Taking the British Golf Museum Home

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Over the last two and half years, I have been in the unique position helping to create CD-I discs while at the same time, I was the first end-user of CD-I in the United Kingdom. From the onset, it was always our intention to make a consumer disc as well as the museum discs, but it was a secondary consideration. Our first objective was to finish and open the British Golf Museum and then take things from there.

On the surface, it might appear that a disc or discs for use within a museum require a very different treatment than one designed for home use; but as we all know, appearances can be deceptive.

The British Golf Museum, which opened in June 1990, tells the story of the development of British golf from the middle ages to the present day. Golf is a game of motion and yet for security and conservation reasons, all the objects in the museum must be kept behind glass. Museums as a whole are often perceived as dreary places with rows and rows of objects on display with either very little or too much interpretation. This perception dates back to the origins of many museums in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when visitors could be amazed by seeing a wide variety of strange and exotic objects that they had never seen before. Hence the stack 'em deep, pile 'em high philosophy of display. With the advent of film and then TV, people became accustomed to seeing these wondrous objects in the comfort of a cinema and then in their own home. Museums needed to change - to find new ways to amaze the visitor.

The use of audio-visual material is one the tools available to museums to help add an extra dimension to their displays. In the British Golf Museum, we have used laservision and CD-I technology to generate our audio-visual material. And it is this audio- visual material that allows us to amaze our visitors. Yet the touchscreens that we use are not toys or gimmicks; they convey a great deal of historical information that is fundamental to an understanding of the history of British golf. They are designed to complement the displays of objects and they then convey their information in an interesting and exciting manner.

Altogether, we have 11 touchscreens, 8 of which use laservision players and 3 of which use CD-I. In addition we have an audio- visual theatre, which uses a laservision player; five tableau commentaries that also run off of laservision players and finally there is one slide

show. Before I go any further, let me stress that I am one of the least technically minded people you will ever meet. When I was at school, I was told by my physics teacher that the only practical experiment I ever got right was the result of mathematical co-incidence and not the product of sound methodology. I don't know how to physically make a disc, or indeed even how to program software. My role in the development of the museum discs was as a writer in the old fashioned sense of the word. I wrote the words that formed the scripts and I specified what pictures were to be used where in each script. Ted Toms of the APS Group was responsible for producing all the programs and Philips Interactive Media Systems provided the technology.

When Ted and I started on the project, we quickly realised that the limitations on what we wanted to achieve were the constraints of the museum environment and not those of the technology. The challenge was actually how to harness the immense capabilities of the technology within the very restricting museum environment.

First, the touchscreens had to be integrated into the museum so that they contributed to the overall story being told and interpreted within the building. The museum is set out chronologically and divided into 15 galleries. Each gallery has a well defined theme and each display within the gallery contributes to that theme. It was decided that each touchscreen would only contain programs that dealt with the specific gallery in which it was located. In other words, the touchscreen that is in the gallery about the Open Championship 1860 through 1891 only contains programs about that subject within those dates. In all, the 11 touchscreens were divided between 7 galleries.

All the research and writing of the museum a/vs were done in conjunction with the setting up of the museum itself. The touchscreen material was totally integrated with the museum displays. Being a typical historian, I wrote everything in chronological order for the museum. The material for the touchscreens went hand in glove with the museum text panels and captions. I tried to avoid duplicating information between the touchscreens and the museum text. In fact, if you looked closely, you would find that the introduction a/v for each touchscreen often continued the story told on the introductory text panels for each gallery.

All the copyrights were cleared for use in the museum only. As I said, we knew that we would eventually do a consumer disc, but we concentrated on getting the museum open to begin with, and work on the consumer disc itself did not start in earnest until about 4 months after the museum opened. This meant that clearances for material used on the consumer disc were obtained separately. I did not want to cloud the issue before the museum itself was up and running.

From a content point of view, each program, or a/v, had to not only be historically accurate and be totally integrated with the display material that surrounded it, but it had to be good television at the same time. One of my obsessions in life is that something can be both accurate and entertaining. Thus whenever possible, any biography or account of a dramatic match had to have a good hook in the story or anecdote in it. I also had to be able

to illustrate any program. This caused a few problems for the period between 1860 and about 1891 when golfing photographs are few and far between.

From a visitors point of view, each touchscreen had to be extremely user friendly. To be successful, they had to be easy to use by visitors of widely diverging ages, all of whom are literally just passing by. The programs needed to be short and easy to access. This is a key part of the museum environment. We have to entice visitors to use the touchscreens; we couldn't have something that was overly complicated to use. It had to be kept simple. One of the jobs that I had a long time ago was that of a Training Manager for a Los Angeles department store. My primary function was to teach new staff how to use the point of sale terminals. The biggest problem I had, especially in older employees, was to overcome a syndrome I called "Terminal Paranoia", which manifested itself as an uncontrollable fear that by pressing a wrong button, the cash drawer would fly open and a pair of hands would spring out and start throttling the unsuspecting employee. The same syndrome exists in a museum. Our visitors haven't just bought some new hardware and software which they can't wait to try out. They have walked in off the street to either learn about the history of golf or to get out of the rain. And now they are confronted with a strange little monitor flashing the seductive message "To start the programme, touch the screen". At this point, we probably have about 10 seconds to gain their interest and their trust.

Simplicity is the name of the game and gaining the visitors trust is essential. We - that is Ted and I - felt that the key to doing this lay in the menu construction. We decided that the visitor using a touchscreen should not have to go deeper than a main menu and one sub-menu to access a program and that they must be able to stop a program at any time and return to the main menu either directly or via one sub-menu. This is all well signposted on the screen.

We also decided that any menu should be limited to one screen only. With the format that we used, the maximum number of choices that could fit onto one screen was 10 and that set the ceiling on the number of choices. We felt that it was important to use the same format of menu display wherever possible to breed familiarity, and in our museum, familiarity breeds contentedness. We must be doing something right, because 85% of our visitors think that the touchscreen instructions are excellent or very good. And the number of finger prints that we have to clean off all the screens every day show that all the workstations are well used.

The length of the a/vs was also a prime consideration. As you undoubtedly know, most museum visitors have a remarkably short concentration span. On average, they only spend something like 5 seconds reading a text panel. The time spent watching an a/v is deceptive. When I went to one museum to look at their use of touchscreens, I thought that the a/vs were lasting about 3 minutes. Then I started to time them and they were actually lasting between 70 and 90 seconds.

I aimed to keep all of ours at about 60 seconds - my simple guideline was that no script could be more than a single page of double spaced A4 paper. If it was longer, something got cut out. But just to prove that nobody is perfect, I eventually discovered that profes-

The golf game is again designed for maximum fun. It takes the form of a sudden death playoff on the Old Course, and by using animation, you choose an historical figure for your player and you have a choice of historical equipment to use as clubs and balls. The history section of the disc can't tell you how to play the Old Course, but it does tell you about the characters you are choosing and will give you insight into the type of ball and clubs to use.

On the menu design for this disc, we wanted to get away from the simple menu structure used in the museum. Instead of a screen with a number of choices on it, the menu scrolls from left to right and back again. This makes it fun to use and gives a feeling of wandering through time. In the museum, time is against you but at home, time is on your side. As one would expect with CD-I, the menus not only allow you to scroll to the main subjects, but also to form links with items of a like nature. The menus actually correspond to the chronological layout of the museum so that you have the ability to go through the disc as if going through the museum and then like a second visit to the museum, you can go directly to the parts that interested you the most.

The historical section of the disc required a certain amount of modification for home use. As I said earlier, the museum discs were integrated into the fabric of the displays. In the museum, we cover the period from 1457 to 1860 with artifacts, tableaus and documents on display in the galleries and the discs only start in 1860. Furthermore, all club and ball development throughout the museum is interpreted by the objects themselves and we did not do any a/vs on that subject. On their own, the museum a/vs would not tell the complete story, so I needed to write about 30 new scripts to fill in the gaps in the historical section.

As noted earlier, all copyright clearances for the consumer disc were dealt with separately from the material used in the museum.

As with the museum discs, all design work for the consumer disc was done by Ted Toms at APS. My role on the home disc was limited to being the historical adviser and writing any necessary new historical scripts plus the quiz.

I sincerely believe that the consumer disc offers the purchaser a complete armchair golf experience - the rich history of British golf plus a quiz and a game set on the world's most famous golf course. In a sense, there are two ways of taking the British Golf Museum home with you. The first is to try and break into our building and steal something from it. I don't recommend that option - we have a very, very, very good security system. The second and much easier way is to buy the consumer disc of the British Golf Museum. In either event, there is no substitute for visiting our museum and seeing everything I've been talking about first hand.

As I said at the beginning, I am an historian by training and there is a school of thought that maintains that the pattern of history repeats itself, so it may be of some interest that I am not the first member of the Lewis family to be involved with the birth of a new technology. In 1925, my grandfather, Albert Lewis produced and directed a very successful Broadway musical call The Jazz Singer and he sold the film rights for it to Warner Brothers. The

brothers Warner decided to make The Jazz Singer as the first talking picture, which they did in 1927, starring Al Jolson. Jolson was not the first choice to play the lead. George Jessel, who had played the part on Broadway, was. But when Jessel heard that it was going to be a talking picture, he held out for more money. Jolson took the part for no money. Instead, he took stock in Warner Brothers. As a result of appearing in that movie, he became a legend and his stock in Warner Brothers helped make him a very rich man. The moral of this story is simple. It takes an act of faith by all parties concerned to become involved in a new technology and that act is rewarded when the future and the present become one, as is now happening with CD-I.