

Q: DO AUDIENCES WANT VIRTUAL CONTENT FROM MUSEUMS?



A: DURING THIS PANDEMIC ... YES! BUT WHAT PEOPLE WOULD LOVE TO SEE, AND HOW THEY FIND IT, VARIES QUITE A BIT.

► First, families with children.

“Any resources that can engage and educate my children while allowing me a few minutes quiet would be the most mentally and emotionally helpful thing for me.”



Parents and caretakers of young children are struggling to juggle work, childcare, and education. More than anything else, they are looking for content that is educational and fun for children while giving adults a break.



But what about activities? They are OK too ... but if they require the assistance of an adult or materials they don't have, demand won't be as high.

► Educators are also grappling with shifts to virtual learning.



“My brain is on overload some days as I work through the challenges of teaching elementary age students through the computer.”



Of course, museums can help them ... if educators know about what you have and it fits in their curriculum. And if they assign your content to students, the constraints remain the same for families:

your content is more likely to be used if it requires minimal/no adult involvement.

► What about adult audiences?

Our research indicates most had *not* sought out content from museums over the past few weeks.

WHY NOT? FOR LOTS OF REASONS, INCLUDING:

- Hadn't occurred to them
- No time (especially among parents)
- Anxiety is depressing motivation for culture/learning
- Perception museums are only providing content aimed at children
- Tired of screen-time
- Don't know where to start looking for content

But that doesn't mean that content is unnecessary. Far from it! Most museum-goers would enjoy hearing from museums ... and engaging with content.



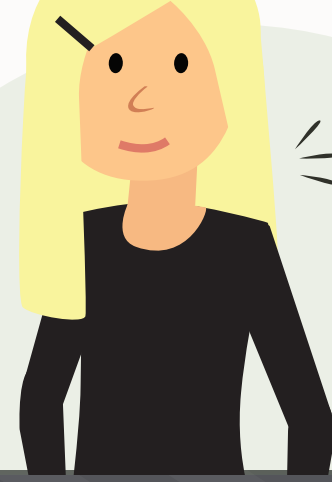
► Museum-goers have shared four critical things they need ... and that museums could help them with:



“What can museums share from their knowledge/collections of how people have coped in the past, how did society rebound after the disease dissipated, what new actions, philosophies, or attitudes came about from living through such times?”

- ESCAPE
- HOPE
- CONTEXTUALIZATION OF PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE
- FOSTERING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS ... FROM A DISTANCE

“Most importantly, I need an escape from the pandemic ... I just want a place where I can hide from the pandemic for a little while. I can't even enjoy cat videos anymore because it's about cats and the quarantine, not just cats.”



“I'd be grateful if any museums offered other activities that I could easily experience with my family and friends while social distancing.”

► How they want us to engage them, and to what depth, varies.

Most museum-goers were interested in a regular feed of short snippets of content, such as:

	PUZZLES AND GAMES		FUN "DO AND SHARE" ACTIVITIES
	FUN FACTS		THINGS THAT SURPRISE AND DELIGHT
	BEHIND-THE-SCENES TIDBITS		SHARING HOPE AND BEAUTY

Why short snippets? In periods of stress, our attention spans suffer. Additionally, our isolation has increased reliance on social media, which serves this kind of content well. (All this only reinforces why things like #hashtagthecowboy, curious penguins, and art recreations have been effective.)

The demand for longer-form content *isn't* as strong ... though the connection longer-form content engenders tends to be deeper and more meaningful.

Suggestions from museum-goers include:

Ways to meet and engage with a variety of staff (not just curators!)



Virtual tours

Cooking demonstrations/ lessons, writing seminars, etc.



Lectures, author talks, webinars, etc.

Regardless of length, museum-goers expect high-quality, meaningful experiences that are authentic to this moment. That means considering where your audience is *right now*, and not simply repackaging old content.



“... instead of feeling like I'm getting the quarantine substitute experience, I feel like I'm getting a completely new experience I would never have gotten if it weren't for this and it's more exciting.”

So get the word out because museum-goers want to hear from museums!



“I enjoy getting updates and emails from the museum, knowing that YOU ARE STILL THERE! Like a family member who lives in a different state, you're far away but not gone.”



Of course, some museum-goers want social media while others want email ... in this, *nothing* has changed since pre-pandemic.

What *has* changed is our emphasis on online content, which is creating a surfeit of riches that is actually hard to wade through:



“I'm actually very overwhelmed by all the online opportunities!”

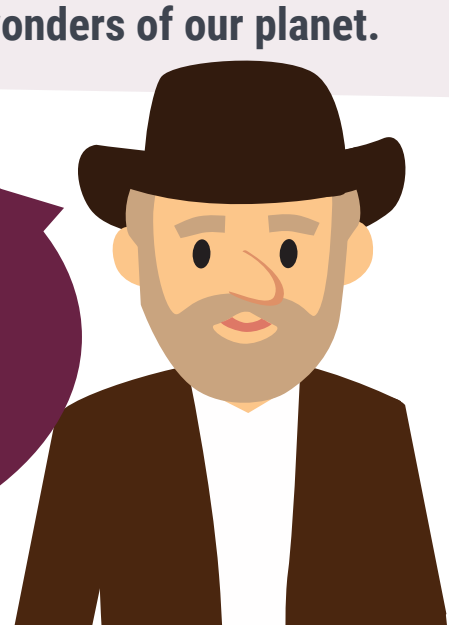
And it is on us to organize the content that is out there so that people can find the things that spark their curiosity more easily.



Because if we really matter, this is how we help people in this moment ... by sparking curiosity, engendering empathy and connection, providing hope, and reminding all of us of our shared humanity through history, culture, science, and the wonders of our planet.



“A Cultural Institution must somehow become indispensable to survive the coronavirus crisis ... Doing nothing whatsoever invites cultural disaster.”



COMING UP:
What will it take for us to make visitors feel safe and comfortable at museums when we reopen? Our next *Pandemic Data Story* will share their thoughts.

Museums and the Pandemic Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums.

Sources include:
• Spring 2020 Online Panel of Museum-Goers
• Spring 2020 Broader Population Sampling
• 2020 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers

*Data Stories share research about both museum-goers (who visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).

The entire series of Museums and the Pandemic Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.



American Alliance of Museums

