

THE USE OF THE INTERNET FOR THE PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PRESS WORK OF THE STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN - PREUßISCHER KULTURBESITZ

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As well as the classic tasks of museums, those of collecting, keeping and recording, they also have an educational task to fulfill with the presentation of their collections. The mediation of knowledge and culture, the leading to seeing and discovering, that is, in the broader sense, the task of prime importance of museum educational theory. It is on the agenda to employ the educational potential of the museums in a more targetted way. For this reason, museum educationalists are trying to "save" the museum's treasures, adapted in different ways, for different target groups. Museum objects need the necessary mediation in order to be brought closer to the public.

The office for press and public affairs, as well as the museums, is responsible for the education and public relations work of the state museums. Museum educationalists plan, organise and design the museum's educational offers and projects for the, in total, seventeen collections for the public. In order for these offers to be accepted they have to reach every single one. Thus the educational content must be advertised in diverse ways. For this reason, the public relations work and educational work are setting up one entity.

Public relations work as an instrument of communication, comprises of the planning, organisation, implementation and control of the activities, so as to successfully attract the chosen target groups to the content of the museums. As well as the classic forms of advertising, (printed media, radio, television, posters, flyers...) advertising within the arena of the new media, particularly in the Internet, plays a special role. The Internet can support the press and publicity work of the museums in a useful way. As well as information which is accesible for everyone, special offers should also be made available for specific target groups, for example journalists.

In the Internet, mediation, education and advertising can be brought together well. The advantage is that a direct communication can also develop in the area of education.

Internet: <http://www.smb.spk-berlin.de>

Targets and target groups

It is the aim of the public relations and educational work of the museums to also find an adequate form in the modern information media like the Internet. The rich museum permanence offers a wealth of content which could be gradually prepared for the Internet according to the desired target group. It is an important aim to develop an editorially controlled information system with various information areas and interactive contributions in order to be able to manage and actualise the system over a long period.

The chance exists, based on the current WWW sites, to also use the medium over and above the pure information, entertainment, research and publication medium, for further areas of the museum's work. In the long term the system must offer the possibility of the integration of content, which connects different areas (e.g. libraries, archives, museums). Interdisciplinary relations between the collections could be made available, material for the preparation and evaluation of museum visits prepared and data bases offered. Therein lies a great potential which offers advantages both for the SMPK and for many users. A useful deployment of multimedia technology cannot be acheived by the tautologiacal depiction of the museum in the digital sphere. We do not want a virtual museum, but to wake the interests of the visitors and entice them into the museum.

It was the aim of the present Internet presence to provide a basic offer, that can be built upon, with information on the collections. A general platform was to be created for the different museums which belong to the state museums of Berlin. The historic connections of the museums should be clarified. At the same time it must be discernible which museums and establishments belong to the state museums. That is why the sites resemble each other both structurally and in content. (However, at the moment this is not yet a matter of the homepage of the respective museums! They are planned for the additional extension.)

The present Internet sites of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin were conceived in the broader sense for those generally interested, that means not aesthetically modelled museum visitors, but for those interested in art and culture from around the world, tourists to Berlin, travel groups, magazine publishers, teachers and pupils. The additional planning schedules sites for journalists, pupils of different classes, teachers and students. The homepages of the separate collections must also be developed so that the curators can use it, above all the academic communication.

Within the additional development, a comprehensive offer of museum educational content will be prepared which is suitable for the internet. There is a chance of employing the educational potential of the museums in a more targeted way, in the sphere of a museum educational net with different parts and also more general themes. The academic acquirement of multimedia museum educational information systems is specifically orientated towards the viewable collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The museum educational theory of the office for press and publicity of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz has also operated for a long time with the popular academic preparation of collection areas and research results, as well as the preparation of teaching material. Due to this work of the SMPK extensive material already exists which is aimed towards multimedia conversion. The quantity of current exhibits, documents, historical film and tape recordings, models, cards, plans and photo documentatio, the copyright of the majority of which are at the SMPK, form the foundation of the project.

The project is planned as an independent system from the WWW-sites of the SMPK. It will have its own Internet address and appearance (CD/CI). In the features which have already been produced, a contact with the museum's educational contents is indicated as an example and a possible transplantation of the museum's educational net is referred to.

In order to offer the users a clear choice of different possibilities, the information for the particular target groups in different areas must be accesible. This requires an organisation and structuring of contents, a forward looking strucural diagram must be drawn up. (Bad information structures frustrate the users and has a lasting effect on the opinion of the institution.) A well thought through construction of the navigation systems and linking up of the sites, a so-called metaconcept, has therefore, a positive efect on the user and retrospectively on the reputation of the museum. Some Internet users search for information in a structured way, that means they know what they are looking for, others on the other hand, surf the net and stumble rather by chance on sites and linger when the offer seems particularly attractive. Also due to content, logistical and structural reasons, it does not make sense to offer standard information areas, as this would soon lead to confusion and chaos. The data and information which is to be mediated must be caliberated for different areas, that means the paths of information range from short information, to longer texts as well as to essays for downloading.

Press and public relations work

A structured press campaign can decisively support the public relation work. The prerequisite for a successful press campaign is a press hand-out orientated towards the medium as well as a carefully aimed use of press announcements. In order to achieve a high press response to the internet entrance of the SMPK, a subtly differentiated use of different forms of communication is planned.

As well as an online press hand-out which refers to the most recent changes and the contents of the site, is the sending out of a press portfolio with extensive information and material on the internet entrance in its preparatory phase. In this way the compiling of press material will be specially prepared for the various target groups of the newspapers and magazines.

In order to raise the awareness levels of the sites and to symbolise the integration between the public relations work and the internet entry, it makes sense to put the internet addresses on posters, flyers, press announcements, writing paper and business cards. This form of integration of digital and analogue communication means, permits an integral communication with the target groups.

A catchy internet address (or even several) should be introduced next to the current address for marketing reasons and for the purpose of advertising. This can extensively increase the number of visitors if employed and aimed as advertising (e.g. advertising on buses, posters and ads).

Mouth-to-mouth propaganda is also used in the marketing area as an effective instrument of communication, as with this is also the possibility of the opening up of target groups, who will not be immediately addressed through the measures of advertising and the press. For this reason the internet addresses should be easy to remember and above all communicable (also by telephone).

The registration of different internet addresses, which because of their naming are directly referred to the museums, also increase the number of visitors, especially as many internet users find their way to their desired site firstly by the trial and error path and only access after three or four failed attempts on the search engine.

The sending of interactive postcards in the internet is a special measure specifically for advertising. This form of advertising is specifically aimed at the internet user. It especially offers itself within the framework of exhibitions of which features are constructed. The motif of the postcard refers to the exhibition and can be sent to every user who has a familiar Email address. This advertising measure also enables the opening up of secondary target groups, who possibly only become aware of the state museums through the postcard on the internet site. The purpose of this postcard is left up to every user, the advertising message will be passed on by the motif.

Summary

Based on a wideranging area of responsibility, the internet offers the possibility of a subtly differentiated and sensitive discussion not only with the contents, but also with the corresponding target groups. The internet is above all a medium of publication, which carries the work of the museum to the outside world, as well as a medium of information and research. Links between the collections could be created which would otherwise not be apparent. The broad spectrum of the possibilities of using the internet as a supporting means for the press and public relations becomes clear from the diversity of interaction.

Finally some points to summarize:

- The organisation and use of the press system in the internet entrance of the SMPK as well as the specific advertising means for special exhibitions in the online area could effectively support the work of the press and public relations.
- The internet offer as an instrument of public relation work enables a dialogue with the users thereby achieving a high level of feedback.
- A museum educational net in the internet could make an important contribution to the education and public relations work of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and altogether to the society of information in Berlin.
- Multimedia applications are a further useful and wide educational supplement to the present adaptation of the context of the original, i.e. in the classical sense of the museum. A sensible use of the interactive multimedia applications can put the art works in a vivid context and help the visit to the museum become a "successful experience."
- Multimedia which goes with the museum makes sense in particular where works of art require an integration in their original context and where media up until now has not been sufficient to depict the context vividly and all-embracingly.
- Museums must provide new modern technology and the internet and bear in mind the expectations of the visitors.
- The internet offers the user a lot of information quickly and cheaply and can in this way attract new visitors to the museums.