Dulwich OnView: A Museum Blog Run by the Community for the Community

Alison H.Y. Liu**, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan;** Sarah McDaid**, London South Bank University;** Jonathan P. Bowen**, University of Westminster; and** Ingrid Beazley**, Dulwich Picture Gallery, United Kingdom**

http://dulwichonview.org.uk

Abstract

Dulwich OnView (DOV) is an on-line blog magazine associated with the Dulwich Picture Gallery (DPG) in south London. Uniquely, it has been set up by some Friends of DPG in the local community, with a symbiotic relationship between that community and the museum. DPG benefits from the marketing and publicity generated by DOV. DOV benefits from the status that DPG brings to it. This paper explores recent developments of DOV in the context of its community, including a study based on the Community of Practice (CoP) approach and a usability review for a planned redesign of the Web site.

Keywords: art museum, blogging, social networking, virtual community, on-line magazine, Web design

1. Introduction

Dulwich OnView (DOV) is a unique example of a museum blog run by volunteers from its Friends and the local community, with posts about both. This combination increases exposure and interest in the museum (*Dulwich Picture Gallery* in southeast London, UK), attracting new audiences. It uses very little staff time and comes at no financial cost. As Dulwich Picture Gallery (DPG) is often perceived as traditional and conservative, Dulwich OnView has helped to counteract this image and set the Gallery in the context of a local community that loves and supports it.

The authors believe that DOV is unique and different from a regular museum blog in the following ways:

1. It is independent from the museum. DOV is run by the community for the community, and with DPG at its heart, it renders it a sense of belonging within the local area and part of people's everyday lives.
2. It is discovered by people not looking for (and perhaps not knowing about) DPG (analysis of search terms), who are then introduced to the Gallery through the associated articles and numerous links (analysis of Web traffic).
3. It is not dominated/controlled by official authority, whist still benefiting from formal recognition and support from the museum – which makes the contents created by independent volunteers, more believable and able to win public trust and further involvement from the local community.
4. It uses no DPG resources and staff is under no pressure to submit regularly (the director writes or comments about every two months). The minimal costs incurred by the editors are covered by sponsorship, and all contributors are volunteers, so this promotional tool comes at no cost at all.
5. It encourages anyone to contribute content. Although a limited number have editorial access, hundreds have written/photographed/made films for this hybrid blog/magazine. Consisting of many voices, it has a very wide appeal.
6. Contributors come from a far wider demographic than the visitors to DPG. These contributors tell their peers about their article (evidence in numbers of comments), who then in turn discover DPG.

This paper presents the following aspects of DOV:

1. An introduction and overview of DOV and its unique aspects.
2. The background of DOV, progress of the blog over the last two years since it was launched (Beazley, 2008a), including statistical evidence collected and correlated from the DOV and DPG Web sites and what this can indicate about the benefits of DOV to DPG.
3. A wider study for a PhD thesis, investigating a number of varied museum-based virtual communities in

an art education context using the social science *Community of Practice* (CoP) framework.

4. A redesign of the blog, aimed at a better structuring of the increasing number of articles into categories and the integration of the more formal and static DPG Web site (http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk) and the more informal and dynamic DOV Web site, with suitable interconnecting links. As part of the redesign process for the DOV Web site, a usability review has been conducted.

5. Some overall conclusions on running of DOV and lessons for the future.

2. Background and Progress

The village of Dulwich in south London has had a powerful sense of community since the days of Edward Alleyn (1566 - 1626, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Alleyn), an Elizabethan actor and founder of Dulwich College. In 1811, Sir Peter Francis Bourgeois left his significant collection of paintings to Dulwich College with instructions that they should be available to be viewed by the public. These comprise the core of the present permanent collection at DPG. Sir John Soane designed what was the first public art gallery in England and which receives very strong and loyal local community support.

As the Web has expanded and interactive facilities have improved, social interaction on-line has increased rapidly over the last decade. Initially much of the interaction was professional in nature (Bowen et al., 2003). Individual cultural institutions, including museums, have tried to harness this technology for their own ends in engaging with their audiences, but with varying success (Beler et al., 2004; Russo & Watkins, 2008). Such facilities have even been used for collaborative artistic endeavors (Smith, 2009). Experimentation is all very well initially, but sustaining such audiences has proved more difficult unless the right motivation to revisit can be found (Russo & Peacock, 2009).

There are a number of different Web 2.0 technologies available for collaborative support. For example, wikis are a suitable technology for projects that involve collaboration and have been utilized in a museum context in interesting and varied ways, even if to a limited extent so far (Bowen et al., 2007 & 2008). Blogs are more suitable for an ongoing magazine-like facility depending on a temporal ordering of article and associated comments. For a developing virtual community, this is an appropriate technology to use as a basis for support facilities.

The Dulwich OnView (DOV) on-line blog magazine (see Figure 1) has grown out of this very strong community atmosphere. (Indeed, Dulwich still has the feeling of a village without the suburban expanse of southeast London). It was last presented at the *Museums and the Web* conference in 2008 (Beazley, 2008a & 2008b). In this section, a number of the developments since then are presented. It is sometimes seen as an 'unofficial' museum Web site (Beazley 2009), and this informality has allowed the site to be a thriving and dynamic facility for the local community in Dulwich, with a strong connection to DPG.

DULWICH ONVIEW

celebrating people and culture in the Dulwich area

Feeds: Posts Comments

So much Italian flavour in Dulwich Picture Gallery!
April 14, 2009 by annadibrina | Edit

I feel at home, as usual, in Dulwich Picture Gallery, in this late, warm April morning.

And it is not only because here are permanently displayed some Italian masterpieces, but also because Italy seems to be a recurrent thread within many of its exhibitions at the moment.
So it is, that in these rooms, I comfortably pass from the beautiful and rich display of *Sickert in Venice*, to the magnificent reunion of the Veronese's *Petrobelli Altarpiece*. And I feel as I have never left my country.

Walter Sickert, The Rialto, courtesy of

PUBLISHED TUESDAYS & FRIDAYS

WHAT IS DOV DOING?

Dulwich Festival - Michael Morpurgo has given an interview - up on Friday 20 hours ago
Dulwich Festival: A solo walk across Africa: Inspired by the legendary crossings of the great explorers, Fran Sa.. http://tinyurl.com /d5xdk8 1 day ago
Ruskin Walks His Dog, part two: The burnings of Crystal Palace and Ruskin's women By Bruce Gregory 'Here's.. http://tinyurl.com/d4zr5o 1 day ago

Fig 1: Dulwich OnView homepage (http://dulwichonview.org.uk)

Statistical information

The site went live in January 2008 and has seen steadily increasing visitor numbers since then (see Figure 2). It can be noted that December and January are slightly quieter months each year.
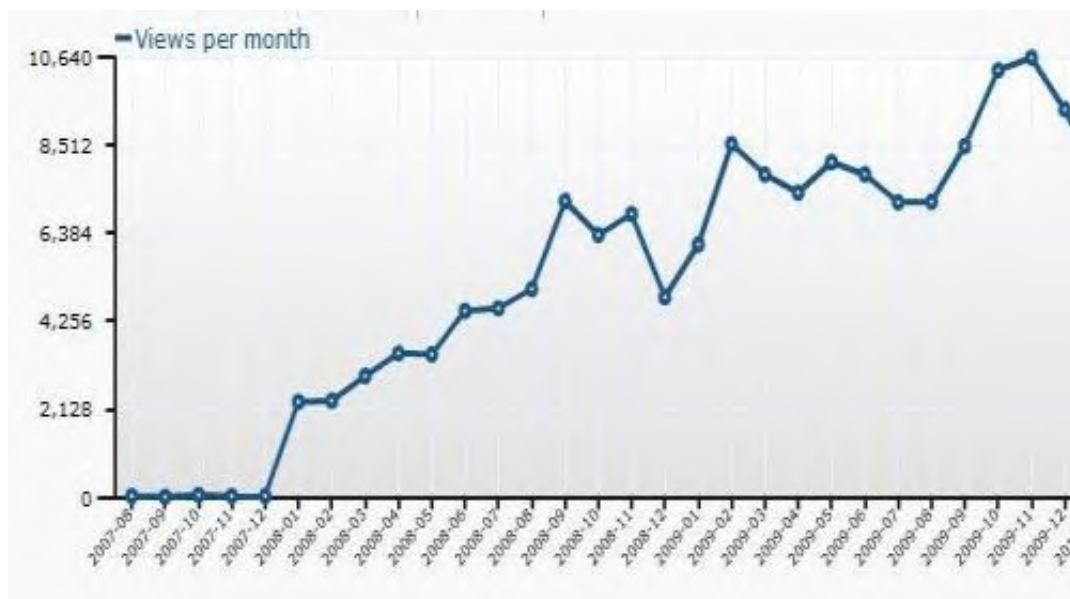
Fig 2: Dulwich OnView views per month.

With regard to search terms, "Dulwich OnView" and variants are not the most popular keywords. In fact, "flamenco" is top with 22%. There are articles on flamenco (for example, see http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/03/07/flamenco-and-film-at-dulwich-picture-gallery/), and it is likely that this page has been linked from another popular Web site or published in some effective way. There are also flamenco-related Web pages on the DPG Web site. The second most popular search term is four variants of "St

Sebastian", at 18%. There is an article on "Selling St. Sebastian" by the DPG shop manager on DOV (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/04/22/selling-st-sebastian/). Variants of "Dulwich On View" are only the third most popular search term at 11%. Explicit searches for DOV have increased with time. The term "Dulwich Picture Gallery" is substantially down the list of popular keywords at 2%. Even though 98% of visitors arriving at the DOV Web site through a search have not selected "Dulwich Picture Gallery", 33% of onward clicks go to DPG, which is a free benefit for the Gallery.

Regarding visitors, 28% arrive at DOV through reciprocal links from organizations about which DOV has written articles; 25% come from local information Web sites and discussion forums; 14% arrive from the main DPG Web site via many different links to DOV articles on the site; 12% are from other blogs; and 9% from Facebook (e.g., see GalleryFilm at Dulwich Picture Gallery – http://www.facebook.com/group.php? gid=2446446018); 4% from Flickr (e.g., see Dulwich Picture Gallery flickr Friends – http://www.flickr.com/groups/dulwichpicturegallery/); and 2% from Twitter (see http://twitter.com/dulwichonview). A Wikipedia page from DOV was created in August 2009, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dulwich_OnView) and 3% of visitors have come from this source, even though it is a more recent addition.

There are many outgoing links on DOV. As mentioned above, 33% of outgoing visitors follow a link to the DPG main Web site or Flickr site; 20% go to the DPG home page, the what's on page or an exhibition page; the other 13% go to Flickr. The figure of 33% travelling from DOV to DPG compares to 14% in the opposite direction.

Evolving contributors

DOV has many people involved to a greater or lesser extent with its running (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/about/). There are two interns working for it, one of whom continues to edit even though she has moved to Brussels. The other is a third year student in Arts Management at London South Bank University, and her work with DOV is part of her coursework. One school girl has written some articles before returning to school. Other contributors have included school leavers about to start university and young people wishing to work in illustration, who provide material for articles (e.g., see http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2009/10/13/conker-those-autumn-blues-by-erica-green-green-light-lifestyles/). DOV acts as a platform for three authors and two professional photographers.

Overall, contributors find their involvement in DOV to be an enjoyable experience. There is good community spirit, and off-line friendships are formed directly as a result of involvement. The magazine is managed in an informal way, often in social environments (see Figures 3 and 4). For writers, it is a good place to experiment with new material and writing styles. More recently, there have been a larger number of regular authors, but each of them with less commitment. It has become more difficult to find editorial support; a new generation of interested volunteers would help to continue and develop the project.

Fig 3: Some of the DOV team at a meeting in the pub.

Fig 4: An informal DOV gathering.

The importance of contributors

A pool of diverse writers is important as they represent different voices and will connect with different audiences. The diversity of topics helps to involve new readers as articles are typically passed on by the writers to their networks (e.g., see comments under http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/11/21/sexy-hemp/). DOV supports local causes and is developing a network of friends and links. For example, see an article about a new choir in the community (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/08/22/763/). The author of the article sent it to all the members of the choir, an example of viral marketing.

Another example is that of a local school that has been raising money for a music centre. Children and their parents wrote five blogs about it (e.g., see http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/11/18/countdown-to-jags-art-fair/). They then told their friends. The school now has a link to the articles on DOV.

There has been an article about war veterans who were old boys of a well-known local school. Subsequently, alumni of the school have been sending the link to this article (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2009/11/06/alleyns-old-boys-wwii-casualties/) to their mailing list.

The link with DPG has helped in encouraging prestigious authors to contribute, including three museum directors (e.g., see http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/10/31/the-proximity-of-art-and-death-dulwich-picture-gallery-and-its-mausoleum/).

DOV has been increasingly promoting exhibitions by building expectations beforehand. For example, there were 13 posts on *The Polish Connection*, an exhibition at DPG (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/category/dulwich-picture-gallery/the-polish-connection-dulwich-picture-gallery/). A mural was created in the gallery and the progress was photographed on five consecutive days for DOV. DOV volunteers visited the artist's studio while he was creating the works, and this was recorded in film, text and still images for DOV and Flickr. The rehearsals for an associated dance were filmed for DOV. The Gallery staff did not have the time to do this. None of this was on the main DPG Web site, as its informality was not appropriate, but it provided insight for those interested in this aspect of the exhibition.

Articles are also used to contextualize exhibitions. DPG staff were asked by DOV to become involved, e.g., as in the *What are YOU Like?* exhibition (http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/what_are_you_like.aspx). The Director of DPG, Ian Dejardin, provided some informal insight into his interests (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/11/25/what-are-you-like-ian-dejardin-director-of-dpg/), again something that would not fit in with the ethos of the main DPG Web site.

The DOV wine reviewer often links his articles to DPG exhibitions, e.g., to the *Best of British* exhibition when he wrote about British wines (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2009/09/01/best-of-british-wines/).

The feel of DOV articles is personal, informal, chatty, warm, and welcoming. It is intended to be in keeping with blogs in general and the culture of Friends of DPG in the community. Articles have to conform to this style under editorial guidance.

Increasing recognition by DPG

DOV links to DPG with a prominent graphic included in the right-hand sidebar of all pages (see Figure 5). There are also many more specific links within individual articles concerning DPG and its activities, such as exhibitions.
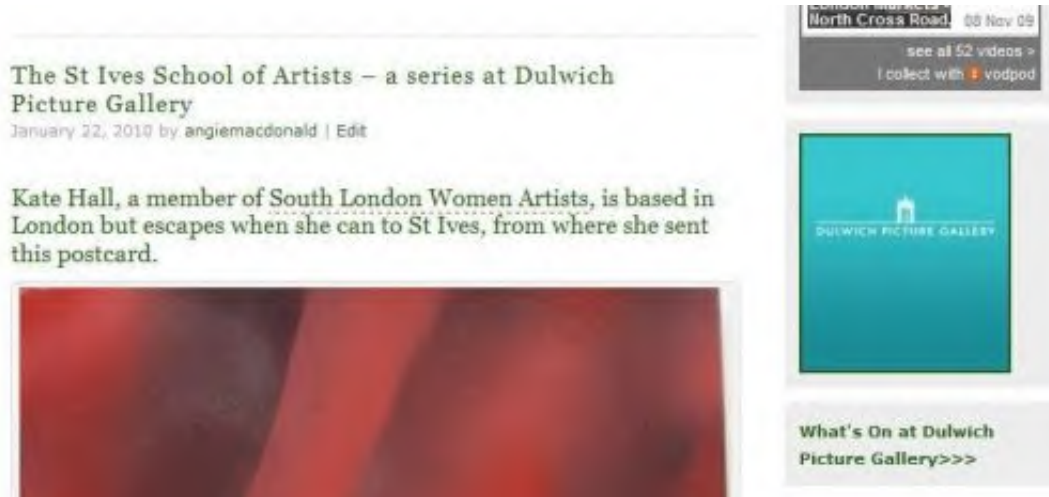

Fig 5: Dulwich OnView link to Dulwich Picture Gallery

There was initial suspicion of DOV from middle management and reluctance to create links from DPG to DOV Web sites. The management of the Web site was then moved to the Communications Department, where there was greater awareness of the benefits of social networking. About a year ago DPG set up a Facebook fan group (http://www.facebook.com/pages/London-United-Kingdom/Dulwich-Picture-Gallery/59017148002) and started to link to DOV, but deep within the Web site. Statistical analysis of Web traffic in early 2009 revealed no movement of on-line visitors from DPG to DOV.

DOV personnel requested more links, and it was decided that the visitor might be confused as to why such links existed to this external Web site. So DOV collaborated over a logo that would be next to the links with an explanation of the DOV blog in the Friends section of the DPG Web site (http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/support_us/friends_of_the_gallery.aspx). Within this section is a DOV page, linked from the sidebar menu, but still on the main DPG Web site (http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/support_us/friends_of_the_gallery/dulwich_onview.aspx in the Friends section).

It was also decided to have in the Friends section a page of links to DOV articles that were always of interest and would not go out of date. As the number increased, these were divided into category pages, including gallery staff articles (http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/support_us/friends_of_the_gallery/dulwich_onview/gallery_staff_articles.aspx), exhibition reviews, Friends events, and education, linked in a sub-menu within the sidebar (see Figure 6).

Fig 6: Dulwich Picture Gallery link to Dulwich OnView.

The Director of DPG has always been supportive of DOV, but has been keen to keep the relationship relatively loose to allow flexibility on both sides. For example, DOV included many articles that are not related to DPG, but to the local community in general. DPG gives the Director the opportunity to write informally, in a way that would not be suitable on the current DPG Web site.

Success stories

To take just one example, DOV has facilitated international research with regard to an exhibition of Chinese photographs in 2008 (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2008/07/15/chinese-whispers/). This resulted in a number of interesting responses that would have been unlikely otherwise. There are further similar examples on DOV.

Conferences and workshops

DOV personnel have participated in a number of conferences and workshops to help publicize its activities in the professional field, including a previous demonstration at the *Museums and the Web* conference in 2008 (Beazley, 2008).

In November 2008, a meeting devoted entirely to DOV was organized by the Membership Management Forum (http://www.membershipmanagementforum.org), associated with the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions. The event was attended by 44 delegates from around the United Kingdom and involved personnel from a variety of arts organizations (film, dance, music, theatre, etc.). As well as membership managers, managers involved with development, use of the Web, marketing, and patrons attended.

In December 2008, a workshop on *Social Media and Museums and Cultural Heritage* at the NODEM 08 conference in Reykjavik, Iceland, included a presentation on DOV (http://www.tii.se/nodem/conference.php?subpage=workshops).

In January 2010, at *An Introduction to Web 2.0 and the Social Web* UKOLN workshop at DPG, DOV was used

as a case study (http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/cultural-heritage/events/social-web-dulwich-2010/).

Summary

In this section, recent developments at DOV have been presented. In the next section, the activities of DOV are explored more formally in the framework of a *Community of Practice*. This concept is increasingly being applied to virtual communities as well as real communities (Varlamis & Apostolakis, 2010).

3. Community of Practice Study

Dulwich OnView has been part of a set of wider case studies for a PhD thesis conducted by one of the authors of this paper (Liu, 2008 & 2009). The thesis investigates a number of varied museum-based virtual communities using the social science *Community of Practice* (Wenger et al, 2002) as its framework. This in-depth case study includes several that are run by national museums (Liu & Bowen, 2010). DPG is relatively small-scale, but the study concludes that DOV has greatly benefited its associated museum as many of its activities conform to the principles of a Community of Practice (CoP).

The three fundamental elements of a community of practice

There are three fundamental elements forming the structural model of a CoP; namely, *domain*, *community*, and *practice*. Wenger et al (2002, p.29) state that: "When they function well together, these three elements make a community of practice an ideal knowledge structure – a social structure that can assume responsibility for developing and sharing knowledge." DOV as a virtual community to a large degree embraces these three elements that give it the potential of being cultivated as a successful community of practice.

In terms of *domain*, a CoP must have a common interest to be effective. Otherwise, it is just a collection of people with no particular purpose participating in the group. At first glance, the domain knowledge in the DOV community seems not very definite. There is a far broader variety of articles that go beyond the Gallery-related topics being included in discussions within the community, making a clearly defined domain less obvious. Nevertheless, DOV indicates in the "Who we are" Web page, "From East to West Dulwich and beyond we wanted to recognize the eclectic nature of life round here, the breadth of people and livelihoods, the rude health of the Arts, and the buoyant sense of community...". This on-line community does create a common ground that attracts local people coming to celebrate the shared culture within their physical neighborhood.

With regard to *community*, a CoP needs a group of people who are willing to engage with some others in the group, so ultimately the entire group is transitively connected as a unified entity. This aspect is critical to the effective development of shared knowledge within the community. As a hybrid blog/on-line magazine, DOV encourages everyone to contribute content to the community, including comments on articles, and has enabled many local residents to feel proud of being authors, and hence build a sense of ownership in it.

In terms of *practice*, a CoP explores existing common knowledge whilst also developing practice for the future. The term "practice" denotes a set of socially defined approaches to doing things in the shared domain that create a baseline for communication and action within the group. As the domain knowledge of DOV more or less engenders local people's emotional attachment in the Dulwich area and their motivation for participating in the community, fostering a strong sense of community that can hold continuing interactions is indeed achievable.

Developing a healthy CoP requires the interplay of these three elements within a community in a balanced manner, because they are all dynamically changing over time. Whilst it is important to have the three elements controlled to a degree in a CoP, perseverance in one element will help ease the potential problems in another. As Wenger et al. (2002, p.47) point out, "If the domain is clear and the practice is well established, then people can come and go without harming the community." Although this did happen to the DOV community at times, the whole community still has continued to evolve healthily and prosperously as time has progressed.

The seven principles of cultivating a community of practice

The success or failure of a community of practice largely depends on the objectives of the community, combined with its interests and resources. Wenger et al (2002, chap.3) have identified seven specific aspects that should be addressed to enable a CoP to flourish. Nevertheless, these principles are recurrent aspects of the life of a CoP itself, rather than external rules that are to be imposed on the community.

1. **Design for evolution**

   Because communities are built on existing networks and evolve beyond any particular design, the

purpose of a design is not to impose a structure but to help the community develop. (*Wenger et al, 2002, p.53*)

When DOV was first launched, there was already in the Dulwich area a real and strong community that has made the evolution of the virtual community possible. Historically Dulwich has had a deeply rooted local community, so everything was developed based on the existing local connections between people who have long resided in south London. When the Web technology became available, these people simply participated on-line, and developments naturally happened and progressed.

In other words, when the DOV community was incubated, it naturally attracted local people's attention as it was inherently part of their lives, rather than something imported from elsewhere. DOV would not have been successful without its original local community. Everything that is brought up and discussed on DOV, from a piece of local history to an ordinary person's sentiment, has the potential to make the community members feel involved and form a strong attachment to the area.

2. Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives

As a result of this dialogue, the people who understand the issues inside the community and have legitimacy within it are also able to see new possibilities and can effectively act as agents of change. (*Wenger et al, 2002, p.55*)

Being associated with DPG notwithstanding, the editorial team of DOV all work for the community on a voluntary basis. They are independent from the museum and have a tighter connection with the local community than the museum itself, allowing DOV to more easily incorporate outside perspectives. The prosperity of the DOV community actually has much to do with the team members' social networking life in the real world. This helps them continuously find interesting people in the wider community, with varied backgrounds, who can potentially join the DOV community and contribute articles with their own unique local stories. Very often such stories add value to DOV by injecting into the community into the community outsiders' creative ideas that may not have evolved if it was purely a museum blog.

On one hand, embracing authors from the local community helps engage their own friends to read their articles and include more comments. This indeed has opened dialogues between inside and outside perspectives as DOV serves as a channel for the local community to voice themselves. On the other hand, the increasing visibility of local people's personal stories helps them get more opportunities to improve their lives. Owing to a sense of belonging to DOV, people tend to reciprocate with their loyalties to DPG by supporting events or bringing in useful resources to enrich the museum programs.

3. Invite different levels of participation

Alive communities, whether planned or spontaneous, have a coordinator who organizes events and connects community members. But others in the community also take on leadership roles. (*Wenger et al, 2002, p.55*)

There are typically three main levels of participation in a CoP, as in DOV (see Figure 7). The first is at the heart of the community, which constitutes a core group of members who are actively involved and devote their time taking on projects. As the community develops, the core members take on more of the leadership, playing an auxiliary role to the coordinator. The principal coordinator in the DOV community, who is one of the authors of this paper, often works on encouraging members in the editorial team to take personal responsibility for the blog. The editorial team members also benefit from writing articles for some local events (e.g., free theater tickets, etc.) and they are reasonably sustained.
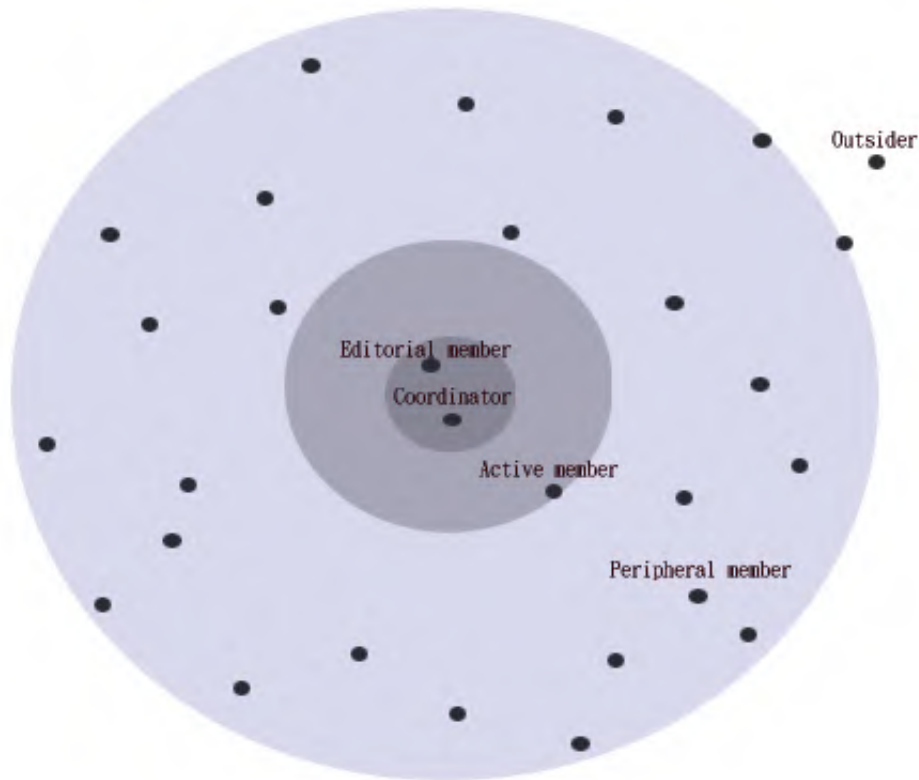
Fig 7: Degrees of participation in the DOV community.

The next level outside the core is a group of active members. As mentioned above, there have been many local people contributing articles to the DOV community. Although some of them have written no more than once and have become less involved, others have remained active in the community in a long-term manner. The active members from the local community post articles illustrating their personal pursuits, as part of a series of stories occasionally, and have also helped attract curious readers to leave comments in this eclectic community.

Outside the core and active levels is a large portion of peripheral members. They rarely contribute and normally stay on the sidelines observing what is happening in the community. The steadily growing hits on the DOV Web site may give an idea about the large size of readership. As Wenger et al (2002, p.56) explain, these peripheral members are often not as passive as we perceive, and in fact they should be seen as an essential part of a CoP. Since they mainly participate in DOV as readers, they may continue receiving information on the Web site and come to an evening party, a film club event, a walk in the local area, a lecture or concert at DPG ,and hopefully enjoy seeing the museum collection, etc. That is to say, these people are contributing in their own way with their different levels of participation in the community.

4. **Develop both public and private community spaces**

    The heart of a community is the web of relationships among community members, and much of the day-to-day occurs in one-on-one exchanges"

    (Wenger et al, 2002, p.58).

Wenger et al (2002) point out that a common mistake in designing a community is to put too much emphasis on public aspects. Individual relationships and private communication are very much worth encouraging in a CoP because they often help enrich public events in the community. In the DOV community, the coordinator often tries to organize opportunities for private interactions and informal networking during an event, or between meetings, inside or outside the community. In the Gallery Film events at DPG, for instance, participants are offered drink and snacks to mingle with each other and are invited to continue the evening after the film somewhere outside the Gallery – to foster private connections among a more limited number of people in the community.

The interplay between the public and private community spaces can also be observed in the subtle "role changing" between being an author and a reader on DOV. As mentioned above, there are many local people

participating in the DOV community as peripheral members; namely, the readers. However, their role does not necessarily remain unchanged forever. As an example, one reader who has never contributed read an article on DOV about a local cooking competition. She was inspired and had her husband enter the competition. After her husband was chosen to be the winning cook on a TV series, she decided to share this interesting experience on DOV as many of the other authors do. She changed her role from long-term reader (private) to author (public) only when the opportunity arose.

This example reveals that DOV readers, even as peripheral members having private conversations outside the community, gain their own insights by reading articles on DOV and put them to good use. These "back channel" connections, as Wenger et al (2002, p.58) describe them, actually help DOV gather momentum and are key to a successful CoP.

5.   Focus on value

A key element of designing for value is to encourage community members to be explicit about the value of the community throughout its lifetime. (*Wenger et al., 2002, p.60*)

Over the last two years of running DOV, the value of this virtual community has been widely recognized by the local people in the Dulwich area and south London. As was commented by a community member on the DOV Web site:

Hi Dulwich OnView – May this new contributor to your lively on-line magazine say how much fun it is to see his copy transferred from the page to the screen so quickly, presented with such flair and added links galore – and all before breakfast too. – I have laid down my quill pen for ever! ...

(http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2009/08/28/the-ideal-cover-girl-for-drawing-attention/)

It is evident that the value of DOV lies in its facilitating very inclusive discussions in the local area and achieves mutual benefits for the people involved, DOV itself, and DPG – their supported museum. The editorial team of DOV always endeavors to help promote local people, including some artists, musicians, and little-known people who work hard behind the scenes, and at the same time celebrating culture, events, and other subjects. With these kinds of altruistic and reciprocal motives, the coordinator and some core members do have a sense that making the community more valuable is to the benefit of everyone.

Inevitably, there are cases where people wish to promote their own business on DOV because it is such a popular community site. This is certainly not encouraged, unless it is done in ways that mean the article itself will enrich other people's lives and interests in a non-commercial way. The efforts made in building many personal networks around the local area always result in more contributions being generated for DOV. As Wenger et al (2002, p.37) state, it is a poor sort of social capital that allows people to make contributions whilst believing that "at some point, in some form, they too will benefit". This sort of understanding of mutual value will hopefully continue to be nurtured and extend in the DOV community over time.

6.   Combine familiarity and excitement

Routine activities provide the stability for relationship-building connections; exciting events provide a sense of common adventure (*Wenger et al., 2002, p.62*).

At the heart of the DOV community, DPG is often perceived as traditional and conservative with its official Web site presenting exhibition and collection related information in a more formal and conventional way. The DOV Web site, however, plays a counteractive role, providing the local community a focus for interaction with more informal narratives and timely discussions. When introducing any exhibitions to the readers, DOV articles rarely focus on explaining or explicitly promoting an exhibition. It normally provides perspectives from different angles, guiding the readers to look at the exhibitions with fresh eyes – e.g. relating the exhibition to wine (http://dulwichonview.org.uk/2009/09/01/best-of-british-wines/), showing how children enjoyed visiting the exhibition, interpreting artworks with witty and frank comments, etc. Most of them are presented in a personal tone and sometimes challenge the formal way of thinking. In this sense, DOV serves as a place providing a feeling of excitement, energy, and pleasure that complements the familiarity of the museum Web site.

As for the DOV itself, the common style of funny and quirky articles has settled into a kind of familiarity as the community matures. The periodical real-life events held in the Dulwich area can be seen as the enthusiasm that is generated to engage more local people and newcomers to join the community. Because it always surprises the core/active members when new people are attracted to community events, the sense of excitement

motivates them to continue establishing social networks and aiming to attract even more people.

7.   Create a rhythm for the community

> At the heart of a community is a web of enduring relationship among members, but the tempo of their interactions is greatly influenced by the rhythm of community events. (*Wenger et al, 2002, p.62*)

The rhythm of a community is the most powerful indicator of its aliveness. There are various rhythms in the DOV community – the number of articles being updated per week, the pattern of regular real-life events, the frequency of private interactions, the pace of the community's overall evolution, etc. Generally speaking, the rhythm of the DOV community is very lively, strong, and energetic. There are around 5–6 new articles uploaded to the community each week; i.e., almost one article per day on average.

This gives DOV a very healthy and vigorous heartbeat, rendering a sense of evolution in the community. Because of the considerable amount of articles being served to the readers on a weekly basis, a wide range of interests can be covered, helping to attract continuous attention from different readerships. All this is due to the enthusiastic contribution from local people, so in order to make authors feel worthwhile, the editorial team has to publish their articles as quickly as possible. By doing so, the heartbeat of the DOV community remains rhythmic and energetic over time.

Very often, DOV articles also announce a future date for a follow-up article, allowing readers to anticipate the sequels. The series of articles, with a sense of rhythm, not only sustains the readers staying in the community in anticipation, but also provides a feeling of familiarity amongst the other completely new articles. Typically, there is an article published just before and after the Gallery Film events and some other on-gallery programs, giving the community a temporal structure, providing participants with a sense of progress and achievement. All these rhythms are established in different ways, but as Wenger et al (2002, p.63) explain, there is no right rhythm for a community and the heartbeat will vary as the community evolves; therefore, "finding the right rhythm at each stage is key to a community's development."

The stages of community development

> A community's development, like an individual's, is rarely smooth. It frequently involves painful discoveries, difficult transitions, and learning through hard-won experience. *(Wenger et al, 2002, p.69)*

The ethnographic studies conducted by Wenger et al (2002) have provided a developmental model of community of practice which comprises the typical five stages of community development: Potential, Coalescing, Maturing, Stewardship, and Transformation. Although the ways communities experience these stages and the sequence may vary, this model generally provides a sense of a community's maturity and informs the challenges of running it through its growth, expansion, and transformation.

Overall, DOV as a community of practice has gone through the earlier stages of potential development over the last two years and has reached the relatively mature stages of a CoP lifecycle. Observably, DOV is at around stage four, namely Stewardship, in which the key issue is sustaining the community's momentum through its transition of practice, technology, and relationship to the organization (ibid, p.104). In relation to this, the DOV coordinator has recently undertaken two major tasks aiming to maintain the freshness of the community and keep its tone lively and ever-engaging.

The first task is, as Wenger et al (2002, p. 106) suggest, institutionalizing the voice of the community. Communities at their maturity often find it necessary to be recognized by the organization and to gain a voice in it. Since the DOV community exists to support its associated museum, it is important for DOV to become a recognized part of DPG; e.g. through a senior management liaison, in order to influence the museum for mutual benefit. In light of this, the DOV coordinator recently organized a meeting with the Gallery Director, with two other independent professionals who are the authors of this paper; the result is a formalized commitment from the Gallery (see Figure 8). Giving the community this kind of voice, such as an allocation of staff time for writing Gallery-related articles on DOV and an increased presence of DOV on the DPG Web site, will greatly strengthen the community along the way.

Fig 8: The meeting with the DPG director.

The second task also coincides with what a CoP is suggested to address in this stage of community development: to "rejuvenate the community" (ibid, p. 106). As communities commonly face questions about their future direction – whether to become part of the organization or remain "below the surface", whether to stay informal or adopt a more systematic approach in their domain, etc. The DOV coordinator has pondered these questions since the community's Web site, which is a blog, has inevitably buried many of the very precious articles in the deeper layers of Web pages. Designing a new Web site for the community with a good set of categories seems to serve as a solution rejuvenating the community and helping people easily retrieve articles. With blogging becoming mainstream nowadays and DOV members having a habit of reading articles on the Web, the design of the new DOV Web site needs to take user-related issues into account. In considering this, a usability review was conducted, as described in the following section.

Summary

In this section, the community activities of DOV have been explored in the formal framework of a *Community of Practice* (CoP). DOV presents itself to the outside world as a web-based blog, so it is important that this interface aids the community in accessing DOV. In the next section a usability review of the DOV Web site is presented, aimed at improving the next Web site for DOV.

4. Usability Review

As part of the redesign process for the Dulwich OnView (DOV) Web site, a usability review was conducted (McDaid, 2009). It is just one tool available to a usability expert for use during an iterative user-centered design process. The aim is to identify those parts of a design that might adversely affect the overall usability of a Web site - usability defined as "the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use"(ISO, 1998). Usable Web sites allow users to attain their goals fully without, for example, causing frustration, anxiety or negative feelings towards the site.

Some of the advantages of this process are that it is cost-effective, requires no advanced planning, and can be done at an early stage of the development process (Nielsen & Molich, 1990). Recommendations on how the usability of the site can be improved are based on each usability expert's own experience, and supplemented by research-based usability guidelines (e.g.: Nielsen & Tahir, 2002; Usability.gov, 2009) and recommendations for accessibility (W3C, 1999). In addition, a reviewer should identify those elements that meet specific guidelines well.

Alongside the usability review, it was suggested that other user-centered design techniques such as user testing

should be undertaken during the DOV re-design and development process in order to confirm that the terms, labels, and structure of the site were appropriate to the target user group. Even at this early stage of the design, the review identified a number of inconsistencies in the positioning, organization and labeling of navigational elements. Since these areas of concern were highlighted before the main DOV Web site development process had begun, they could be addressed easily.

For the new DOV Web site evaluation, two wireframes of the proposed design were available: the homepage and the new posts page. The posts page displays the full text, a related image, and the latest comments for a post to the site, as well as a description of the author and a text input area for new comments to be added.

Target end users and context of use

The aim of the site owners is that DOV should appeal to a broad range of users who through the blog site will discover DPG and the people who work there and will ultimately join as Friends of the gallery.

However, for the review, no detailed demographic information regarding the users of the blog was available. In general, the main type of visitor was described as a local person whose objective in going to the site was to look for a good read with a local connection, information on local events, and/or information about ticket sales for DPG events. The age of visitors to the site ranged from teenagers, posting comments on articles, to older people accessing photographs and posting memories. There are also a significant number of international users (Australia, United States of America, Canada, Italy, etc.), requesting more information about DPG-related posts or trying to make contact with an expert. Therefore, for this review, the target user profile in terms of age, gender, educational level, previous technology experience and attitude, etc., was not well defined and had to be taken as very broad.

For the same reason, an assumption was made regarding the context in which the new Web site would be accessed. This was taken to be an average domestic or office environment on either a mid-range laptop or desktop computer. It was not suggested that the new site would be accessed, for example, using PDAs, iPhones, or other handheld mobile technologies, and therefore the design was not reviewed for its usability on a small screen.

It is generally suggested that the most important elements of content for the Web site visitor should be visible immediately on arrival at the site; that is, in the first screen of the homepage and without the need to scroll down (Nielsen Norman Group, 2009a). In 2009, the most commonly used computer screen resolution was estimated to be 1024x768 pixels (Nielsen Norman Group, 2009b) and therefore the design was reviewed at this resolution. Even when a larger resolution screen is available, it is suggested that, rather than filling the whole screen with the browser window, users open multiple windows, and therefore reviewing at this resolution is still pertinent even for users with higher specification screens. Figure 9 and Figure 10 give an impression of how the new design layouts might look when viewed on a 1024x768 pixel screen.
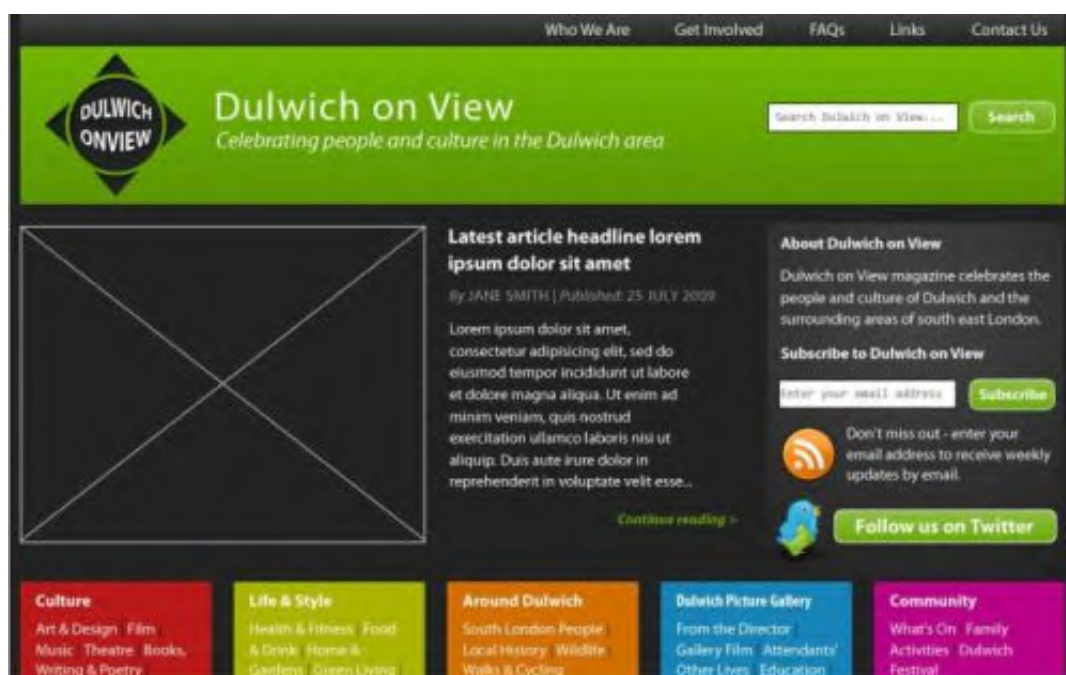

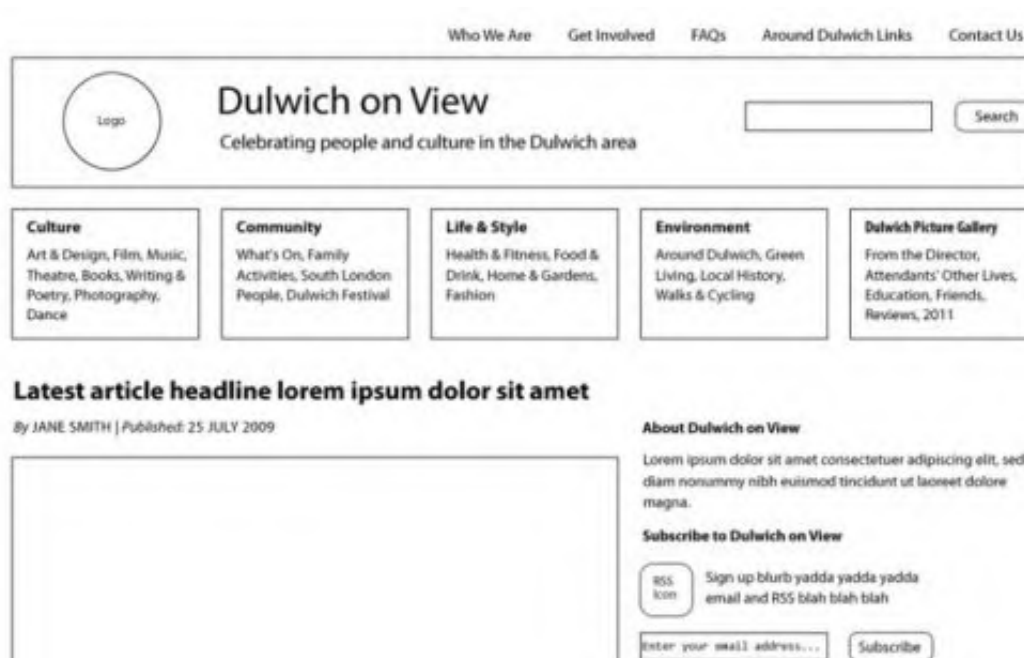Fig 9: New homepage as it might appear on a 1024x768 resolution screen.

Fig 10: New post page as it might appear on a 1024x768 resolution screen.

General findings

The report (McDaid, 2009) made a number of recommendations regarding the overall layout of the designs and also identified those elements of the design that met usability guidelines and those that could be usefully revisited. As the review was done on paper-based design wireframes, the quality of the interaction in terms of response times, etc., could not be judged at the time, although elements in the design that could impact on, for example, download time, such as large or numerous images, were highlighted.

The review found that a number of features of the design were generally in line with usability guidelines. In particular, the name, logo and tagline of the organization were clearly visible on the homepage and in an appropriate area of the screen. The tagline summarized the purpose of the site and enabled the visitor to quickly identify this intention.

The pages also included information regarding the creators of the site and how they could be contacted. This information and short biographies of the main authors of the posts help to increase the perception of the site's trustworthiness. In addition, it was suggested that a 'privacy policy' similar to the one on the existing DOV site would increase visitor trust.

Other elements that supported usability included the grouping of similar items together, the availability and location of a 'search' function, and the inclusion of links to recent, popular, and archive posts with fully spelled months to avoid confusion between UK and US formats.

Some recommendations

The new designs exhibited two main usability issues. These related to the allocation of screen space to the different elements of the page (main content, navigation, banners, etc.) and inconsistencies in the location, organization and labeling of the main navigation links.

Screen layout

One of the main recommendations was that the space allocated to the content of interest to the visitor should be increased and the percentage of space allocated to navigation, banners, etc., reduced. Nielsen (2000) suggests that as a general rule the main content of a page should take up at least 50% of the page area and ideally should be closer to 80%.

In the new DOV homepage design, it was found that only around 25% of the visible content related to the primary user task of finding local information. Of this area, over half was taken up by an image, with the DOV banner taking up another 17% of the screen area. Added to this, on the new post page, only 13% of space was allocated to the local news item, which meant only a headline, author, and half a picture were visible.

Navigation

Consistency is one of the major indicators for usability. It is a sign of the cognitive load placed on users when they utilize the site or, in other words, how hard they must work to learn and recognize elements of the Web site. Regarding the design and location of navigation areas, a number of inconsistencies in the placement and naming of links would adversely affect the usability of the new Web site.

The location of the main navigation area differed on the two page designs. Inconsistency occurred also in the naming of links and the order in which the groups of links were placed on the page. For example, during the review there was confusion regarding the difference between 'Around Dulwich', 'Around Dulwich Links', 'Links' and 'Environment' and why 'South London People' sometimes occurs under the heading 'Around Dulwich' and sometimes under 'Community', etc.

Apart from those links that appeared as buttons, what was and was not a link was hard to identify. It was recommended that the visibility of text links should be increased both in terms of the format and the use of a color that contrasted strongly with the background. The combination of low contrast, variable size, and the compact way some of the links were presented on the page could have created an accessibility issue for older visitors to the site. In general, the usability of text links is increased by the consistent use of color and style to indicate that they are clickable, with an alternative consistent style to show that a link has been visited. In addition, providing links that can be distinguished from the remainder of the page content allows users to easily scan sites for the information in which they are interested.

On the homepage in particular, the placement of the navigation buttons gave the impression that there was only one page of information on the screen. Only the first article was visible, with all other articles accessed by clicking on links rather than scrolling further down the page. In fact, the homepage design was over 2,300 pixels long, meaning that items such as the 'featured video' were unlikely to be viewed as the user would have to scroll down at least two pages to see them, without any indication on the first screen that they were there.

Summary

A usability review aims to identify areas which could impinge on the usability of a site and cause users to have difficulty or become frustrated with it. In extreme cases, this may result in the users not returning to a site and potential continued use being lost. Two main usability issues were identified at an early stage in the new DOV Web site redesign process. These related to the allocation of space to screen real-estate and inconsistency in the navigation areas and link text.

Reviewing the designs near the beginning of the development process means that these issues can be addressed more quickly and with minimum cost. Many of the latter issues could be mitigated by creating a style guide for the site. Ideally, a series of usability reviews should be done along side user testing at each stage of an iterative design and development project lifecycle.

5. Conclusion and Future

This paper has presented the on-line blog/magazine Dulwich OnView (DOV), that is associated with Dulwich Picture Gallery (DPG). The facility is believed to be unique amongst museums with its thriving local community. It is a model that other museums could follow if there is an existing real community and at least one 'champion' that has the time and ability to take a sustained lead role. The informality and activity of DOV contrasts well and appropriately with the formality and slower pace of the DPG Web site.

The paper has examined DOV in the context of a Community of Practice (CoP), which includes three fundamental elements, seven major principles, and five stages of community development. All of these apply to DOV to a large degree, so although CoP is mainly seen in a scientific, engineering, business, or educational context, the model can be extended to the museum field as well.

The future of DOV

DOV has been developing and continues to expand. A redesign of the Web site is being considered as the number of articles increases and needs better organization and categorization. A usability review of a proposed Web interface has been undertaken.

DOV is always striving to reach new readers and find new authors. Reviews are encouraged with the offer of free tickets. A competition is planned to create an image of DPG in the style of Paul Nash, in association with a coming exhibition. It is intended to display submissions on DOV, with a short biography of the participant. Public voting will be undertaken using the comment boxes at the end of each article, and a prize will be awarded at the end of the exhibition. This will be promoted via the DPG emailing list, amongst other places.

DOV's visitor figures have increased consistently since its launch, apart from annual winter dips in numbers (see Figure 2 earlier in the paper). This pattern is likely to continue as interest in DOV grows among the local and wider community.

Recently there have been increasing contributions by DPG senior management. In the past, contributions from DPG staff have been somewhat irregular and random. It would be beneficial if articles were produced from all DPG departments, for example. In addition, the large and increasing number of articles on DOV, many still relevant as time progresses, need to be organized more conveniently into different sections, covering various interests. It is planned that one of these will be DPG itself (see Figure 9 above). In this case, DPG will probably link directly to this section rather than to the main page of DOV. From the DOV viewpoint, it can be seen as a subset of the local community's interests. From the DPG viewpoint, this section could be considered as a more informal and dynamic part of the DPG site. It is hoped and intended that the symbiotic synergy between DOV and DPG will continue for the foreseeable future.

Acknowledgements

References

Beazley, I. (2008a). Reach new audiences, increase numbers of visitors, and become a major part of the local community by using on-line social networking sites and blogs. *Museums and the Web 2008: Demonstrations*, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Abstract. http://www.archimuse.com/mw2008/abstracts/prg_335001837.html

Beazley, I. (2008b). "What are you waiting for?" *BAFM Journal*, Issue 92, page 19, Summer. British Association of Friends of Museums. http://www.bafm.org.uk/bafm%20journals/bafm%20issue%2092.pdf

Beazley, I. (2009). "The unofficial museum website". *BAFM Journal*, Issue 95, page 17, Summer. British Association of Friends of Museums. http://www.bafm.org.uk/bafm%20journals/bafm%20issue%2095.pdf

Beler, A. (2004), A. Borda, J.P. Bowen, and S. Filippini-Fantoni. "The building of online communities: An approach for learning organizations, with a particular focus on the museum sector". In J. Hemsley, V. Cappellini, and G. Stanke (Eds.). *EVA 2004 London Conference Proceedings*. University College London, The Institute of Archaeology, UK, 26-30 July, pages 2.1-2.15. http://arxiv.org/abs/cs.CY/0409055

Bowen, J.P. (2003), M. Houghton, and R. Bernier. "Online museum discussion forums: What do we have? What do we need?" In D. Bearman and J. Trant (Eds.). *Museums and the Web 2003: Proceedings*, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. http://www.archimuse.com/mw2003/papers/bowen/bowen.html

Bowen, J.P. (2007), E. Lisney, S. Filippini-Fantoni, and E. Lisney. "A Museum Wiki". In J. Trant and D. Bearman (Eds.), *Museums and the Web 2007: Proceedings*, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. http://www.archimuse.com/mw2007/papers/bowen/bowen.html

Bowen, J.P. (2008). Wiki software and facilities for museums. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (Eds.), *Museums and the Web 2008: Proceedings*, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. http://www.archimuse.com/mw2008/papers/bowen/bowen.html

ISO (1998). *BS EN ISO 9241-11:1998 Ergonomic requirements for office work with visual display terminals (VDTs) - Part 11: Guidance on usability*, International Organization for Standardization. http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=16883

Liu, A.H.Y. (2008). "Using online communities to attract museum visitors". *International Journal of Education through Art* 4(3), 259-274, December. http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/eta.4.3.259_1

Liu, A.H.Y. (2009). "Creating online learning environments for museums". *Museology Quarterly* 23(3), 5-35. http://www.nmns.edu.tw/php/Library/quaterly/200907_37.pdf

Liu, A.H.Y. (2010) and J.P. Bowen. Creating online collaborative environments for museums: A case study of a museum wiki', *International Journal of Web Based Communities*. Accepted for a special issue on *Designing Shared Spaces for Collaborative Creativity*. http://www.inderscience.com/browse/index.php?journalCODE=ijwbc

McDaid, S. (2009). *Dulwich OnView Usability Report*, Usability Design Report, London, UK, October.

Nielsen, J. (1990) and R. Molich. Heuristic evaluation of user interfaces. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human factors in computing systems: Empowering people*, Seattle, Washington, USA,

ACM. http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=97281

Nielsen, J. (2000). *Designing Web usability: The practice of simplicity*. Indianapolis: New Riders Publishing. http://www.useit.com/jakob/webusability/

Nielsen, J. (2002) and M. Tahir. *Homepage Usability: 50 websites deconstructed*. Indianapolis: New Riders Publishing. http://www.useit.com/homepageusability/

Nielsen Norman Group (2009a). *113 Design Guidelines for Homepage Usability*. http://www.useit.com/homepageusability/guidelines.html

Nielsen Norman Group (2009b). *Screen Resolution and Page Layout*. http://www.useit.com/alertbox/screen_resolution.html

Russo, A. (2008) and J. Watkins, J.. New literacy new audiences: Social media and cultural institutions. In S. Dunn, S. Keene, G. Mallen, and J. P. Bowen (Eds.), *EVA London 2008 Conference Proceedings*, 22-24 July, pages 225-239. Electronic Workshops in Computing, British Computer Society. http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=conWebDoc.20609

Russo, A. (2009) and J. Peacock. Great expectations: Sustaining participation in social media spaces. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (Eds.), *Museums and the Web 2009: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. http://www.archimuse.com/mw2009/papers/russo/russo.html

Smith, S. (2009). The creative uses of Facebook as a tool for artistic collaboration. In A. Seal, S. Keene, and J. P. Bowen (Eds.), *EVA London 2009 Conference Proceedings*, 6-8 July, pages 181-191. Electronic Workshops in Computing, British Computer Society. http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=conWebDoc.27709

Usability.gov (2009). *Research-based Web design and usability guidelines*. http://www.usability.gov/guidelines/

Varlamis, I. (2010) and I. Apostolakis. Self-supportive virtual communities. *International Journal of Web Based Communities* 6(1), 43-61. http://dx.doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2010.030016

W3C (1999). *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0*, World Wide Web Consortium. http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/

Wenger, E. (2002), R.A. McDermott, and W. Snyder. *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press. http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/2855.html

Cite as: