



ASSOCIATION OF
NOVA SCOTIA
MUSEUMS

NovaMuse User Engagement Plan

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Vision

NovaMuse strives to connect museums' collections with the public. Audiences will discover information about Nova Scotia's history, artists and craftspeople can find new inspiration in original objects, students and teachers can connect history to today's world through the study of relevant objects.

NovaMuse also enables heritage institutions to connect with each other. It allows them to compare notes on their collections, make more informed decisions about new acquisitions, and learn from their colleagues' documentation practices. They can share collection resources for special exhibits, by enhancing in-house displays with artifacts from neighbouring institutions.

The goal of NovaMuse is to help tell the story of Nova Scotia through its material culture. Visitors to the website can explore artifact records and tell their part of the collective story of life in Nova Scotia by sharing their own stories and information and using the website as a forum for celebrating our heritage.

History

In 2002, a group of 18 community museums recognized the need for standardizing their collections practices. They started the project by using the same database system and bulk purchasing computer equipment, and became known as the Passage Project. Museum staff and volunteers were trained individually and in workshops, and the community museums began digitizing Nova Scotia's material culture. Over the years this group of 18 grew to over 50 heritage organizations from across the province.

More than a basic cataloguing tool, the 2011 migration to a new web-based database system provided the information platform required to support a public website with robust search and sharing capacity. Supported by the Association of Nova Scotia Museums (ANSM), the NovaMuse website was launched on September 12, 2012.

Artifact records on NovaMuse are shared and uploaded by 51 community museums from across Nova Scotia. Many of these museums are only open during the summer months and are run by volunteers. Others are open year-round and rely on a combination of staff and volunteers to operate. They all have one thing in common – people who are passionate about Nova Scotia's history.

Content

As of February 2015, NovaMuse's 51 contributing museums have made over 190,000 artifact records available for public viewing. These records comprise artifacts spanning many centuries and are all contained within 10 searchable classifications including architectural, fishing, and communication themes.

Approximately 86,000 viewable images are currently attached to the artifact records on display in NovaMuse.

In 2014, a database of Nova Scotian industrial history was integrated with the artifact records already residing on NovaMuse. This database comprises 7,426 profiles of companies and individuals from Nova Scotia's past that produced manufactured goods ranging from ships to sculpture.

These entity profiles can also be linked to related artifact records existing on NovaMuse. For example, the profile of a shipbuilder in Shelburne can be linked to the records of tools he used during construction, images of ships he constructed, or the actual ships he built.

In its current form, the NovaMuse website allows for several measurable forms of engagement with online audiences including shares, likes, and comments pertaining to artifact records.

Social Media

In addition to the actual NovaMuse website, several ancillary social media platforms are also used to highlight the website's artifact records and engage with online audiences through regularly updated shared posts.

NovaMuse's Facebook and Twitter accounts are used to highlight artifact records through daily posts and tweets pertaining to related Nova Scotia historical anniversaries, current events etc. These platforms allow for several measurable forms of audience engagement including shares, re-tweets, and likes.

NovaMuse records are also shared on Pinterest with various boards containing groups of themed artifacts (i.e. Olympics, holidays etc.). Pinterest allows audiences to follow the NovaMuse board, pin artifacts to their own boards, and comment. All of which can be used to measure levels of engagement.

In addition to driving their own engagement, these social media platforms also refer audiences to the NovaMuse website itself and increase its audience participation levels.

Current Reality

Since launching NovaMuse in 2012, the number of records available for public viewing has increased by 38%. The number of available images has increased by 57%. The server space has required two separate upgrades to increase memory. This growth represents real investment and ownership from contributing members into NovaMuse.

The evolution of NovaMuse has become an example for other organizations looking to launch similar plans. ANSM has received queries regarding the project and is seen a leading example of organizational best practice for this type of work, as highlighted with NovaMuse winning the 2013 Canadian Museums Association award for Outstanding Achievement in Museum Management. For these reasons, it is imperative that future planning for NovaMuse, including audience engagement initiatives, be incorporated into the overall strategic plan developed by the ANSM board of directors.

Future Plans

Now that the process of getting NovaMuse online is complete, and the website has been populated with artifact records available for public viewing, a new organizational shift in focus towards attracting and engaging online audiences is a priority. In order to accomplish this, ANSM must identify audiences for NovaMuse, market NovaMuse to those groups, and determine how it will ultimately measure these groups' level of engagement with NovaMuse.

In order to move forward with these plans ANSM must systematically move through the following steps:

1. Identify Audiences

Current Audiences

To-date no efforts have been made to target specific audiences for NovaMuse. Online visitors to NovaMuse have come from 38 different countries (possibly comprising individuals with personal connections to the province), but most visits originate from within Canada, specifically Nova Scotia.

It can be assumed that most of the Nova Scotia traffic to NovaMuse have heard of the site from either the contributing museums' or ANSM's online spheres of influence or word-of-mouth within the Nova Scotia heritage community.

Current Number of User Profiles/Followers:

- NovaMuse profiles – 680
- NovaMuse Twitter followers – 70
- NovaMuse Facebook followers – 181
- Pinterest followers – 16

As a public website, NovaMuse also has visitors who can view pages without registering or logging in. In addition to viewing pages, these visitors can "like" and "share" artifact records, but, unlike registered users, are unable to leave comments.

Future Audiences

ANSM would like to focus its engagement efforts to a small number of communities with potential interest in Nova Scotia heritage and who could benefit from the data contained in the artifact and entity records found on NovaMuse.

Communities identified by ANSM include:

- Nova Scotia Museums

NovaMuse allows museums to compare collections, enhancing the ability to make informed decisions about new acquisitions and learn from their colleague's documentation practices. It also increases partnership opportunities through shared collection resources and information, including the ability to research artifacts from neighbouring institutions.

In the future, NovaMuse could also serve as a virtual exhibition space where community museums work together to curate¹ exhibits that combine resources from various institutions.

- Schools & Researchers

NovaMuse offers students virtual access to thousands of unique artifacts and their related stories without physically visiting the contributing institution. The wide range of information available through NovaMuse also helps ensure that students and researchers of varying interests, skillsets, and geographical location can find data for their specific projects.

The ability to comment on records on NovaMuse provides users the opportunity to share their own research and findings with other users or the contributing museums. In the future, NovaMuse could offer even greater ability for interaction by enabling users to share entire research papers online or create their own exhibits using NovaMuse's records and photos.

These groups represent ANSM's initial thoughts on communities who would find value in the resources available on NovaMuse. They are also groups who could potentially create and share their own work to NovaMuse. However, they are only ANSM's first attempt at identifying target communities. It will be important for ANSM, and contributing museums, to be vigilant in the search for new communities to engage with and market NovaMuse towards.

These communities were chosen because ANSM feels that NovaMuse offers information and resources that they would particularly useful. Despite the logic involved, this represents an assumption on ANSM's part. When marketing campaigns begin with these groups, it will be important to ask them what they value and what tools/resources they are looking for, while simultaneously providing them with information about NovaMuse's capabilities. This community insight may lead to changes in marketing campaigns, provide insight in future tools added to NovaMuse, or the decision to move away from them as target audiences altogether.

2. Strategies for Engaging Identified Communities

Nova Scotia Museums

Infrastructure is already in place to begin informing museums about the capabilities of NovaMuse. As well, because of ANSM's role in the provincial heritage field, relationships are already established with many of the museums in the province. The key will be proactively using this infrastructure and relationships to market NovaMuse to the province's museums.

- Provincial listservs

There are currently 4 regional museum listservs used by museums and heritage professionals to discuss museum issues and relay pertinent information. Additionally, there is a provincial

¹ Recent studies show that online audiences are looking for the same type of experiences as visitors to actual museums; they want experiences, not pure data. Audiences are expecting "contextualised narrative content, illustrated with a few beautiful high-resolution (and re-usable) pictures" (Poole, 2014).

archival listserv that serves the same purpose for those institutions. As museums become more knowledgeable about what NovaMuse has to offer, these listservs could serve as quick and easy information highways that enable museum workers to ask peers about things they have seen on NovaMuse or gauge regional interest in exhibition partnerships stemming from artifact research on the website.

- Social Media

NovaMuse and ANSM have several related social media platforms. Many of the users following these platforms are museums in the province. Regular posts highlighting NovaMuse's capabilities and benefits to museums would provide quick and easy advertising, and reaching a large percentage of the target audience would be assured.

- Site Visits

ANSM's Museum Advisor regularly visits dozens of museums every year as part of their position's responsibilities. These meetings provide an excellent opportunity for dialogue regarding the benefits of NovaMuse to museums. It also provides an easy forum for museum workers to voice their own thoughts and opinions regarding the website, possibly opening the door for additional work that has not yet been considered.

- Conference

ANSM hosts an annual conference that brings museum workers from around the province, and across Canada, to one place. This meeting offers a sustained period of contact with NovaMuse's key audience members. Because ANSM sets the schedule of events for the conference, it could be straightforward to offer a workshop or focus group centered on NovaMuse's resources and partnership opportunities. It could also serve as a forum for museum workers to offer their own thoughts and opinions regarding NovaMuse's capabilities.

Schools & Researchers

- School board websites

Each school board district has their own website and contact information specific to the communities they serve (i.e. Annapolis Valley, South Shore). The districts could be sent generic information regarding NovaMuse, while also highlighting museums and collections that pertain to their region. This has the potential for sparking more interest and increasing student research projects.

<http://www.nssba.ca/>

<http://www.ednet.ns.ca/contact/schools.shtml>

- Teachers Union and Associations websites

The Nova Scotia Teachers Union has its own website that provides contact information for union leadership. The website mostly focuses on member services such as negotiations and resources for teachers beginning their careers. However, making contact with the union's leadership could be useful for disseminating information in the future and receiving information about additional teacher websites/groups etc.

<http://www.nstu.ca/>
<http://ssta.nstu.ca/>

- Principal/teacher/board social media and chatroom groups
There are numerous professional chat boards, social media pages, and listservs designed for teachers and administrative personnel. These sites might be the easiest places to post information and spark dialogue with school staff. Finding these sites and gaining access for posting information could be challenging initially, but perhaps after contacting board and union websites, they could provide information.
- Professional Development Workshops for Teachers
Teachers and administration attend annual professional development workshops/conferences where new teaching techniques and resources are offered to members. As a short seminar or presentation, NovaMuse could be marketed as a new research tool for students at these events. Conferences specific to social studies teachers could prove to be the most useful events to focus on.

<http://ssta.nstu.ca/default.asp?mn=1.10>

- Libraries
Nova Scotia has many universities and colleges with potential NovaMuse users within their student bodies. Ensuring that library staff at these institutions are aware of NovaMuse as a potential research source for their students could be valuable.

Additionally, individual researchers make constant use of public library collections and resources for their own projects. Ensuring that library staff at these public institutions are aware of NovaMuse as a potential research source for their users could be valuable.

In the future, the potential for a shared conference between museums, libraries, and archives could provide an easy avenue for making library professionals aware of NovaMuse.

- Archives
Although many NovaMuse contributing museums are also archives, there are many archival institutions across the province that do not contribute to the website and may therefore lack knowledge regarding NovaMuse's potential as a research tool. ANSM's close relationship with the Council of Nova Scotia Archives, could be an easy way to access archival listservs and market NovaMuse to provincial archives and their users.

In the future, the potential for a shared conference between museums, libraries, and archives could provide an easy avenue for making library professionals aware of NovaMuse.

- Genealogy groups

Genealogical research has become a major interest for many professional and amateur researchers. Because genealogical research spans so many professional and regional bridges, many different groups have been created that could be contacted regarding NovaMuse as a research tool. NovaMuse's current and future user content creation tools also means that genealogists have the option of sharing their research on a public forum with an established membership. Many of these groups have their own websites that contain contact information and details about group meetings. Accessing this information could be an easy option for NovaMuse to become listed as a resource or for ANSM to attend a meeting to discuss NovaMuse's research potential.

<http://nsgna.ednet.ns.ca/>

<http://www.novascotiaancestors.ca/>

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~canns/>

- Heritage groups

There are several interest groups around Nova Scotia with specific focus in heritage or material culture. NovaMuse's wide range of information means that it could be of interest to a number of these groups. Many of these groups have their own websites that contain contact information and details pertaining to meetings and workshops. Accessing this information could be an easy method for NovaMuse to become listed as a resource. ANSM could attend a meeting to discuss NovaMuse's research potential.

<http://www.industrialheritagens.ca/>

<http://nsbg.chebucto.org/>

Gamification

A potential way to engage with various communities online would be to "gamify" aspects of NovaMuse. Several similar projects have created games or activities around their online collections that allow users to complete designated tasks (i.e. add tags or search terms), answer questions, etc. These games could enable NovaMuse users to interact with museum/ANSM staff, post their work to the website, and even complete basic catalogue work for museums. A merit system could be added that would enable users to display what activity they have completed or even compete for simple prizes (i.e. membership, NovaMuse swag).

These activities are theoretical so it is difficult to know what type of metrics would be needed measure their levels of engagement. However, metrics involving the number of participants for each activity, the number of tags added by participants, the number of participants who have completed merit badges etc. are all reasonable examples of activities that could be quantified.

Please see **Appendix 2: Gamification Case Studies** for specific examples of gamification strategies that could be adopted for NovaMuse.

3. How Engagement will be measured

Definition

Engagement will be determined by the level of authentic involvement, intensity, contribution, and ownership of NovaMuse by its audience members. The level of involvement, intensity, and contribution will be quantified by regularly tracking and evaluating specific, measurable metrics relating to NovaMuse's visitation and interaction.

Similarly, visitation and interaction with NovaMuse's supporting social media platforms will also be tracked and evaluated. These metrics will be reported separately from the NovaMuse website.

Engagement Metrics

NovaMuse:

- i. Conversation Rate (# of audience comments/post)
Total number of comments received from users for all artifact records/per artifact record
- ii. Amplification Rate (# of shares/post)
>WHIRL-I-GIG DOES NOT THINK NOVAMUSE CAN REPORT SHARES
Total number of shares all artifact records receive/per artifact record
- iii. Applause Rate (# of likes/post)
Total number of likes all artifact records receive/per artifact record
- iv. Unique Visits (1st Time Visits)
Number of first time visitors viewing the website
- v. Loyalty Index (Returning Visits)
Number of returning visitors viewing the website
- vi. Depth of Visit (# pages visited)
Average number of pages viewed by each visitor to the site
- vii. Time of Visit (time on site)
Average length of time spent on the website by each visitor
- viii. New/Total Registrations
Number of new registrations per quarter compared to overall totals

Social Media:

- ix. Conversation Rate (# of comments, replies, posts)
Facebook - # of comments or replies/post
Twitter - # of comments or replies/tweet
Pinterest - # of comments or replies/post
- x. Amplification Rate (# of retweets/shares)
Facebook - # shares/post
Twitter - # retweets/tweet
Pinterest - # pins/post
- xi. Applause Rate (# favourite clicks/likes)
Facebook - # of likes/post

- Twitter - # of favourites/tweet
- Pinterest - # of likes/post
- xii. Visitor stats
 - Facebook – duration of visit, frequency of visit, new/returning visitors
- xiii. New Followers/Total Followers
 - Number of new followers per quarter compared to overall totals

4. Evaluating Metrics/Success

These metrics will provide a good combination of specific actions that are working to engage audiences (i.e. posts, tweets) and general audience trends within the website (total number of visits, duration of visit, depth of visit). However, the listed metrics are only suggestions and some may prove ineffective for ANSM's needs. Additionally, without the benefit of software (which is currently an unpractical cost), tracking and calculating all of the metrics listed may simply be too much work to be realistic. The amount of work involved will also be heavily influenced by how often engagement reports are completed. Initially, reports will be completed on a quarterly basis.

Some of the metrics listed (i.e. Depth of Visit, Time of Visit, Loyalty Index) are already available through Google analytics, Facebook etc., which means no additional work for ANSM staff is required to calculate statistics. If ANSM chooses, Whirl-i-Gig has the ability to make some of NovaMuse's user information accessible, which would also increase the metrics (i.e. Conversation Rate, New/Total Registrations) easily available for comparison.

At least initially, no set number(s) will determine "engagement". Instead metrics will be reviewed on a predefined, regular quarterly basis in order to compare varying statistics. Changes in statistics can be compared with marketing efforts with specific communities (i.e. attend group workshop, listserv campaign etc.) to help determine what initiatives are working to increase visitor flow to NovaMuse. Similarly, monitoring increases in engagement (i.e. re-tweets, likes) pertaining to specific social media posts can help determine what types of information NovaMuse audiences are finding most interesting, allowing ANSM to increase those types of posts. Reviewing statistics this way determines which metrics appropriately reflect NovaMuse's audience engagement, and should also help choose which metrics are worth tracking as the project moves forward.

Getting Started

The process of moving forward with these plans should not be viewed as an overwhelming obstacle. It can be broken down into manageable tasks that should start paying dividends once started. These steps include:

- Work with Whirl-i-Gig to make NovaMuse user statistics available for use, add links to NovaMuse's social media pages, and discuss future participation tools (i.e. online exhibition spaces, story sharing capabilities etc.)
- Calculate current engagement statistics to set benchmark
- Determine how often future statistical reports will be completed, then begin tracking using chosen metrics, comparing these with the initial marketing campaigns

- Post NovaMuse milestones (i.e. new contributing museums, new record breakthrough, new tools etc.)
- Begin organizing simple participatory games on social media
- Contact identified communities regarding NovaMuse and its resources and ask to attend meetings/conferences to discuss NovaMuse
- Start a dialogue between ANSM and Nova Scotia museums regarding the future of NovaMuse, possibly during Museum Advisor site visits or through provincial listservs

As the plan moves forward, some of these steps may no longer be required or, conversely, additional steps may be added. The process will be fluid but systematically completing manageable stages will be the key to overall success.

Conclusion

To be successful NovaMuse requires active participation from a variety of sources. ANSM has identified two groups, Nova Scotia Museums and Schools & Researchers, as communities who could benefit from the information available on the website. These groups will only represent ANSM's initial attempts at engaging with potential audiences. It will be important to continuously attempt to identify additional groups that could benefit from NovaMuse.

Additionally, any attempts at engaging with these communities will require an ongoing commitment from ANSM and NovaMuse's contributing museums. Successful engagement will require regularly interaction with identified target groups in the form of social media and community outreach campaigns. Funding for these campaigns will likely be grant dependent, and increasing engagement with NovaMuse will likely be a secondary goal of the grants. For example, a First World War digitization training project could potentially be tied with social media blitzes and physical and online exhibitions centered around artifact records on NovaMuse.

Increasing the gamification of NovaMuse provides a secondary option for increasing online engagement. Creating specialized tasks for users that involve tagging, editing, and uploading content to NovaMuse could be something worth researching with developers at Whirl-i-Gig. This type of addition would require further work from ANSM staff and funds to complete the necessary upgrades to the website. An easier solution could be to initiate quick and simple participation games using the social media of ANSM and contributing museums. Followers of these various social media platforms could participate by commenting on, liking, or sharing social media posts pertaining to artifact records on NovaMuse.

Once the marketing campaign of NovaMuse begins with ANSM's targeted communities, it will be imperative that a method for objectively measuring and comparing levels of audience engagement with the website be adopted. The metrics suggested in this document offer the potential to compare visitor statistics with both earlier levels of engagement and also ANSM's marketing campaigns. Reviewing these statistics should provide an idea of what campaigns are successfully driving audience engagement. These metrics are only suggestions, and with time it is possible that tracking all will be too time consuming or will not provide the level of insight needed to justify the work.

The practice of sharing museum collections online is a developing field itself, so tracking and measuring audience engagement with NovaMuse is certainly going to be an experimental process. During the

completion of this plan, attempts were made to find similar projects that could be used as case studies for NovaMuse engagement. The lack of examples found for comparison shows that targeting communities, developing engagement techniques, and choosing metrics that work will be a trial-and-error process. ANSM will have to learn what works best for the needs of NovaMuse, the contributing museums, and itself as it completes these steps. It will be important to continue experimenting with engagement strategies, otherwise there is a real risk of losing any previous gains.

This document will need to be reviewed and revised on a regular basis to ensure the action steps defined within remain relevant and that the specific goals of engagement are supported by ANSM's current strategic plan.

Appendix 1: User Engagement Case Studies

Philaplace – Historical Society of Pennsylvania

<http://www.philaplace.org/about/>

Philaplace is a project that grew out of a merger between the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) and the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, that was envisioned as an ethnographic look at the history of Philadelphia. The PhilaPlace website uses a multimedia format from a variety of sources, including: five interactive maps (both contemporary and historic), text, photographs, and audio and video clips.

Its immediate audience was identified as ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods within the city of Philadelphia. With the website's launch, community outreach programs begin in these communities. There was an additional social media campaign related to the website's launch and as new content is added, the HSP's social media is used to direct traffic to new stories.

Initial visitation and engagement numbers were high, likely due to the social media and community outreach campaigns. However once grant funding was finished and these campaigns lessened, numbers began to decline. Additionally, Google stopped supporting the project's maps, and it took a year to fundraise and rebuild. When finally rebuilt, the "Tell Your Story" user contributed component of the project was dropped. Without supporting community events to market the project, very few people were contributing content to the website. Spam had also become a major issue.

Observations:

Philaplace shares several aspects of NovaMuse's current design, including sharing text, photographs, and maps online. Its interactive maps and "Tell Your Story" content could work as an example of future audience engagement initiatives for NovaMuse, including sharing comments and stories and audience contributed exhibitions (possibly including customized versions the Timeline feature).

The initial success of community outreach and social media campaigns shows that proactively engaging with targeted communities can help drive online engagement. However, it also highlights the need to continuously market NovaMuse to these communities. Otherwise there is a very real risk of audience decline. With funding based almost entirely on grants, delivering ongoing campaigns could be problematic in the future. Realistically, funding based on larger projects with only a secondary focus on NovaMuse engagement will be needed to support these campaigns in the future (i.e. First World War digitization training project).

Appendix 2: Gamification Case Studies

#OneThread – The Auckland Museum

<http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/onethread>

The Auckland Museum has been running a participatory “spot-the-connection” game for users called #OneThread. During each game, participating institutions post clues pertaining to a specific idea, date, person, object to their Twitter accounts. Clues include an item from the participating institutions’ collections and a brief, often cryptic, description.

Users can make their guesses during the game period, which usually lasts 2 days using the hashtag #OneThread. The solution is revealed to everyone at the end of the game period.

Observations:

A game like this could be easily adapted to NovaMuse using artifact or entity records already displayed on the website. Individual contributing museums could use their own social media platforms to share their hints and these could be reposted by ANSM to ensure more views- or ANSM could organize the game on its own.

This type of quick and simple game could be an easy, but effective, way to increase participation between NovaMuse, contributing museums, and online audiences. In terms of workload, it is a very undemanding project and, additionally, the infrastructure is already in place to begin.

Citizen Archivist Dashboard – The United States National Archives

<http://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist/>

The US National Archives has created a number of activities enabling users to participate with and contribute to their online collections records. These activities include tagging, transcribing, editing and uploading content. Users can determine their preferred means of participation through type (i.e. tagging or transcribing), contributing institution, or theme (i.e. Titanic).

Users can also compete in regular contests (i.e. “I Found it in the National Archives” where users share their stories about records they have found in the Archives) and “featured missions” that focus on completing work on specific records and offer merit badges upon completion.

The National Archives has also created a “Citizen’s Contribution Policy” that details what type of contributions are acceptable and explains that anything failing to meet those standards will be removed.

Observations:

This system could be viewed as the “advanced” gamification strategy for NovaMuse. It involves lots of participation from users, various levels of customized activity, and would allow ANSM to focus contribution on specific collections or themes though featured missions.

Depending on how far ANSM wants to proceed with NovaMuse gamification, following this example could be the way forward. However, it would almost certainly require additional work from Whirl-i-Gig to enable some of the activities and would also increase the workload for ANSM staff who would be required to monitor user contribution based on its predefined standards of acceptable contribution.

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