

Tablet Tours and Other Low Cost Digital Tools

(a.k.a. A Cheapskate's Guide to Technology)

By Liz Schultz,
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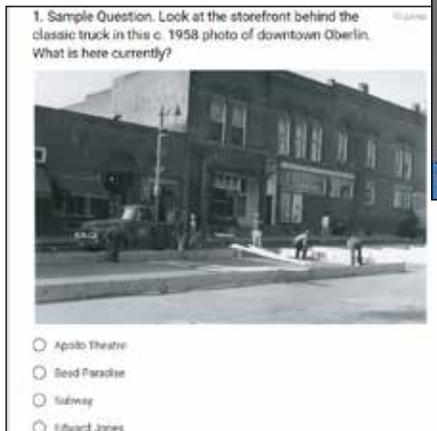
Do you want to breathe life into a static exhibit, give learners more flexibility in what they see and do, or upgrade your professional toolbox? Here are a few ways to bring a bit of "high tech" to even the most resource-strapped museum.

Tablet Tours

Digital tablets are more impressive and less costly by the year. In 2015, the Oberlin Heritage Center received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to purchase tablets and develop two digital self-guided walking tours. We already offered guided versions of the tours, which are about historic downtown and Oberlin's connection to abolition and the Underground Railroad. Tablet tours allowed us to 1) Continue offering tours when guides weren't available, 2) Include additional stories and historic images, and 3) Give people the option to explore at their own pace and with just their family or friends. We chose to build the tablet tours in PowerPoint because it is a well-established, widely accessible program that we can easily update ourselves. (Some other slide programs, such as Google Slides, would also work.)

How do you make a slide presentation into a tour? It's a simple process of adding links between slides. Try it!

- Create a PowerPoint presentation with 5 slides.
- Add a text box to the first slide that says "Skip to Page 5."
- Right click on the text box and select "Hyperlink."
- In the "Link to" column, select "Place in this Document."
- Select "Slide 5" and click "Okay."

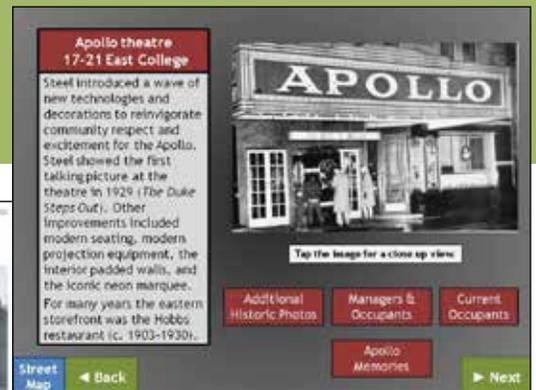


That's it. Those are the key steps to building a self-guided tour that allows people to navigate between different topics, maps, images, artifacts, and more. In our "Picture the Past: Downtown Oberlin Tour," the different slide types included: welcome and instruction slides, a base downtown map, four zoomed-in street maps, forty-nine building slides with text and a historic photo, slides showing those photos at full size, additional historic photos of that building, slides listing former occupants and current occupants, and breakout slides, such as "The Fire of 1886." In theory, a user could click "Next" to look at just the main slides of the forty-nine buildings, or they could click through all five hundred forty-nine slides of supplementary material. In terms of resources, the largest outlay for this project was not the technology itself, but the time to gather and distill the historical material.

Lessons Learned:

1) Finalize the design/layout of your slides first; link last. You don't want to make fifty slides and then decide that your "back" arrow should say "previous slide" instead. Nor do you want to hyperlink everything and then add five more slides somewhere in the middle.

2) Get connected. We should have paid the cost difference to buy tablets with cellular access. When we're not near



Author's notes: As someone who works in the history field, I am fully aware that this article will be out-of-date in the very near future. I would like to thank fellow AASLH presenters Brian Failing, Executive Director of the Aurora Regional Fire Museum, who discussed Google Maps and online exhibits, and Kat Burkhart, Director/Curator of the Carnegie Museum of Montgomery County (IN), who introduced attendees to Raspberry Pi and 3D printers. Feel free to contact me if you want to learn more: director@oberlinheritage.org.

wifi, we can't collect survey responses, link to YouTube videos of historic trades, enable live GPS tracking, etc.

3) We still haven't figured out how to fully "lock" people out of other areas of the tablet, such as email, the internet, and camera. Nothing bad has happened so far, but you might want to take that into consideration.

4) You get what you pay for. There are some excellent developers out there and paying for a new app might be worth every penny – crisp design, mapping capabilities, email integration, donation pages, etc. In our effort to spend as little as possible, we use some less-than-ideal workarounds, such as using Keynote to view PowerPoint files, and loading "music" as video files. Patrons also can't easily download or purchase our program like an app. On the plus side, we have no size limits on our content and no monthly or annual service fees.

(continued on page 6)

Online Google Tools

I hesitate to promote a single company, but the suite of free services Google offers can be extremely helpful. Create a Google/Gmail account and you will have access to the following and more.

1) My Maps – Create a new map, put a marker at your 10 favorite historic buildings, load a photo of each, and share the map with the world. Volunteers of the Oberlin Heritage Center are currently collecting GPS data for thousands of markers in the local cemetery to help people find where their ancestors lie.

2) Drive – (As in hard drive). This is

an easy way to share or email big digital files, as well as back up your most important files.

3) Docs – Update working files from anywhere with internet access and share them with others working on the same project. We had three interns, working at varied hours and places, compiling a comprehensive list of local World War II soldiers. They could see the list live and skip names already on it, supplement each other's work, mark individuals for further research, and leave research notes for each other so they wouldn't check the same newspaper articles. We could check

on their progress at any time.

4) Forms – Create quick, visually appealing surveys to distribute via email or as a link on your website. Bonus! Forms also allows you to create quizzes. We created a mobile phone version of a landmark scavenger hunt.

5) Google for Nonprofits – These higher level tools require registration, but they're worth a look.

(This article is based on Lis Schultz's part of the session "High Tech Enrichment with Low Staff and Resources," presented at the 2016 AASLH annual conference in Detroit.) ■

Is your organization a good neighbor?

By Benjamin Anthony,
Community Engagement Coordinator,
Ohio History Connection

Everyone from Mother Theresa to Benjamin Franklin have encouraged us to be good to our neighbors, but what does that mean for a local history organization? While community engagement is not necessarily a new concept for some institutions, (corporations, hospitals and universities) it is still gaining traction in the history and museum community. Community Engagement is broadly defined as organizations connecting with the intent to learn from and collaborate with one another. When properly implemented, community engagement can expand an organization's audience, catalyze new ideas and fundamentally redefine how historical societies and museums serve their local communities.

In 2014, the Ohio History Connection updated our core values (along with the name of the organization) to include inclusivity alongside authenticity, relevance, stewardship and working together. We did this because we, as an organization, knew that it was our mission to preserve and tell the stories of all Ohioans, not just those with whom we traditionally partner. We are now working to engage with those Ohioans whose past is as much a part of Ohio's history as any other, but hasn't been collected in a meaningful way for a myriad of reasons. We live in a state with a rich and ever-evolving people and history. Engaging with our local communities is the best way to uncover and tap into those stories, neighbor-to-neighbor. When done with sincerity and an open mind, it is massively rewarding work.

The good news is that community engagement does not require huge sums of capital or space to be effective. Some of the best community organizing originates from a home or coffee shop. What meaningful community engagement does require though, is time. If you are willing to put in the time to connect with your community's families, neighborhoods and other institutions you will not only better inform your collection, but you will be creating new audiences and friends of your institution.

Taking the time to visit your local civic associations, churches, community and recreation centers, schools and social groups can lead to unexpected growth and new ideas that can only be generated by the mixing of two different agendas, ethnicities or socio-economic backgrounds. Go meet your neighbors with open minds, hearts and ears to learn how you are seen (or not seen) in your community. You will find that not only is it free marketing and goodwill building, but that when you partner with outside groups you can open up an entirely new role for your organization as a community anchor.

Remember that this sort of outreach and connection with those in your area relies on trust. Meaningful connection, understanding, ideas and partnerships can only develop through sustained engagement. While going to a meeting once to introduce your organization is better than not at all, community engagement and inclusivity must be committed to as full-time ideals, rather than a one off touch-point or program. Ohioans have a keen eye for insincerity (conditioned from years of politicians making promises in exchange for votes). If your organization says it will come to a meeting ask if you can bring a dessert, go early to introduce yourself to those at the meeting and stay to hear what others have to say, even if it may not seem to be entirely pertinent to your organization. It shows that you are willing to put in the time and effort to learn about those you want to work with and aren't there simply to advance your own agenda, only ask for something, or "check the box" so you can say your organization is present in the community. Not to mention, listening is the best way to discover community-based needs or challenges that your organization is uniquely able to address.

Connecting with the myriad of groups and people that make up the fabric of your neighborhood is the most meaningful way to serve your mission. All while increasing your network, creating opportunities for new learning and earning some free good will. Take the time to go to your community; don't wait for them to find you. It's what good neighbors do. ■