

World News Publishing Focus

Stampen's standout chairman

*Tomas Brunegård shares his
and Stampen Media Group's
journey to media excellence
and discusses his new role as
WAN-IFRA President – Page 14*



Photo: Dan Holmqvist

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The “Inside Confucius” museum exhibit created at Western Kentucky University is designed much like a magazine layout. This is the story cover at the entrance, like an article cover page to introduce the piece. The nine news panels that follow are like inside pages, each focused on an aspect of the story but all connected by design and content.



Western iMedia senior social journalist McKenzi Loid tests the augmented reality content on one of the “Inside Confucius” news panels during the story’s premiere presentation in May at the Kentucky Museum in Bowling Green. The exhibit is scheduled for further displays this year in Honolulu, Berlin and Beijing.

Engagement journalism – Lessons in experience design for news media

The “Inside Confucius” project at Western Kentucky University (USA) fuses museum presentation with news content – both online and offline. Here, university graduate Brie Logsdon and Professor Kerry J. Northrup describe philosophy, practice, and lessons learned. Northrup will present the project at the Newsroom Summit during this year’s Expo.

In today’s world, where content flows in torrents, technology is always changing, and the only scarce resource is attention on the part of a Millennial multi-tasker, the key to success in news media is engagement.

New studies show that it is no longer about attracting millions of unique visitors or thousands of social media followers. We can tell that the total time most people spend with a piece of news is measured in seconds, and that people aren’t really committing anything of themselves to the experience.

Yet it is the experience that matters, that differentiates. When people can find pretty much the same news and information anywhere, it is the experience of how they engage with it that they remember and value.

So it is worth consulting experts at designing experiences around content, to see what they can teach the news business about doing a better job of engaging our public.

Consider museums. There are significant commonalities between what museums and news media do. Both have content and audiences. Both seek to connect their audiences with their content while making enough money to pay for the activity.

On the other hand, museums and news media relate to their audiences very differently. Museums consider their audience members as patrons. They focus on giving these patrons something significant for their time, money and attention: an experience of culture, knowledge and information. Commercial news organisations do not generally regard their readers as patrons but

rather as their primary commodity to be packaged and sold to advertisers. That’s on the business side.

On the journalistic side, we are similarly committed to the cultural, knowledge and information values of our content. But even there, most traditionally trained journalists put the integrity of the story above everything else – including the public’s experience of it.

Museums emphasise experience

Museums are just as staunchly protective of the integrity of their content, but they emphasize how successfully people experience and engage with the content.

That emphasis on the experience doesn’t seem to hurt the content or the museum. Museum attendance worldwide has increased every year for the past four or five, according to an annual survey by The Art Newspaper, while newspaper readership has steadily declined.

So what if you approached a news story like a museum exhibit? In fact, what if you made a news story into a museum-like experience, so that people could physically as well as informationally explore, study and absorb it, with the goal of generating a much higher level of engagement than a typical news story? How would that work exactly?

Investigating the Confucius Institute

That’s what the news project “Inside Confucius” set out to explore over eight months from late 2012 into early 2013. It is an investigation of the educational, financial and political influences of the Chinese government’s Confucius Institute, which places thousands of Chinese teachers in local schools all over the world. It is also a story designed from the start to be experienced by people through media such as artistically inspired infographic posters, augmented-reality video and other highly engaging storytelling formats.

Eventually “Inside Confucius” even created a physical experience – an exhibit – based on museum experience design techniques, including exhibition display and lighting, tiered signage, synchronised literature and tactile interactivity. See details at the responsive mobile site at wkujournalism.com/insideconfucius.

The process of assembling “Inside Confucius” easily matched the level of complexity and work required of any major editorial exposé. Dozens of people blending a wide range of skills were required. Most were fusion journalists trained in the Western iMedia entrepreneurial startup embedded in Western Kentucky University’s School of Journalism and Broadcasting.

Five best practices

The process identified five best practices that news media can borrow from museums and other experience designers to improve engagement around news content:

■ **Plan the experience, not just the story** – The Manual of Museum Exhibitions lists five phases in the design process. The first is creating an interpretive plan that considers the “intended visitor experience” as much as any piece of content. The comparable step in a news organisation is making engagement part of the story budget.

■ **Put a storyteller in charge** – Museums don’t collect art, then turn it over to their IT departments to create the experience for visitors. News organisations shouldn’t just hand engagement responsibility over to digital desks. It’s not about the technology or even just the content. It all has to play together to make for a truly engaging experience.

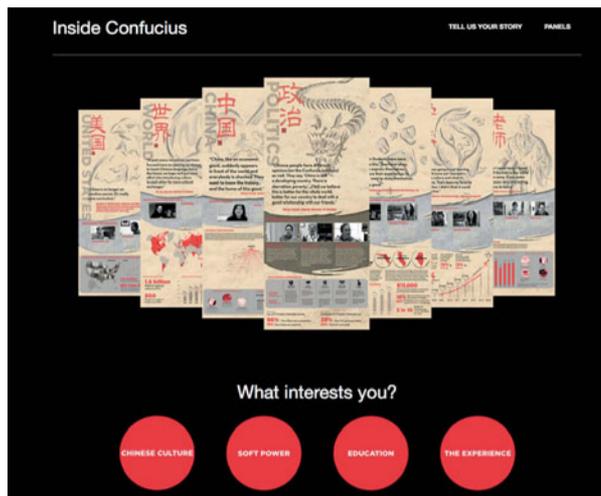
■ **Give power to the people** – Once you’re inside a museum exhibit, you’re in charge of where you go and what you look at. Your decisions become part of the experience. Each choice you make invests you a little more personally in the environment. It’s classic engagement. “Exhibition design begins with the art and ends with the visitor,” explained Michael Brechner, design and operations director at the Frist Center for Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee. To be like a museum exhibit, then, the news experience should be non-linear and provide multiple points of entry.

■ **Use tiered content instead of inverted pyramid** – Look closely at how information is structured on the placards next to a piece of museum art. There are usually just one or two lines of title and label at the top, followed by a brief conversational paragraph, followed by a longer section of expert detail. This tiered content model

allows people to decide how deeply they want to dive into the information. In Saul Carliner's piece "Lessons Learned from Museum Exhibit Design," he writes, "As exhibit designers layer content so visitors can choose a desired level of complexity, so interface designers can create layered interfaces to match users' experience levels and layered help systems to match users' appetite for information."

■ **Give people a real experience** – Heavy science lies behind experience and engagement design, grounded in deep studies of human motivation and psychology. Museum exhibit designers are often schooled in these arts. News managers usually aren't. In layman's terms, though, it's simple: It isn't much of an experience if it's something they see all the time. To be worthy of the term, a news experience needs to be special. When people have gone to the effort to engage with your story, they want to feel a sense of accomplishment, some reward or gratification. Engagement design researchers Christian Dindler and Ole Sejer Iversen at the University of Aarhus in Denmark wrote that the "goal is to create strong links between the museum and the everyday life of the visitor. You must understand the structures of motivation to understand how to fully engage the visitor."

The metric for success in this effort is increasing your engagement coefficient. Calculate your coefficient by first tracking the number of people who actually do something with your story rather than just giving it a glance and moving on. Then divide that by the total number of people who touched the content in any way.



A responsive web app is touch- and swipe-sensitive to let people search and experience the "Inside Confucius" story from anywhere. All the content from the museum-style news experience is included on the site, along with additional content (wkujournalism.com/insideconfucius).

A perfect coefficient of 1

You would have a coefficient of 1 in a perfect world. The more the coefficient diminishes to some disappearing digits behind the decimal point, the worse you're doing in creating a meaningful experience for the people who were initially interested in your content.

Tracking improvement is important. But the really valuable part of this metric is that you'll have to sit down



Seen in this part of the "Inside Confucius" news experience is a video wall that lets people participate in a Confucius Institute classroom learning Chinese. In the foreground is an area where an actual Confucius Institute visiting teacher becomes part of the experience to answer questions and provide explanations.

and consider what actually constitutes solid engagement with your public and how you can engineer those opportunities for people.

Kerry Northrup will present the project in the session entitled "Re-engineering journalism" at the 12th International Newsroom Summit, 8-9 October in Berlin. For full programme and to register, see www.wan-ifa.org/nrs13.



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