Digital Strategy

The Barbican's Digital Strategy was collaboratively-written by a combination of digital specialists from across the organisation during Summer 2016. It is premised upon the notion that "digital", shorn of any suffix, is too broad a concept with which to facilitate focused and meaningful conversations and projects. Rather than gathering all projects under the overarching umbrella of "digital", our new strategy outlines the Barbican"s approach centred around five digital domains. Progress against this strategy is monitored by our Digital Strategy Group, chaired by Sean Gregory.

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Part 1 - Introduction and overview

Introduction

The digital age has transformed how we create, communicate and collaborate. For an organisation in pursuit of arts without boundaries it presents a rich array of opportunities.

For the arts sector in general, a more digital world is an opportunity for once distant, intimidating institutions to break down barriers to access, to better communicate what we are and what we are for, to amplify our impact. It has engendered a culture of immediacy, shareability, and malleability – a culture in which information can be created and shared in an instant. To fully realise these ambitions, the Barbican needs to continue harnessing the opportunities presented by the digital age for ourselves, our artists, and our audiences.

But at a functional level, "digital", shorn of any suffix, is far too broad a concept with which to facilitate focused and meaningful conversations and projects. Rather than gathering all projects under the overarching umbrella of "digital", this document, collaboratively-written by a group of established digital thinkers from across the organisation during Spring 2016, outlines the Barbican's approach across five distinct domains:

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 and Learning – How we harness digital culture and technology to empower the artists we work with.

Purpose

This document is intended for three audiences:

- those responsible for commissioning and delivering digital projects for the Barbican;
- the wider staff community;
- those people and organisations who collaborate with us on our digital work.

It is intended to achieve the following:

- inform decision-making;
- explain what digital means to us;
- position the Barbican as a leader in this field;
- highlight best practice;
- provide rationale for digital staffing structure/resource.

Delivery and Implementation

Our digital work nearly always permeates multiple teams in the Centre. We have therefore refrained from forming a centralised digital team, or appointing a Head of Digital.

We pursue a collaborative approach, forming cross-cutting teams comprised of departmental specialists to deliver digital projects. This ensures that each project team is staffed by the most appropriate group of people, and digital expertise and skills become embedded across the Barbican.

In order to ensure momentum and substantive progress with our Digital Strategy, we have adopted the following management framework:

- At a senior level, the Director of Learning and Engagement has ultimate responsibility for ensuring progress against the digital strategy;
- The Director of Learning and Engagement will also chair the Digital Strategy Group, which consists of senior stakeholders from different teams and meets bi-monthly to monitor progress of major projects, and make key decisions as required;
- Elsewhere, specialist cross-departmental teams (e.g. the digital content group, the technology projects review group, or the web project team) deliver specific areas of work.

Additionally, this document will be reviewed annually and progress against it reported to the Barbican Board as part of the Director of Learning and Engagement's digital updates.

This document sets out the series of principles which inform our decision-making across all digital projects. It is accompanied by detailed, domain-specific, project plans which present roadmaps for ensuring substantive progress against our digital vision over the next three years.

General Principles

In addition to the domain-specific criteria which are outlined below, there are some general principles which inform all of our work in this area:

We…

1. Understand that the opportunities afforded by digital technology are central to fulfilling our organisational vision and strategic goals.

2. Challenge the accepted and traditional ways of working but ….

3. … remember that 'digital' is not a cure-all that can solve everything.

4. Always have a clear user or audience in mind.

5. Make decisions based on clear data analysis and business metrics.

6. Work collaboratively with domain experts and teams across the Barbican and beyond to share knowledge and expertise.

7. Appreciate that the successful delivery of projects requires sufficient budget and staff resources.

8. Educate staff on how to best use the appropriate tools effectively and efficiently.

9. Learn lessons from what works and what doesn't and iterate quickly to improve.

10. Strive to maximise opportunities for developing new and existing income streams.

Part 2 - Five digital domains

Introduction

This section details the criteria which inform how we make project commissioning decisions across the Barbican's five digital domains, and it articulates a domain-specific vision for each of the five areas.

Infrastructure

The ecosystem of platforms and systems we use to deliver our artistic and commercial ambitions.

	We do...	**We don't...**
Secure systems & sensitive data	Ensure that all data is warehoused securely and that all relevant security frameworks are adhered to	Allow an undocumented network of data storage to develop, particularly where sensitive data is concerned
Data driven decision making	Present data for key business metrics clearly and consistently to facilitate informed data driven decisions	Keep data in silos that are not interconnected
Valuable information and metrics	Provide easy access to valuable data and educate staff in the use of the systems to support that access	Structure our data or warehouse it in such a way that access is limited to staff with specific technical literacy
Open source / cloud-based architectures and software that are future proof	Wherever possible, always use cloud-based and open-source technologies	Procure closed or proprietary technologies where a direct open-source alternative exists
Open data & systems	Integrate our systems wherever possible, focusing on flexible API (application programing interface) frameworks	Develop systems that don't offer opportunities to integrate
Project Management	Use the Agile/DSDM project management methodology to deliver technology projects on time and on budget	Start projects that are not aligned to business objectives and have clear deliverables, budget and deadlines

Communications

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

	We do...	We don't...
Data, personalisation & CRM	Strive to put audiences at the heart of every digital communication	Create digital communications without a specific audience in mind. If we're not sure who it's for, it's not good enough.
Platforms & channels	Take a platform- and channel-agnostic approach.	Prioritise one channel over any other or choose a channel for any other reason than it being demonstrably the most appropriate medium for the message.
New technologies	Encourage an experimental attitude and approach and adopt a 'try early, fail fast' strategy for new platforms and tools.	Wait on the sidelines to follow the lead of others or procrastinate and stand in the footsteps of others
Style & tone	Adapt our voice depending on the moment and message, but always in ways that are meaningful, engaging, and accessible	Talk down to our audiences or use deliberately opaque or pretentious language
Publishing structure	Strive to democratise the publishing of digital content across our team through clear frameworks for style, tone and timing	Rely on individuals with particular strengths to lead and maintain the quality and structure of our digital communications
Metrics, analytics and ROI	Constantly evaluate and evolve our communications against a range of KPIs to ensure we stay relevant and deliver demonstrable ROI	Use the same approach if there is no evidence that it is working.
Bought vs. earned digital communications	Maximise opportunities to broaden our digital reach by investing in bought presence where appropriate	Perpetuate the myth that digital reach is free
Integrated ecosystem	Create multiple routes to access our content and allow it to live holistically and timelessly alongside our existing channels	Publish content once and then let it fall into the ether or see content as having a singular means as part of a campaign

Content

The stories we choose to tell our audiences online and the artists we engage to tell them

	We do...	**We don't...**
Creative vision	Commission original projects to excite and provoke, encouraging our audiences to engage on a creative and discursive level at all times	Commission projects which are derivative of work which already exists or which could easily be made by other organisations
Uniquely digital	Support ambitious projects which exploit the storytelling possibilities of the internet	Always use linear storytelling mediums
Independently valuable content	Create work which is meaningful and coherent in and of itself	Create work which is entirely reliant on our programme in order for it to be relevant
Clarity	Know what our story is, and who is telling it	Embark on a project which doesn't have a clear story
Platform	Decide on the story first, and then choose the most appropriate medium for it	Make a film/microsite/podcast for the sake of it
Audiences	Conceive projects with a specific target audience in mind	Commission 'vanity' projects
Creative diversity	Work with a diverse range of authentic and engaging voices	Give space to voices which aren't true to the Barbican's mission
Relevance	Plan our content to be as well-timed and relevant to our programme as possible	Produce content after the 'moment' in our programme has passed

Partnerships

The relationships with build with organisations who help deliver a digital dimension to our work

	We do...	**We don't...**
Shared vision	Seek out partners who are sympathetic to our organisational vision	Work with organisations whose values we don't support
Adding value	Work with organisations who add expertise, resource, or access to a broader audience	Work in partnership to deliver a project we just as easily could deliver ourselves
Horizons	Look to the UK and beyond for the best and brightest ways of working	Rely solely on existing relationships to deliver our work
Confidence	Be aware of the value of our brand when forging new relationships	Under-estimate the attraction of working with the Barbican to our partners
Diversity	Use partnerships to bring different, and diverse, voices into our working life	Select partners who look, sound, and dress like us
Openness	Make time to have exploratory conversations with organisations and people new to us	Forget to look at the opportunities presented by the world beyond our concrete walls
Collaboration	Use partnerships as a way to interrogate our ways of thinking and working	Parachute an organisation in to work in isolation

Arts & Learning

How we harness digital culture and technology to empower the artists we work with

	We do...	We don't...
Artistic rigour	Commission work where the idea leads the technology, not the other way round	Commission work which is driven by the spectacle of technological capability
Innovation and originality	Seek out artists at the leading edge of innovation in their art forms, and support the realisation of their ideas through technology	Allow technology to steer the artistic ideas which inform our work
Collaboration	Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between art forms and beyond	Remain siloed within our individual programming disciplines
Contemporary technoculture	Focus on the way art is being made today, concentrating on the social and technological changes that are transforming artistic practice	Adhere to twentieth century models of artistic production
Audience development	Stretch our audiences, broadening their ideas about what art can be and who can make it	Allow audiences to become too comfortable
Platforms and access	Create programmes which allow emergent artists access to a new generation of creative tools and spaces	Restrict access to those who can afford modern technology

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