Web 2.0 Implementation in the Applied Bitola Museum

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ABSTRACT: *In the document on Web 2.0 Strategies for Bitola, the authors shared the strategies they have implemented in Bitola. The project began in 2010 and has already proven a successful marketing tool. The authors witnessed an increase in the number of visitors, a higher level of communication, and a more positive public image of the museum.*

1. Introduction

The permanent exhibition in the Bitola museum was renovated and reopened in the end of 2009. It is one of the largest and richest museum collections in Republic of Macedonia, chronologically describing the history of the Bitola region. As soon the exhibit was presented, an appropriate strategy was developed, toward the popularization of the museum and its activities.

The evolution of the internet technologies and introduction of Web 2.0, have opened a whole new realm of opportunities towards the increased operational effectiveness of the museums. Web 2.0 refers to the transition from static HTML web pages to a more dynamic, second generation of the World Wide Web, where people could collaborate and share information online. This introduces a new moment in the current practices of the museum, influencing many changes in the decision

making processes, influenced by the constantly monitored public opinion.

Also another advantage of this kind of approach is more "friendlier" image of the museum, resulting with increased number of collaboration projects and cooperation with the public on many levels.

According to many experts, the Bitola museum is the leader in the area of innovative approach, aimed towards popularization of the cultural heritage in Republic of Macedonia.

2. NI Institute and Museum Bitola

The Institute for protection of cultural monuments and Museum Bitola is a national museum institution which main goal is the protection, systematization, scientific processing and presentation of the cultural heritage in the Municipality of Bitola and the nearest regions.

It is the largest museum in South West region of Republic of Macedonia and first museum institution, awarded as "The Best Museum" by Macedonian National Committee of ICOM in 2010. The Municipality of Bitola also awarded the Museum as "The Best Cultural Institution in 2010".

The main reason for these awards was the new established permanent exhibition, which is among the richest museum collections in Republic of Macedonia.

In the framework of the Institute and Museum of Bitola the following edifices are included:

• The Museum building - Old Barrack,

• Archeological site Heraclea Lyncestis,

• Art gallery (Yeni Mosque),

• Hajdar Kady Mosque,

• Memorial House of Goce Delcev

• Memorial House of Stevan Naumov Stiv

• Memorial museum in village Smilevo

• The Magaza gallery

In 2010 the museum started several innovative projects, with main goal is to increase its operational effectiveness. The digitization program, the modernized website and the social media activities, made this museum the first candidate from Macedonia, nominated for the prestigious *EMA* Micheletti award in 2012.

3. Museums and Web 2.0

It is a fact that museums are constantly struggling with the decline in the number of visits and reduced interest in their activities. The evolution of the internet technologies has oversaturated the market with events and knowledge from all over the world, so an evident change can be recorded in the people's everyday lives. The reduced interest for the museums exhibits and activities can also be contributed to the old fashioned rigid approach of the cultural heritage presentation and the lack of appropriate marketing strategies.

Many museum activities are created not having any kind of market research or user survey, but based only on the curator's idea. This also is the case with the museum exhibits, where the curators often have an abundance of objects which they want to present in the exhibit, but there is always the constraint of space and money. In some way this can be categorized as "telling

the curator's version of the story", which can be good or bad but never complete.

Figure 1. NI Institute and Museum Bitola

How visitors are experiencing the exhibits and can they contribute in some way, are the factors that are many times neglected.

The modern technologies had in great deal influenced the peoples life's and also have introduced many new ways of cultural heritage presentation and visitor collaboration.

According to *ICOM*, "Museum is non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment". [1]

Figure 2. A tag cloud (a typical Web 2.0 phenomenon in itself) presenting Web 2.0 themes

Having this definition in mind, the museums must use all the available means and technologies in order to be successful in all previously mentioned areas. With the information age, many museums along with all other type of information have gradually moved from real into virtual space.

Many critics have argued that museums need to move from merely supplying information to providing usable knowledge and tools that enable visitors to explore their own ideas and reach their own conclusions [2]. This argument seems especially relevant today, when technology gives individuals access to communication, information gathering and analysis.

The evolution of the internet technologies and introduction of Web 2.0, is opening a whole new realm of opportunities towards the increased operational effectiveness of the museums.

Web 2.0 is a set of economic, social, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet—a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects. [3]

Basically Web 2.0 refers to the transition from static HTML web pages to a more dynamic, second generation of the World Wide Web, where people could collaborate and share information online.

There have been many successful examples where the implementation of the new techniques, have increased the quality of work of the museums. The Bitola museum is one such example, this kind of strategy, resulted with many benefits for the museum.

4. The Bitola Museum Website

The old website of the Bitola museum existed since 1999 and it was static HTML website offering only one way presentation of the museum.

In 2006 for the first time in Republic of Macedonia, the "Virtual exhibits" were presented, offering new approach towards the presentation of the cultural heritage. The virtual exhibits have proved themselves as a successful tool, resulting with increased number of "online" and "real" visits to the museum.

With the introduction of the new museum exhibit and the necessity of its adequate presentation, new strategy was developed, based on the proven virtual technologies, supported by the use of Web 2.0. The new website of the Bitola museum was presented at the beginning 2010.

Figure 3. The web site of the Bitola museum (www.bitolamuseum.org)

According to the website statistics, as predicted most visited sections from the start were the virtual tours, photo galleries, the permanent, temporary exhibitions and the educational section.

It was also noticed that large quantities of website traffic come from the social media, facebook especially. By analysis of these visits, it was determined that users were also significantly contributing to the quality of the published data. People were viewing, sharing and commenting the various sections of the website, constantly contributing towards the quality of the published content.

5. The Bitola Museum on Facebook

Being on the Internet is not just having a website. Almost every company today has a Facebook profile or a Twitter account in order to stay in touch with its clients. With estimated 1.2 billion users, the social media sites represent a significant tool for promotion of the companies, their products and activities.

However, Web 2.0 is not only about social connections or promotion. Constantly evolving, the Web 2.0 technologies provide new smart and interactive formats to show information.

Social media is not just about opening up another marketing channel. It enables customer participation on many levels. For museums, it offers various ways to support the museum experience and even to extend it beyond the actual visit. It is not about virtualizing the museum, but about developing new models of participation and feedback [4]

With more than 830 million users Facebook is the most used social media site, and it was the first choice for social profile for the Bitola museum.

In Republic of Macedonia the number of facebook users in March 2012 was 936 300, or 49,15 % of the total population and 88,55 % of the internet users [5]. According to Social Bakers, more than 50% of the facebook users are under the age of 34, which is target group for many museums. It is known fact that the younger population is spending less time visiting the museums, so new approaches must be developed in order to popularize the cultural heritage.
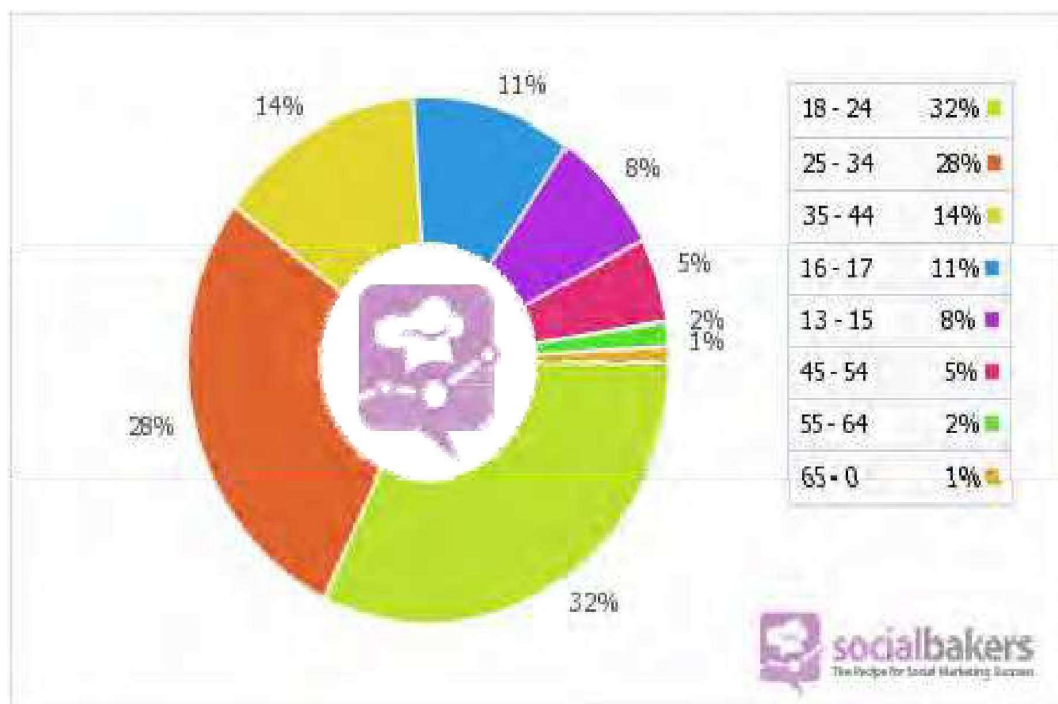

Figure 4. User age distribution on Facebook in Macedonia

Figure 5. Facebook profile of the Bitola museum

The facebook profile of the Bitola museum was created the same time when the website was launched. At first it was used as a tool for boosting the website traffic, but the preliminary results uncovered its true potential.

Small test was conducted, where one photo gallery form the website was shared as external link, compared to the same photos from the gallery uploaded and shared as album on facebook. The first approach resulted in increased number of visits on the website but with no comments. The facebook album was consecutively shared, but also individual images were tagged

Figure 6. Donated photo from the online friends

and commented. By analysis of the facebook album valuable information was gathered concerning the content of the photos, but also on the visitor's behavior. For example, some photos were shared and commented more than others, meaning they were more interesting to the public.

Soon after all the galleries and videos were transferred to the facebook account, which made this account very popular and generated large circle of friends in a short time. This is also another advantage of the use of social media, creation of circle of friends with similar interests. The online friends are not limited by the place and time barrier. For example city like Bitola has a very large scientific and nonscientific community outside its borders, holding large quantity of knowledge and assets in different areas.

Also trough the analysis of the comments, it was determined that in some areas of interest a large quantity information was contained in the "normal" users also. Either in form of historical fact they have witnessed, some person they knew or a story they have heard.

Figure 6 is good example of the benefits of using Web 2.0 strategies, since it is photo donated to the museum by facebook friend. The photo also carries the facebook tags of many members, friends and relatives of the team and complete list of names of all team members.

The facebook approach proved as complete success and soon after new quizzes and educational games were developed, which embraced the user interactivity with the museum. In some way this created more "friendly" image of the museum, resulting with more users donating images to the museum.

During the campaign "Bitola then and now", more than thousand old photos were collected by the museum from the online friends. More than 70 % of these photos were new for the museum and as a result of this campaign temporary exhibition was organized in occasion of the day of liberation of Bitola – 4th November.

Trough the online communication the museum gathered a large quantity of new information and managed significantly to increase its inventory trough donations and acquisitions.

The online friends have accepted with great pleasure this new approach and many of them have contacted the museum concerning different matters. Based on this communication a large quantity of new ideas have evolved, which are constantly implemented by the museum. According to many experts, the Bitola museum is the leader in the area of innovative approach in Republic of Macedonia

The number of visitors is increased thanks to the different types of educational and interactive programs for all categories and excellence promotion in the media and International fairs.

6. Educational Workshop : "Museum Detective"

The museum of Bitola has significant experience in the organization of educational games and activities for the younger audience. In 2011 new project was conducted, aimed towards the education and familiarization of the museum by the young audience. Those educational workshops are part of long-term project "Learning about us"

The main goal of the "Museum detective" was to provoke the participants to be interactive using different types of techniques and gain knowledge about the cultural heritage (during the "game").

Before the task all participants attended lectures according to their age and the possibilities for further research were presented to them. They were divided in groups and every group had received a task to locate specific object from the museum exhibition. The museum collection of the Bitola museum is among the richest in Republic of Macedonia with abundance of objects. Having in mind the competition aspect of the game, it was determined later that the participants who did pre-game online research, were more successful than their competitors. A large number of participants were involved in these workshops and even greater interest is recorded for the second phase planned for May 2012.

This project resulted with some interesting conclusions, or expressed trough statistics:

• In the following 4 months 35 % more primary and secondary school visits were recorded in the museum, than the same period in 2010

• 78 % of the participants have visited the museum before the workshops to learn more

• 92 % have used the museum web site before the workshops

• 92 % wanted to continue with workshops and to be involved for the next year

• All of the participants had facebook profile and more than 70 % have shared their museum activity on their profile

• More than 70 % of schools asked for extra workshop on other subject (art, geography…)

• More than 80 % of the participants have never been in a museum before the workshops

• More than 40 % of the participants, claimed that their close relative or friend have visited the museum on their suggestion after the workshop.

After the workshop a meeting was held with the participants, where the mutual experience was shared. Many of the participants said they liked the Web 2.0 activities implemented by the museum and today some of them are also among the most active participants and supporters. According to them, "The Bitola museum represents an excellent place for cultural heritage education and sometimes fun by participating in the online quizzes".

7. Conclusion

It is evident that the new internet technologies have changed the people's everyday lives. If the museums want to be successful in their work, they are left with only two choices: to resist the changes and have only minor individual efforts in this area, or to embrace the new technologies and make the required organizational change. The benefits of the second approach are evident in many fields of the museum work and significantly increase the quality of work in the museums.

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