

FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EXHIBIT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

C. TRAVELLING EXHIBIT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Putting together an exhibit, whether in-house or travelling, involves certain common documentation tasks which follow the exhibit objects change of location. Object tracking is following an object's location through time. Loan agreements, travelling schedules, work orders for crating, shipping invoices, crate lists and labels, incoming and outgoing receipts, condition reports, installation lists, gallery text and labels, and venue list, all facilitate the object's movement from lender to borrower (or borrowers) and back to the lender. For objects that travel, the insurance covers the object from "wall-to-wall", meaning from the lenders' storage or display space back to the original space.

Travelling exhibits require extra documentation tasks. Loan agreements and incoming and outgoing receipts are more numerous; travelling schedules and expense records are more complicated; crating and installation instructions must be clear to make unpacking, mounting, repacking and reshipping easier; condition reports and insurance losses are more critical with increased handling in different venues; and gallery text and labels may need redoing to prevent a frayed look.

Travelling exhibits have evolved from an occasional ad hoc activity to a regular feature of museum activity and the source of a new category of commercial services. They have become more and more popular, especially since World War II.²¹ However, the idea is over a century old, and may have been launched in 1850 by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London when they lent works of art to the Central School of Design at Somerset House. The following two years, this exhibit went to various provincial schools. Since 1852, the Victoria and Albert Museum long term loan activities (two or more years) have been directed by a separate department called the Central Inventory. Departmental keepers were responsible for short term loans from the collection to other museums.²² The Victoria and Albert first centered its efforts on preparing a "circulating museum" of about six hundred objects that toured for more than four years and was seen by 307,000 people. A second educational "circulating museum" concentrated on showing appropriate art for art students. Soon,

21. E. C. Osborn and Grace Morley, Temporary and Travelling Exhibits, 55-109.

22. D. Andrew Roberts, Planning the documentation of museum collections (United Kingdom: Museum Documentation Association, October 1985), 363-364.

spurred by general demand, the department prepared loans to museums and art galleries. Today the Victoria and Albert Museum no longer has travelling exhibits due to budget cuts. Previous policy placed almost no limits on value, fragility or rarity on circulating objects. The loan process excluded only objects that were strictly unique or of international importance. Pilot automation projects to control the collection are just beginning.

"Packaged" travelling exhibitions are a newer development. This type of exhibition arrives with its own installation units, parts, and labels ready to set up. Cultural agencies operated by many governments (the U.S. Information Service, the British Council, etc.) promoted these "packaged" exchanges during World War II and continue to do so. The Australian government has promoted travelling exhibits by providing railway carriages, stripped of their furnishings, as travelling galleries.²³ The National Park Service designs and constructs "packaged" exhibits at the National Park Service Headquarters at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Their exhibit design headquarters personnel created several travelling exhibits to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of the Constitution of the United States during 1986-87. One exhibit shows political cartoons of the era to dramatize the issues that confronted the creators of the Constitution. A second exhibit, organized with the Library of Congress, features 150 photographs of historic U.S. architecture taken by Jack E. Boucher for the National Park Service's Historic American Building Survey (HABS). The exhibit opened March 31, 1986 at the headquarters building of the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C. and traveled nationwide.²⁴

Today, large commercial firms prepare exhibits for museums, for educational institutions, for conferences, for fairs and for national government agencies and businesses. An example of a consulting exhibit company is Lynch Museum Services in New Jersey. They give "advice for the museum professional from museum professionals."²⁵ They plan, design, research, write scripts, engineer participatory exhibits, fabricate and install exhibits. Another exhibit design company, Intaglio, promises to

23. Osborn and Morley, Temporary and Travelling Exhibits 55-109.

24. Mary Maruca, ed. "Constitution's Bicentennial," and "HABS Photographer," Courier 31 (March 1986): 1, 26.

25. Lynch Museum Services advertisement, History News 37 (December 1982): 27.

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"explore beyond conventional boundaries, creating exhibits that are vibrant expressions."²⁶ The American Federation of the Arts (AFA) exchanges art exhibits throughout North America. They believe that sharing exhibitions is the most effective way for organizations to give quality programs to their audiences at the lowest possible cost. AFA member museums organize most exhibits or develop exhibits from their museum collections. Sponsorship is both public and private. AFA provide the only national group fine arts insurance policy on collections and special exhibitions. By pooling risk, member museums reduce insurance cost. Wall-to-wall coverage (protection from the time a painting is removed from the wall of the originating museum until it is returned) provides for temporary exhibits and permanent collections. AFA now administers annual coverage for 265 institutions.²⁷

Large museums and museum associations also organize and circulate travelling exhibits. Prominent among these, in the Arts, are the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and the Western Association of Art Museum Directors. The Smithsonian Institution Travelling Exhibition Service (SITES) is an all-inclusive travelling exhibit service. Founded in 1952, SITES is probably the largest travelling exhibit program in America. In 1980-1981 SITES circulated over 150 exhibitions, developed 30-40 new exhibitions a year, and retired about the same number. SITES also offers an international program of exhibition exchange.²⁸

A study for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the early 1970s showed that one out of three (34 percent) U.S. museums sent out travelling exhibitions, averaging six outgoing exhibitions a year. The NEA study found that more than half (55

26. Intaglio advertisement, Museum News 64 (April 1986): 8, 12.

27. AMAA brochure, AFA, 270 Sutter Street, San Francisco. Beth Goldberg (AMAA registrar), interview with author, 7 May 1986. Nauert and Black, Fine Arts Insurance - A Handbook for Art Museums 99. Update call to Eric Brizze, 19 December 1988.

28. SITES, "About SITES," Update, SITES Annual Catalogue (1980-1981): 4. This publication gives prospective exhibitors and lenders a description of SITES exhibit service and an index of available exhibits. Mary Jane Clark (SITES registrar), telephone conversation with author, 6 May 1986. Update call to Jeanette Pilak, 14 July 1987. Peggy Loar, "From the Director," Siteline 26 (Summer 1987).

percent) of the art museums sent out travelling exhibits compared with 36 per cent of science museums and 19 per cent of history museums. Generally, the higher the operating budget of a museum, the higher the number of travelling exhibits sent. Museums that organized travelling exhibits sent them most often to other museums or to universities and colleges. The frequency of exchanging objects increased between 1966 and 1971. The study suggested that any substantial increase in travelling exhibition activity would depend on improved exhibition space, better climate control, and security in receiving museums.²⁹

1. TRAVELLING EXHIBIT AUTOMATION: USE OF COMMERCIAL GENERIC SOFTWARE

The following are typical examples of the use of generic software packages in documenting travelling exhibits. Each of these organizations or museums bought separate packaged software database, spreadsheet and word-processing programs and built their own exhibit documentation applications. Because there is no available software developed to integrate all these functions, these organizations are creating their own solutions. These are inexpensive software packages but the cost in manpower can be considerable.

The Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC) formed a travelling exhibits service in 1974. In 1987 they circulated twenty-two exhibits with a three person staff, mainly to science and technology museums. ASTC funding comes from participation fees, the National Science Foundation, companies, foreign governments and other sponsoring groups. Wendy Pollack, ASTC Director, is beginning to use Compaq computers and will have a network system between their five computers. They are buying dBASE III Plus to update their Framework software. She says that schedules, contracts and invoices are the most essential information in exhibit control.³⁰

29. National Research Center for the Arts, Museums USA (Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974): 61-70. Statistics cover the years 1971-1972.

30. Victor J. Danilov, Travelling Exhibitions - An Overview of Not-For-Profit Travelling Exhibitions Services, (Washington, D.C.: Association of Science and Technology Centers, 1978), 18-19. Wendy Pollack (ASTC Director), telephone conversation with author, 12 May 1986.

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San Francisco Bay Area registrars Joan Knutson of the Lowie Museum of Anthropology at the University of California in Berkeley and Joyce Gilio of the California Academy of Sciences, both use microcomputers to prepare for exhibit documentation.³¹ The Lowie prepared one travelling exhibit in 1985. They used a Macintosh computer with MacWrite software to produce the labels and text.³² The Academy of Sciences had sixteen temporary exhibits in 1986.³² They use an IBM PC computer, WordStar software by MicroPro and a database management system called Knowledge Manager. The database works for them as a way to justify their budget. The database can track, each employees' hours by name, type of task, project name and cost account number. For budgets, they use another software package, Lotus 1-2-3. Both the Lowie and the Academy of Sciences are organizing their exhibits with the latest affordable commercial microcomputer software and both registrars feel that these software packages are useful tools in preparing and managing exhibits. For further information on museum use of commercial generic exhibit software in the United States see APPENDIX B.

In contrast to using small generic software packages, the following example is the only system the author has been able to find that ties together exhibit functions in one software development. At the AAM 81st Annual Meeting in New York (June 1986), there was a session on "Using computers to Track Objects in Temporary Custody," chaired by Exhibits Preparator, Stephen Ringle from the University of Maine Art Collection. Ringle has written a software package called Traveler for the administration and scheduling of the University Art Collections Travelling Art Exhibition program. Each show leaves the University for nine one-month showings around the state. The Traveler program runs on an IBM 3033 Mainframe computer operated by the University. Traveler produces scripted documents, personalized letters with mailing labels, exhibit lists, packing lists for the shipping crates, exhibit schedules, identification labels for artwork, etc. Ringle stressed that this type of system should produce a user manual, a data dictionary, and file descriptions. To design the software he looked at the tasks and forms involved and then examined the data and its organization.³³

31. Telephone conversations with author, 2 April 1986 and 12 May 1986.

32. William Poole, "Present at the Recreation," S.F. Chronicle, Image Magazine (December 28, 1986):13-18.

33. Stephen Ringle, "Using Computers to Track Objects in Temporary Custody," AAM Conference, New York, June 1986. Attendance by the author. System Documentation lent to the author.

Travelling exhibits have become a popular phenomenon supported by the co-operation among museums, government cultural agencies, and commercial firms. Large museums and universities in the United States continue to be the principal supporters of these exchanges and art museums seem to be the most active participants. Managing travelling exhibits is a balancing act in object tracking. Like a medical record on a patient, object documentation traces what, when, where and how an object moves through time in the exhibit event.

D. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EXHIBITS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND COLLECTION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES

How do exhibit loan records relate to collections management records? Well organized and well managed collections management records are like a building's foundation. They are the records that a curator needs first to start planning an exhibit proposal. Collections management records include information on acquisition, registration, cataloguing, deaccessioning, loan processing, internal inventory control, shipping, conservation, and collections planning. The curator reads the history of the object through these records.

Loan agreement forms and condition reports are examples of forms used in both collection records and exhibit records. When an object is loaned to a museum's collection, the museum requires a legal loan form and a condition report to be drawn up between the lender and the museum. The collection loan is usually longer in duration than an exhibit loan. Exhibits require a loan form and a condition report for each object or each group of objects sent by the lender. This means that collection loans usually involve one object at a time and exhibit loans include many objects all at once. In other words, there is more paperwork involved in exhibits than in collections. Exhibit records draw from collections management records in the areas of acquisition, registration, catalog, and previous shipping information. All other exhibit paperwork differs from the collection records and is a function of moving, insuring, protecting, placing, advertising, explaining and ultimately justifying the exhibit objects. In-house exhibits and travelling exhibits both start with collection management records.

A museum should first have an operating collections management system in place before considering an auxiliary system for exhibit management. Museums reflect their control of their collections and operations through their records. The following examples show that various agencies and museums are organizing