

Committee: Barbican Centre Board – For Information	Date: 19/09/2018
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Summary

This report provides an update on the Barbican's approach to digital strategy. Detailed updates on the progress and impact of individual digital projects and initiatives is now embedded in departmental updates in line with the distributed approach set out in the strategy.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note this report.

Main Report

Background

In September 2016, a new digital strategy was presented to the Barbican Centre Board. Two years on, this report reflects on the current position of that strategy and identifies key areas of focus and development in 2018/2019.

Our digital strategy, co-written by a team of key staff with responsibilities for digital across the organisation, is built upon the following two principles:

1. An awareness that 'digital' increasingly permeates every aspect of what the Barbican does.
2. A set of shared principles must therefore inform decision-making with regards to how the Barbican engages with the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age.

In order to acknowledge a whole-organisation approach to digital, we identified five domains of digital activity within the Barbican. These are:

Infrastructure - The ecosystem of platforms and systems we use to deliver our artistic, educational and commercial ambitions.

Communications - How we shape our voice, the audiences we aspire to reach, and the spaces we choose to deliver our message.

Content - The stories we choose to tell our audiences online and the voices we engage to tell them.

Partnerships - The relationships we build with organisations who help deliver a digital dimension to our work.

Arts, Learning, and Commercial – How we utilise digital culture and technology to empower the people we work with.

This approach – built upon the belief that digital culture and technology must inform every aspect of our work – necessitated a principle-led strategy rather than one built on a commitment to specific projects or outcomes.

Therefore, our strategy outlines a set of key principles which inform decision-making across these five domains, with digital projects initiated and delivered across all departments. These principles can be found in the full digital strategy, attached in Appendix 1.

Given the extent to which our digital work permeates multiple teams in the Centre, we refrained from the formation of a centralised digital team or a Head of Digital. Over the last two years, we have pursued a collaborative approach which relies on the formation of cross-cutting teams comprised of departmental specialists to deliver key digital ambitions.

However, the need to ensure momentum and substantive progress was clear, and we therefore adopted the following management framework:

- The Director Learning and Engagement holds ultimate responsibility for ensuring progress against the strategy.
- This Director also chairs the Digital Strategy Group, which consists of senior stakeholders from different teams and meets bi-monthly to monitor progress of major workstreams, and make key decisions as required.

Current Position

What ‘digital’ means at the Barbican today has considerably more breadth and is expressed across all of our activity, for example:

- An artist’s deployment of emergent technology in the realisation of a Curve commission.
- The procurement of a new CRM system to transform our ticketing, marketing and audience journey capabilities.
- The continuous and iterative development of our website using Agile methodologies.
- The roll-out of new flexible working tools for all staff.

- The forging of significant new partnerships with creative and funding organisations to realise our programme.
- Digital is the primary tool by which international audiences can engage with our programme
- The development of deeper and more engaged relationships with our audiences through a strategic approach to social media and digital content.
- A rigorous and extensively-planned response to the impacts of GDPR on our approach to data collection and email.

This is by no means an exhaustive list; there is much else besides. But it is nonetheless indicative of the success of our approach to date in driving digital innovation across the organisation. The extent to which digital technology and culture have permeated our activity means that it is increasingly difficult to bring any updates from across the organisation to the Board which do not feature a significant element of digital activity. For example, the July 2018 board meeting alone included updates on:

- British artist and filmmaker, John Akomfrah creating his most ambitious piece to date in the Curve, which is now currently touring with huge success - an immersive six-channel video installation addressing climate change, human communities and the wilderness.
- News of a more-than 200% increase in audiences booking online for *Basquiat: Boom for Real* compared with other recent exhibitions, allowing us to continue conversations with those audiences, reinforced by a significant digital content legacy which continues to attract daily digital engagement months after the exhibition closed.
- The UK's premiere documentary festival, Sheffield Doc/Fest, launching its first touring exhibition at the Barbican from August 20-27 with four highlights from its Alternate Realities programme of interactive, augmented reality and virtual reality projects.
- The extended reach of the Creative Learning *Basquiat's Brain* project, when our young glitch artists were invited by the new Shoreditch Digital Canvas to submit their work to be shown in the public domain overlooking the Old Street Roundabout.
- The commitment by Creative Learning to the use of digital as a tool to enable us to achieve things with our work that could not otherwise be realised, looking to test and develop its potential in the following 3 areas of our work:
 - Digital as a means to create greater accessibility and inclusion for audiences and participants
 - Extend the breadth of our reach and engagement
 - Develop the skills required for the industries of the future

Further, the Marketing and Communications update to the Board in May 2018 touched upon:

- The launch of a new website for the Barbican by an internal, cross-functional, Agile team and a shift to rolling testing and improvement, delivering a 10% rise in overall visitor numbers and an increase in transactions enabled by a mobile-first approach, a 9% increase in sales conversions and a 20% increase in engagement with content.
- The Barbican website being recognised at the 22nd Annual Webby Awards, receiving the distinction of Honoree in the 'Best Visual Design' category.
- The Barbican's social media footprint reaching 1.5m followers – an increase of more than 20% than on the previous year,
- A shift in marketing strategy to a content-led approach and a strong focus on video, with at least one piece of video content published per week on average, leading to a steady increase in our share of voice on Facebook and YouTube. Barbican digital content now reaches 12 million social media users every month and generates 70,000 user interactions.

Meanwhile, a cross-organisational team led by the Audience Experience, IT and Marketing departments has overseen the procurement of a new ticketing and customer relationship management (CRM) system. This will now form a significant focus of our digital work in the coming year, presenting some major challenges and opportunities both technically and operationally. The project offers a chance to revolutionise our approach to CRM and marketing automation, to commit more fully to agile methodologies and to unlock new opportunities to maximise the value inherent in our data.

We also recognised the need to allow staff more flexibility in how and where they work. Phasing out desktop PCs, gradually introducing laptops with always-on remote connectivity to our systems for all staff and migrating to Office 365 is an important step in encouraging cross-departmental, collaborative engagement. This has been well received and we are now working with the City to develop a richer training package that will likely be delivered corporation-wide.

In light of this more embedded approach to reporting on digital throughout the Board cycle, the Director of Learning and Engagement's digital updates to the Board will now focus on strategy, governance and forthcoming strategic initiatives, complementing the digital aspects reported by departmental teams.

As we reported in July 2018, the Digital Strategy Group has been undertaking a review of our Strategy. A key observation unearthed through that work - which incorporated consultation with a range of teams, particularly within the Commercial division - was the uneven distribution of digital expertise and resource across the organisation.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Two years since the launch of our digital strategy, it is encouraging to note that the principles we set out remain as relevant as they were when initially proposed, particularly during a period when digital technologies and digital culture have evolved at pace. We have also noted that the format of the strategy and the basis of the principles contained within it have been adopted by other major arts organisations seeking to establish leadership in digital as they strive to publish strategies that are not only future-proof within reasonable expectations, but also relevant to all.

We recognise however that the strategy should be kept in constant review through the digital strategy group under the leadership of the Director Learning and Engagement. And more importantly we are mindful that – after engaging with stakeholders across the organisation – awareness, relevance and impact of the strategy needs to be improved significantly in order to realise its potential.

The Digital Strategy Group has identified three key areas for further development through 2018/2019:

1. How can we apply the culture and practices of the digital age evenly across the Barbican to further improve the way we work as an organisation?
2. How can we catalyse a major shift in our use of data to drive more informed decision-making?
3. How can we develop a creative learning offer which harnesses the opportunities afforded by contemporary digital technologies and digital culture?

These three key areas for future development, identified through internal consultation with teams across the centre and amongst the Strategy Group itself, have been supported by, and will continue to be explored through, informal discussions with Board Members.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Our approach aligns directly with outcome nine of the City's Corporate Plan 2018–23: “We are digitally and physically well connected” and the ongoing process of digital strategy review is specifically identified as a priority area in the Barbican's Strategic Plan.

The shift in focus may necessitate the engagement of appropriate partners and expertise to help move to our next phase of development.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Barbican Digital Strategy