

ISSUE SEVEN

LIMITED USE OF 21ST CENTURY MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Some Oregon heritage organizations are using 21st century marketing strategies that have revolutionized public relations, marketing and advocacy during the past decade. However, until significantly more adopt those strategies, engaging a growing population will be difficult.

Only a few heritage organizations use new media (or social media as it is sometimes incompletely called) and marketing through other organizations. Some reach out to the public rather than creating programs in a vacuum. However, few have made a full operations shift that demonstrates and communicates their value to local, regional and international constituents through their marketing and communications.

Most significantly, there is no statewide strategy or message about the characteristics and value of Oregon heritage to Oregonians.

NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Museum leaders across the country are searching for ways to demonstrate their value to their audience. “In some cases, that means engaging with people where they are already congregating and sharing information online,” says Allison Lazar, formerly with the Western Museums Association. “In other cases, it means offering activities that are important to people but would normally not occur in a museum space. Marketing and special promotions also play a role in this new approach, offering people a free or an inexpensive refuge from the trials of economic hardship or unemployment.”

FEW EMBRACE ONLINE POTENTIAL

A 2008 Institute of Museum and Library Services study estimated the number of online museum visits at 542 million, a number that far exceeds in-person visits. The museums’ goals with these virtual visits, according to one communications expert, should be “increasing dialogue between the community and the museum itself.”



Warm Springs

“There is a dire need for appreciation, awareness and support (fiscal and manpower) from citizens of all ages, and more importantly, from the policy makers in city, county and state government - a bottom to top state-wide advocacy blitz!”

- Peggy Sigler, Oregon field representative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Oregon heritage organizations use more traditional and outdated methods for marketing and outreach. Some do not even use the Internet.

In fact, a December 2009 survey of 50 historical society and museum websites in Oregon showed few museums embracing 21st century online marketing strategies. Only 78 percent of the museums and historical societies had a website and most of those had few ways to engage visitors. Of those sites:

- 76 percent had no e-commerce features.
- Only 55 percent had at least three useful links to other heritage organizations and resources.
- Only 11 percent used a form of new media (RSS feeds, Facebook, My Space, Twitter, etc. This percentage has increased since the study was completed.)
- Only 18 percent featured interactive resources for the user
- Only 18 percent provided opportunities to donate online to their respective organizations.
- Only 18 percent possessed online member services (for e.g., ability to purchase memberships, event tickets.

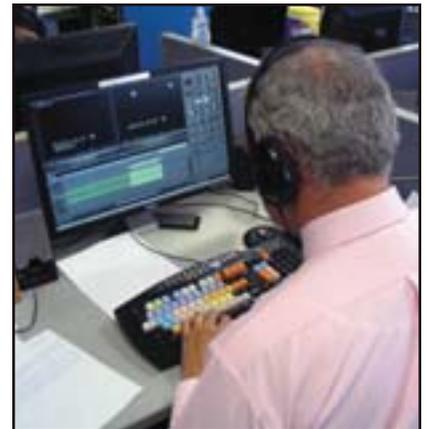
While 11 percent of responding museums said they intend to launch a new website or online presence in the next three years, cross marketing opportunities with other museums and historical societies are just beginning.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW APPROACHES

Many involved in heritage see opportunities to engage the public. Among 11 states of similar population size to Oregon, the second most identified opportunity within state historic preservation plans is a growing public interest in historic preservation and planning. Educating the public about the economic, social and educational benefits of historic preservation is the most desired form of state assistance for encouraging public interest, according to the Heritage Assessment Survey.

As one survey respondent said, “museums and heritage tourism sites need to be more interactive and diverse for a public that does not have as long an attention span as in years past.”

Yet the surveys showed heritage organizations are looking more to traditional partners such as government agencies and newspapers than to new relationships with other museums, cultural organizations, businesses, tourism organizations, or others. And with budgetary challenges



Media in action

SPREADING THE WORD

Respondents to the Heritage Assessment Survey said they favor press releases (15%), newsletters and mailings (14%), and direct communication with city, county and state government representatives (12%) over interactive websites (8%), joint marketing with other heritage organizations (6%), and working with the local tourism commission to develop cultural tourism programs (4%).

“If I just market myself, we won’t be any more or less significant. However if I am able to raise the image of heritage, it will raise the prominence of all the heritage sites, including my own.”

- Peter Booth, executive director, Willamette Heritage Center.



Pacific Railroad Preservation Association

affecting most heritage organizations, 21 percent reported reducing their community outreach and marketing in the last three years as a cost-saving measure.

“Outreach is critical. That is one area where we have really had to cut back; it takes so much staff time to do outreach. And that’s an area where we’ve had to put it on the backburner until we get stronger funding,” said Janeanne Upp at The High Desert Museum in Bend.

THE BENEFITS OF A NEW REALITY

Some heritage organizations are employing contemporary marketing and communication tools. The City of Portland Archives, according to archivist Diana Banning, is “working to try and meet more contemporary needs...we now have a Twitter account, we have a blog, and our web pages have been revamped to be more user-friendly. We are trying to find reasonable and useful ways to get our information out there.”

She added that archives need to “send the message that archives are not just for scholars and are institutions that everyone can use. We are working to introduce more people to the archives, using fun events like the Archives Crawl, so we can convey to them that these are their records and demonstrate ways in which they can use them.”