
WHAT CLICKS? MARKETING FOR TECHNOLOGY IN THE MUSEUM AND ON THE WEB

Background

The Marketing Department at The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which is charged with general responsibility for marketing all aspects of the museum, has traditionally focused primarily on raising awareness of the museum and its offerings and motivating through-the-door attendance. Prior to the *What Clicks?* project, Marketing Department staff did not have resources to market the museum's various technologies, including the Web site. Museum staff had little experience with Web based advertising and the project opened up a new world of tactics and terminology that had been previously unexplored.

What We Learned in 2002

The 2002 *What Clicks?* baseline research clearly indicated an overall lack of awareness of the Museum Directory and the Interactive Learning Stations among museum visitors. Total awareness was 35% for the Museum Directory and 43% for the Interactive Learning Stations. The research suggested that museum efforts to create awareness of the Museum Directory and ILSs had been relatively ineffective, except for efforts made by museum staff and volunteers. Based on the 2002 studies, the project team reasoned that greater visibility, signage and more seating, along with marketing and publicity

vehicles, would increase awareness and usage of these in-museum technologies.

At 54%, the Web site had greater awareness than the Museum Directories and ILSs among museum visitors. However, only small numbers of people said they had become aware of the site while on museum visits or via MIA publications, suggesting that more investment in these efforts may be worthwhile. The 2002 Survey of Web Site Visitors found that the most likely way that visitors found their way to the site was through a search engine or via a link. The *What Clicks?* team assumed that greater visibility on the Internet through other sites and search engines, as well as positioning the site as a destination in and of itself, would generate greater awareness and more reasons to visit the site.

What We Did to Market the Technologies

The MIA Marketing Department created a comprehensive \$65,000 advertising and promotional campaign to increase awareness and use of the Museum Directories, ILSs, and Web site. The budget included consultant's fees, online advertising, printing of collateral pieces and publicity-related expenses.

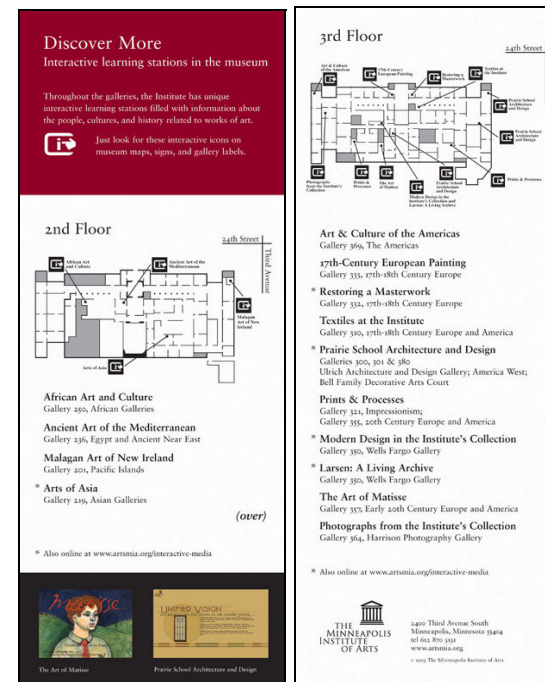


Key marketing program elements included the following:

- Concepts and designs for multimedia campaign (print, online, direct mail, and possibly radio underwriting)
- Online advertising through other sites and search engines
- Professional media buying support for online placements
- Print production of collateral pieces (rack card/map of all ILS sites; reprint of Press Release stationery incorporating Web address, etc.)
- Production of give-away items for museum visitors to raise awareness and usage of Web site and ILS
- Direct mail campaign to target audiences that raises awareness and enhances usage of Web site and ILS
- Suggestions for staff and volunteer training
- Publicity and story placement recommendations
- Future advertising and promotional initiatives beyond the *What Clicks?* grant timeline and funding

In keeping with the test/retest mode of the *What Clicks?* project, the Marketing Department devised a plan to monitor and track results of advertising and promotional efforts (log number of click-throughs on online advertising, implement audience-specific contests that are able to be tracked, etc.) and tweak plans as necessary to maximize return on investment.

New or Revised Print and Collateral Materials—An easy first step was to revise existing print and collateral materials and, when necessary, develop new ones. Following are some of the tactics employed:



A sample of a rack card, newly created to make users aware of other ILS locations.

- Created and displayed rack cards at all the Interactive Learning Stations to make users aware of other ILS locations and encourage them to try other ILSs
- Revised the existing MIA rack card to make particular mention of the Interactive Learning Stations and the Web site URL
- Added Interactive Learning Stations to the Ford Free Sundays program distributed every Sunday to museum visitors



- Ensured the Web site URL consistently appeared in all print ads and collateral materials for all special exhibitions and non-exhibition-specific museum pieces
- Featured Web site prominently in the redesigned Arts Magazine, including a URL display at the bottom of each page as a consistent design element
- Distributed free give-away items to increase Web site awareness (magnets, fans, etc.) at key community events including National Night Out, the State Fair, neighborhood festivals and parades

Television and Radio Advertising—Another easy and low-cost way to increase Web site awareness was to change the MIA’s existing paid radio and television messages. Previously these messages featured the museum’s phone number; however, marketing staff changed them to direct listeners and viewers to visit the museum’s Web site for additional information.

Online Advertising—As mentioned previously, the MIA’s Marketing Department had little experience in the world of online advertising. Consequently, the first step was to hire a marketing and media buying agency to act as an online buying consultant. MIA staff worked with the consultant to create and implement a three-month online advertising campaign to test efficacy of various messages, sizes, and placements of online ads. They also purchased Google ad words to gain visibility and raise awareness of the Web site on



A sample of a vertical "skyscraper" online ad.

selected search engines. They leveraged the existing special exhibition advertising campaign in Summer 2003 for “Crossing the Channel: British and French Painting in the Age of Romanticism” to generate an additional opportunity for direct e-mail messaging with an online advertising provider (Startribune.com).

Public Relations Campaign—The Marketing Department also designed and launched a public relations campaign, including placements of articles in local media and the museum’s own publications as well as communications targeted to local and national media. Examples of articles included features highlighting “Unified Vision,” an online exhibition on the museum’s Web site in Minneapolis’ major newspaper, the *Star Tribune*, and in *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*. The *What Clicks?* project was highlighted in an article in the museum’s own *Arts Magazine*, which is received by 30,000 member households. Of particular interest to MIA marketing staff was the opportunity to create an online Press Room for media to access recent news releases and images. To launch the Press Room, marketing staff sent 300 awareness raising post cards to media contacts nationally and internationally.

Staff Training—Because direct observation on a museum visit is by far the primary source of awareness for the in-museum technologies, the *What Clicks?* project team immediately recognized the potential for MIA staff and volunteers to increase visitor awareness. The Marketing Department created concise,



memorable language to use in training docents, Visitor and Member Services staff, Security, and front-line volunteers to raise awareness of the technologies among museum visitors.

As a simple tactic for increasing Web site awareness, marketing staff created an all-staff e-mail to instruct museum staff to add the museum's Web site address to the standard professional signature information at the end of their e-mails.

In addition, marketing staff met with the Director of Design and Editorial Services to share goals and ideas for implementation to ensure key messages about the museum's technology products get incorporated in all relevant print projects museum-wide.

E-marketing Test—As part of the *What Clicks?* project, MIA staff also evaluated its first effort at e-marketing. The *Teaching the Arts* (TTA) online newsletter was introduced to educators in September 2003. Subscribers to TTA receive a monthly e-mail reminder to go to the site and view the current month's teaching resource, which provides content that may be adapted for one or more lesson plans and includes ideas for related activities. The central focus of the monthly content may be based on one particular work of art, such as Thomas Sully's portrait of George Washington; on art of a specific time and place, such as "Art of the Ancient Americas"; or on thematic issues, such as "With All Due Respect," which explores a variety of ways in which respect may be expressed through art. In January 2004 a focus group of art educators who used the site was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of this teacher resource. Results of this in-depth discussion confirmed that TTA was a highly valued resource for art educators. Several of

the participants reported that they had used, or were planning to use, one or more of the monthly teaching resources in their classrooms.

Results of the Technology Marketing Efforts

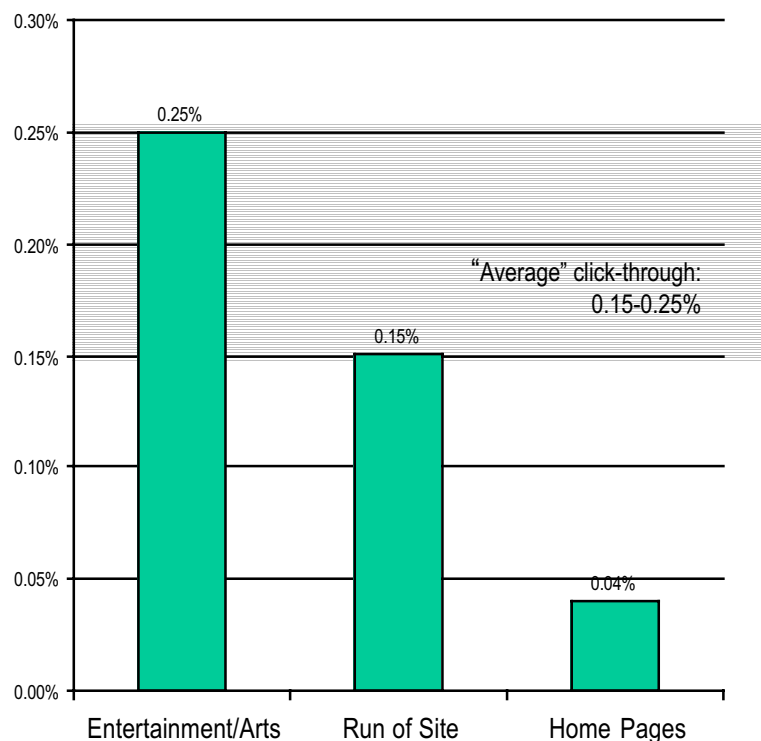
While each marketing tactic presented a learning opportunity, the following major results were reported by the marketing staff:

Direct observation continued to be the primary driver of awareness for in-museum technologies. Eight out of ten Museum Directory users in both the pre- and post-surveys became aware of the Museum Directory because they saw it on a museum visit. There was no measurable increase in awareness from Institute mailings, publications, staff or the Web site. On the other hand, for the Interactive Learning Stations, there was a small but significant increase in the percentage of users who became aware of the Interactive Learning Stations through Institute mailings and publications. As of the time that the *What Clicks?* team conducted its follow-up surveys, the percentage of ILS users who said they are aware of other ILSs in the museum held steady at 57%, suggesting that there was no immediate impact from the installation of the rack cards.

Targeted messages to targeted audiences delivered the greatest results. For example, the highest number of click-throughs were delivered by local media sites (e.g., *startribune.com*) rather than less targeted national sites. In addition, click-through rates increased if messages were placed on Arts/Entertainment pages within a site.



Click-Through Rates by Site Placement



Source: Haworth Marketing and Media

Also, 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.

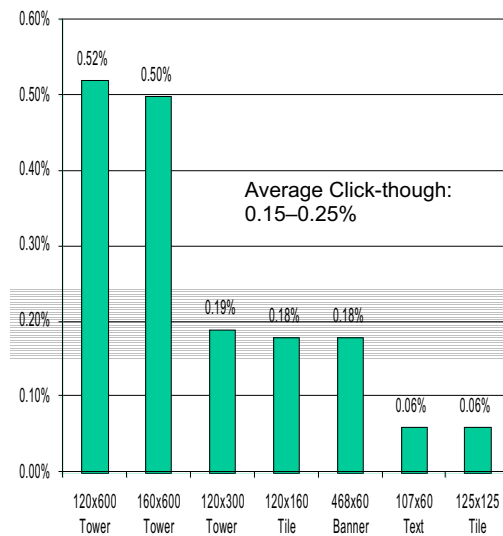
An in-museum example of the power of targeting is the increase in visits to a specific part of the Web site when marketing staff placed rack cards at the Interactive Learning Stations in the museum. In June, 2003, the MIA placed rack cards listing all ILS programs and their corresponding Web addresses at all seventeen ILS's. Immediately following the placement of the rack cards, MIA staff noticed a dramatic increase in the number of visits to the Interactive-Media page of the site, as recorded in the MIA's Web statistics. It was clear that visitors were taking the rack cards home and following up their actual visit with a virtual visit! In this way, through cross marketing, technology can be the medium to extend the museum into people's homes and busy lives. Staff have also reported that immediately after stories featuring the museum's online programs and rich content appear, there is a marked increase in the number of visits to that portion of our Web site.

Finally, we added a Press Room to the Web site, with information and images specifically targeted to the interests and needs of the media. The Press Room is directly accessed about 2500 times per month.

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.



Click-Through Rates by Unit Size



Source: Haworth Marketing and Media

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.

Online advertising did not appear to be an efficient way to drive museum attendance. Marketing staff tracked 2 for 1 ticket discount offers delivered via the Web site and found very low through-the-door redemption. Staff concluded that the millions of impressions on the Web may help generate awareness and build the museum brand; however, the Web audience is so broad that it becomes cost inefficient compared to the costs of other, more targeted media.

Keyword advertising (e.g., on google.com) was an inefficient use of money and staff time. One of the Marketing Department's most interesting experiments was the purchase of key-word advertising on *google.com*. MIA staff purchased "ad words" on Google but discovered that these ads are not a high volume proposition with a "product" like art, which appeals to only a subset of the full Internet audience. The MIA's ads were suspended by Google because they did not achieve Google's minimum click-through rate. This experience further illustrates the difficulty of using a national search engine to promote something that is primarily a locally driven product or service. On a positive note regarding buying "ad words" on Google, marketing staff discovered that in most cases when they narrowed the search terms, the MIA was within the first three to five sites listed. This further confirmed that a purchased ad is of minimal value.

Future Directions for Technology Marketing

The MIA's marketing staff will continue to implement the tactics that were successful during the *What Clicks?* project. They will continue to experiment with online advertising, honing messages and trying new sites and new offers, with a general goal of increasing awareness for the museum and its programs. Having learned a great deal about Web advertising, staff is positioned to test other tactics such as the incorporation of a direct e-mail component to media buys and creating the museum's own opt-in e-mail group list and sending personalized e-mail offers to those who have identified themselves as interested in receiving such offers.

