



Digital Policy

Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust

2020-22

1. Introduction and Scope

This policy outlines how digital activity is used to support the work of the Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust. It describes how RPMT will work with the fast-evolving opportunities presented by digital technology and culture, and how it will respond to the challenges.

A starting assumption of this policy is that digital is no longer an emerging revolution; it now has a role in everything we do. One of RPMT's principal challenges is to embed digital innovation in our activities in a way that is sustainable, enables genuine engagement and learning, and ultimately supports our mission by connecting audiences with our collections, buildings and knowledge. But while digital should not be seen as 'other', there is still a need to create space for experimentation, and to pivot in response to new insights and successful initiatives.

This policy was originally written in conjunction with Royal Pavilion & Museums' Digital Plan 2018-22 which has four key objectives:

- I. **Digital Publishing:** digitisation, and the production of open captured content about its collections, buildings and knowledge
- II. **Digital Skills:** improving the digital literacy of RPMT through staff training and collaborative projects with external partners
- III. **Digital Marketing:** new content and data-driven approaches to targeted marketing
- IV. **Information Management:** supporting the resilience of RPMT by ensuring legal compliance, improved communication and intelligence, and the preservation of its digital assets

While these objectives will define much of RPMT's digital activity in 2020-22, there will be digital elements to many of the other activities in its overall Business Plan, and new opportunities may emerge to use digital technology in support of its mission. To this end, this policy should be considered a framework that supports both the Digital Plan and broader activities during the period.

2. Golden rule

Digital is commonly defined by the technologies used, yet like all media technologies the successful use of digital media is largely determined by the quality of the assets used (images, data, stories) and how they engage audiences (learning, commercial activity, co-production etc). In the case of RPMT, engagement with audiences is our key measure of success, but as its mission is shaped by its unique collections, buildings and knowledge, these assets are a vital component to this engagement.

A simple golden rule that can be applied is that no discussion about digital activity should start with the technology; it should start with either the audience or the assets.

Golden Rule

Assets

- Objects
- Buildings
- Stories
- Knowledge
- Staff / volunteers

Digital Content

- Blog
- Website
- Data
- Image
- App
- Game

Audiences

- Gallery visitors
- Online viewers
- Teachers
- Researchers
- Young people

Developing a digital idea should never start with the technology...

3. Digital is about relationships

Digital activity and products are best conceived, developed and measured according to the relationships they mediate. There are three broad areas of RPMT activity where digital can play a clear and definable role in changing and supporting these relationships, all of which

directly support the four objectives of its Digital Plan, the activities set out in its Business Plan, and will improve its capacity to take advantage of new opportunities.

- a) Improving and enhancing the audience experience
- b) Changing the way we work with colleagues and partners
- c) Publishing information and knowledge

While these areas of activity are frequently convergent in practice, they provide discrete focal points for planning and evaluating digital innovation. These sets of relationships provide a framework for understanding the primary purpose of any digital initiative, and how it can be shaped and measured. In short, what relationship does any digital product or activity seek to improve?

a) Audiences

Our Manifesto pledges that RPMT will 'reach out to audiences who may never be able to visit one of our buildings; virtual visitors are not a threat to our business but a new audience we can engage with'. Alongside this commitment to our online audience, we recognise that many of those who do visit our buildings will have begun their journey as a 'virtual user' – whether from checking out our website to find out what's on offer, to spotting a social media post from a friend in one of our galleries. The 21st century museum visit is increasingly likely to begin online, and it may well end there too.

Examples of the digital activities and services that RPMT uses to improve audience experiences are:

- Visitor information on website (eg brightonmuseums.org.uk)
- Digital marketing (eg e-newsletter)
- Gallery interactives (eg iPad kiosks)
- Audio tours (eg Royal Pavilion tour)
- Public wifi (available at all sites)

Digital activity that is designed to improve audience experiences must be focused on audience wants and needs. While we may look to build fundraising or learning and social outcomes into the digital experiences we offer our visitors, these must be secondary to the needs that drive our visitors to us.

In order to recognise those needs, RPMT must always ensure that its digital products and services are designed with physical, economic and intellectual accessibility in mind.

b) Working

RPMT's work patterns are rapidly evolving, with partnership working and community co-production becoming increasingly common. Our Manifesto also states a commitment to working as a 'fellowship' within the organisation.

These new models of work require improved communication, and the ability to share information and assets with people inside and outside of RPMT. It also requires programmes of training, knowledge dissemination and support so that RPMT staff and volunteers can work confidently and effectively with digital media.

Examples of the systems and activities RPMT uses for this are:

- Staff training and professional development (eg blogging workshops)
- Information management (eg file plan and shared drive management)
- Data collection and analysis (eg onsite survey data)
- Digital preservation (eg digital asset management and ongoing exploratory work)

In much the same way as digital audience experiences must be developed in response to audience needs, improvements to the way RPMT works must be shaped by the needs of our staff, volunteers and collaborators to carry out its purpose. However, it must also be recognised that the way RPMT works is strongly guided by professional standards such as accreditation, SPECTRUM, and cross-sectoral metadata and preservation standards.

c) Publication

As an accredited museum and a publically funded organisation, RPMT is committed to making information about its collections and activities publically available, and, where possible, to permit reuse of that material by others. Our Manifesto states that ‘we are part of a global community, and our collections have relevance beyond the walls of our museums’, and that ‘our museums and collections are for present and future generations’; as such, we consider our captured digital content to be permanent contributions to a worldwide knowledge economy.

Digital activities RPMT uses to support this include:

- Digitisation and collections online (eg brightonmuseums.org.uk/collections)
- Blogging (eg brightonmuseums.org.uk/blog)
- Open licensing (eg dams-brightonmuseums.org.uk)

RPMT’s publishing activity should be developed in recognition of its audiences’ needs. But there is also a need to acknowledge that the return on our investment in publishing may be realised years into the future, by persons and for purposes unknown and unimaginable at present.

4. Digital Team & Digital Principles

RPMT’s digital team is not the team that does digital for RPMT. As a digitally literate organisation, digital skills and activity must be embedded across the whole of RPMT. While the digital team may lead on some projects and areas of activity, it also supports digital work by other teams. Sometimes this will occur through giving advice or taking on tasks; sometimes this may require making critical interventions when existing activities and processes could be greatly improved, or current digital activities and products are demonstrably failing.

Much of this will be supported by the open culture of the ‘fellowship’ outlined in RPMT’s Manifesto. But there are also some broad principles which can help ensure sustainable good practice in digital work. Some of these are common ideas in digital culture, while others have been learned from RPMT’s own recent practice.

- i. Never start any conversation about digital with the technology. See the Golden Rule above.
- ii. Make shareable content and experiences. As circulation becomes more important than distribution in online behaviour, RPMT can best improve its audience reach by

developing experiences and content that people wish to share. Word of mouth has always been the most effective and desirable form of marketing, and sharing is the digital equivalent.

- iii. Be data-centric, but not data bloated. We should measure all our digital activity where possible, and contextualise the data in order to evaluate success. We should learn from the insights we can glean from our audience data, but we must be mindful of the legal and ethical restrictions on collecting this data. We also should not hoard data in the hope that it will become magically useful at some point. A dataset is only as good as the questions that can be asked of it.
- iv. Experiment and iterate. Digital innovation comes with a high risk of failure, usually because audience behaviour is difficult to predict. To accommodate this, we should accept managed risks in new digital activity, and use failure as a means of informing future progress. Digital products should be considered in 'permanent beta', capable of ongoing refinement, or producing ideas and assets that can be repurposed elsewhere.
- v. Presume to publish. While published content should always be fit for its audiences' purpose, there is also a need to sometimes 'go ugly, go early'. The data and digital assets RPMT produces belong to the public; these assets should only remain unpublished in the long-term if there are ethical or legal restrictions for doing so.
- vi. Use open source software and avoid proprietary lock-in. Recognised open source software can provide cheaper and more sustainable tools for developing digital content. We also need to be mindful of investing resources in producing content exclusively for platforms that we do not own. Proprietary platforms like social media can offer increased reach, but the longevity and scope of distribution on these channels is entirely dependent on business needs that are not our own.

Embedding these principles into our digital practice will always support the activities outlined in RPMT's Digital Plan and Business Plan, and the commitments and ambitions set out in its Mission and Manifesto.