that the project, and especially the Interactive Learning Stations part, would be well-served if they could engage the museum's curators in the process as they had been participants in the initial creation of the programs. At each step of the way, the team shared its data with curators and invited them to participate in the decision-making process. Team members observed that when suggestions for change were met with apparent resistance (e.g. location of small LCD video displays next to works of art), it often turned out to be a simple difference of opinion about the specific application rather than a more fundamental difference in point of view. As willing partners, the curators offered many useful suggestions for how these technologies can best be

integrated into the galleries. The *What Clicks?* project was characterized by a new openness on the part of curators to the idea of more thorough integration of technology in the galleries, as a way to enhance the visitors' experience.

## Key Lessons from the Web Site Studies

The MIA's comprehensive, content-rich Web site, *artsmia.org*, logged roughly 3.85 million visits in FY 03 and, for several years, online visitation has grown consistently at a rate of around 50% per year. The Web site acts as both an aid for museum visitation and an online art resource. The *What Clicks?* team evaluated the Web site with pre- and post-surveys of Web site visitors, pre- and post-usability lab studies, a thorough analysis of the museum's Web site statistics, and a study of Web site terminology conducted among visitors to the museum.

Because the overarching conclusion from the 2002 Survey of Web Site Visitors was that visitor satisfaction with the site was very high, the main thrust during the enrichment and redesign phase was on driving people to the site. The *What Clicks?* project gave MIA staff an opportunity to test a number of marketing tactics, which are described in greater detail in the Marketing Key Lessons section that follows. The second major focus for the Web site part of *What Clicks?* was on site improvements through usability lab testing. While the MIA technology staff has been strongly committed to ongoing site enhancement, the usability lab studies provided technology staff with a powerful new way to identify site improvements from a user point of view.



Following are the major lessons from the *What Clicks?* Web site studies:

**1. Usability lab testing is critical.** The project team found that the pre- and post-usability lab process was essential for a thorough examination of the site from a user standpoint. There is no better way than a usability lab to identify the challenges and barriers visitors experience as they navigate the site, and this is particularly true for a very large, content-rich site such as *artsmia.org*. With the increased availability of usability lab resources at museum conferences, at local universities, and among businesses in the communities where museums are located, museums now have many opportunities to access this research methodology. In addition, it is quite possible to conduct one's own usability lab by inviting people to visit the site while observing their behavior and recording observations about it.

**2. Museum terminology is not always visitor terminology.** During the first usability lab sessions in 2002, MIA staff were struck by how often Web site visitors failed to understand the terminology on the site. For example, there was substantial confusion about how to find programs for young people because the site did not use common terms such as “children” or “kids.” Visitors did not understand that the term “public programs” refers to the many lectures and similar events open to the public; some did not understand what kind of art would be “decorative arts.” MIA staff observed that lack of understanding of the site terminology can severely limit the visitors' ability to navigate the site and find what they are looking for. The perplexing question for MIA staff is, when do you go with museum terminology and when do you use more commonly used terms? During the enrichment and redesign

phase, as the result of both usability lab findings and a Web site terminology study conducted with visitors, the *What Clicks?* team converted some terms to those that would be more commonly understood by the visitor and enhanced search capabilities to yield better results based on common search terms, such as “kids.”

**3. The Web site offers an additional way to deepen visitor involvement with the museum.** Prior to the *What Clicks?* survey of visitors to the site, the MIA had very little information about who, specifically visits the site. This new opportunity for audience data confirmed that many Web site visitors are initially motivated to visit the site to plan a visit to the museum (34% in 2002 and 43% in 2003). Very high percentages of Web site visitors in both years used the site to learn about current and upcoming exhibitions and to search for information to plan a visit to the museum. Importantly, most Web site visitors have also visited the museum (69% in 2002 and 78% in 2003). Museum staff believe that the rich content of the site provides an opportunity for museum visitors to continue to explore the museum's collection more deeply after they return home.

**4. It is difficult to evaluate a moving target.** Visits to the *artsmia.org* site have grown at the predictable rate of 50 percent per year. Following the enrichment and redesign phase of *What Clicks?*, visits to the site again grew by 50 percent. The *What Clicks?* project team will never be able to know what would have happened if they had done nothing. An informal survey of comparable museums suggests that a 50 percent growth rate is typical. The *What Clicks?* project offered a new opportunity for audience data that has caused MIA staff to reflect on the museum's mission and priorities for the future.



As of this writing, the museum is in the process of creating an Internet Vision Project team to further define the Web site's role and fully realize its potential.

## Key Lessons from the *What Clicks?* Marketing Program

As previously noted, the *What Clicks?* baseline research clearly demonstrated high satisfaction with all the technologies coupled with low awareness, which naturally caused the project team to turn its attention to marketing. *Direct observation will continue to be the primary driver of awareness for in-museum technologies*, but how could museum visitors be made more aware of the in-museum technologies? What could be done to generate more awareness of the museum's Web site both on the Web and through more traditional awareness generating tools? Much of this was relatively new territory for the MIA's Marketing Team and, hence, the project provided many learning opportunities.

During the enrichment and redesign phase of *What Clicks?*, the Marketing Department launched a number of major awareness-generating initiatives, including the following:

- A comprehensive \$65,000 advertising and promotional campaign
- New and revised print and collateral materials
- Tagging existing exhibition-related television and radio advertising schedules
- Online advertising
- A public relations campaign
- Staff training to make visitors more aware of museum technology resources

Following are the major lessons from the *What Clicks?* marketing program:

**1. *Online advertising is not an efficient way to drive museum attendance.*** Discount offers delivered via the Web site carried very low through-the-door redemption. Staff concluded that the Web audience is so broad that online advertising to drive attendance becomes cost inefficient compared to the costs of other, more targeted media. The Internet offers vast potential to inform and educate people about the museum's permanent collection and online educational tools and resources. It also has the potential to build the Institute's awareness and brand to a national and international audience less expensively than traditional media sources. However, neither of these are attendance drivers.

**2. *Targeted messages to targeted audiences deliver the greatest results.*** For example, local media sites delivered the highest click-through rates and ads on the sites' Arts/Entertainment pages performed even better. The highest coupon redemption from all online advertising came from direct, personalized e-mail messages to self-selected (opt-in), arts/entertainment-interested e-mail group lists.

**3. *Designing an ad for online advertising is similar to creating ads for other advertising media but requires some different considerations.*** Ads that do best have compelling images and messages, include a call to action, and incorporate color. Art museums are well positioned when it comes to compelling images and messages. Bigger ads do better. The MIA's large ad units (the vertical "skyscraper" or "tower" ads) performed best, and media buyers and sellers agree that large ad units are three to four times more effective than traditional





banner ads. While movement catches the users' eye on the Web, some people have a strong dislike for it; the MIA opted for smooth movements and transitions rather than vibrating, flashing movement. Another cautionary consideration is that movement takes a lot of file space and can quickly exceed file size limits.

#### ***4. Key word advertising is not efficient for an art museum.***

Purchased "ad words" on *google.com* did not work because the subject of art appeals to only a subset of the full Internet audience and ads did not meet Google's minimum click-through rate. When the search terms were narrowed, the MIA was within the first 3 to 5 sites listed, making a *purchased* ad of minimal value.

#### ***5. Get some help from someone who is knowledgeable about Web marketing and online design if the staff doesn't have the required skill set.***

MIA marketing staff recommends looking to full service ad agencies or media buying agencies with online advertising experience. It is important to review a full list of the museum's needs—ad design work, best sites on which to place the message, timing of the campaign, frequency, reach, costs, tracking, analysis, etc. The museum needs to be clear about what the goal is, whether it is to drive museum attendance to a special exhibition or generate awareness about the museum, and to give clear direction on anticipated deliverables. It is useful for the museum to share its overall marketing campaign with the consultant so that the online advertising dovetails with other advertising and promotional efforts to make an integrated multi-media campaign.

## **General Lessons from the *What Clicks?* Project**

In addition to the specific lessons that relate to certain types of technology, team members drew several overall conclusions from the project:

***1. Interdisciplinary teams are essential for a project of this magnitude.*** Similar to many art museums, the MIA has a long history of employing inter-departmental teams to perform various tasks and studies. The magnitude of the *What Clicks?* effort necessitated participation from many of the museum's departments including Visitor and Member Services, the Interactive Media Group, Education, Marketing and Communications, Curatorial, and Security, as well as the Director's Office. Throughout the three-year effort, the project team regularly engaged museum staff in the process. One of the obvious benefits of this involvement is that there is museum-wide understanding and acceptance of the *What Clicks?* findings and the rationale for changes that will continue to be made throughout the museum.

#### ***2. Utilize the research tool that is most appropriate for addressing the research questions, and, whenever possible, use multiple research tools to build confidence in decisions.***

The project team found that they had greater confidence in their decisions and actions when they were able to draw on multiple sources for guidance. For example, the team probed on many questions related to the technologies in its regular visitor surveys in 2001 and 2003, the pre and post Technology Awareness Surveys, and the pre- and-post user surveys for



each technology. Members of the team collected and analyzed user statistics from all the technologies, and a local corporation donated its usability lab to conduct pre- and post-Web site studies and to evaluate changes to the Museum Directory. Members of the team also interviewed other MIA staff to gain qualitative knowledge of what visitors need. Moreover, when the team decided to evaluate the use of small video displays in the galleries, it became apparent that the best tool would be a focus group study, which allowed team members to observe visitor reaction to the technology and hear visitors share their observations and insights. Different kinds of information were gleaned from each type of research study and together the studies provided the team with a rich, overall picture of visitor needs and preferences with regard to technology. The project team also concluded that there is tremendous decision-making power in a test/retest approach with multiple benchmarks for comparison.

### *3. It is wise to regularly document your own best practices.*

An early step in the *What Clicks?* project was an internal Best Practices Focus Group of MIA staff members most involved in developing and working with the MIA's technologies. This discussion was made even more important as it coincided with the departure from the museum of Scott Sayre, the founder of the Interactive Media Group, the MIA's technology department. In the focus group discussions, members of the

group were reminded of the importance of the museum's institutional wisdom regarding technology. MIA staff have a strong commitment to continued documentation of its best practices to ensure that future museum employees will benefit from earlier learning.

*4. Don't attempt this at home, unless...! What Clicks?* was a very large, broad-based multi-year project that only worked because of the large grant provided by the Institute for Museum and Library Services. This is the kind of work that museums typically cannot afford to undertake. On the other hand, as described more fully in the Methodology section of this report, the *What Clicks?* project team broke the project down into manageable pieces that can be taken on by many art museums, perhaps even within existing budgets. The team also recognized that many technology improvements can be made by making better use of existing resources. For example, the team took advantage of the museum's existing collections management system to design and install an "Art Finder" function for the new Museum Directory. When the team developed the installations of small video screens for the focus groups, they primarily used existing video content that the museum already owned. The overall lessons are: think about new ways to use existing tools and information, and break a large project into smaller pieces. There is a big pay-off for the whole team when every part is completed.

