

Cultural Storytelling: What your brand can learn from the world's top museum exhibitions

If every life has a story then every institution has one too. How do you tell a story of grit, endeavor, triumph or innovation? Of people coming together around an idea or an invention that changes forever the way we live or see the world?

Often an institution's stories are told in bite-sized ephemera – tweets, sound-bytes, video clips. They are designed to react to a fast-moving news cycle, social media, viral news or bad news. These are, of course, important.

But why not take a step back and look at your organization through a longer, more reflective lens? Create a meaningful experience for your stakeholders, customers, staff, and the general public, that leaves a deep impression. An institution is also like an organism with its own memory worth recording and sharing with the world.

Exhibitions are an innovative and intelligent way to showcase your institution's identity and cement your brand. They are where branding, story-telling and visuals intersect in a smart and engaging experience. An exhibition can be developed to mark a key event in your calendar, to engage with stakeholders, celebrate a milestone, or raise private investment.

How does this actually work?

#1



#2



Image #1 depicts an ancient Mayan anthropomorphic vase from Guatemala. The figure is carrying cacao pods, the raw ingredient of chocolate. Image #2 is an iconic chocolate brand. The two have deeper links than this. Chocolate represents extravagance. The Mayans considered chocolate the 'food of the gods' and Godiva is expensive.

The cultural theme is that this food transcends time, culture and geography.

What might an exhibition look like? Perhaps an immersive exhibit in which the visitor wearing virtual reality headset travels through time through a series of striking images to understand how chocolate represented luxury in an ancient culture.



Cultural Storytelling: Purpose is Important

I once worked on a brand new building, turning it into a compelling visitor experience.

Taking into account the nuanced culture of the organization which commissioned the project, what emerged was a story that wove history, culture and economy in an immersive, interactive space. The exhibition became a tool of diplomacy, a greeting space to break the ice between host and visitor.



Cultural Storytelling: Content is King

Content is the absolute foundation of any meaningful exhibition. These are important factors to consider:

- 1.** A successful experience is rooted in your mission and values. But that is just the beginning.
- 2.** You need to go beyond corporate slogans and marketing tools. This can be difficult for some organizations because it is often well out of the comfort zone. A successful exhibition touches on universal themes that speak to us as humans across the boundaries of culture, customs or language. They connect us to wider historic and cultural moments. The experience should be moving.
- 3.** Identify your assets and be realistic. Do you have the right ingredients for a good story? A proper assessment will be the factor that drives the nature of the exhibition. These might be media productions, static displays or a combination.
- 4.** An exhibition may be permanent or temporary. Think about your audience and what you are trying to achieve because this will determine the length of time you want to showcase the content.

Cultural Storytelling Exhibits: Physical

A compelling in-person experience can be in two formats:

Stationary: A fixed exhibit or a series of exhibits in a single, beautifully designed space where visitors explore and learn a story.

Mobile: For assets that may not be moved from their location a guided walking tour for select audiences in which visitors are told a good story can be a great approach. This is a solution for content that must be kept in its location due to security, insurance, or preservation considerations.

Cultural Storytelling Exhibits: Virtual

An exhibition can also be a virtual experience. Allow your online presence to stand out by creating a virtual exhibition using cutting-edge technology. The web is an opportunity to bring assets from a variety of sources to present and interpret your story and heritage to wider audiences. State of the art technology such as augmented reality can be an additional means to impress and engage with your stakeholders. Content developed for a physical exhibition can be also adapted for a virtual experience, adding value and breadth to your cultural story-telling strand.

Whatever the chosen method, the exhibition experience must always be accessible, intelligent and contemporary.

Cultural Storytelling: Where do you begin?

Every project is bespoke. We begin with your institution's mission and purpose. Our content curator works collaboratively with you to develop a creative concept that guides the exhibition content. We conduct original research, assess your materials and liaise with your in-house experts to develop a strategic interpretive plan with clearly defined themes and messages.

Be among the innovators that are benefiting from Cultural Storytelling.

Storytelling Package A

Tantalus experts assess your organization's assets and provide a high level Interpretive Plan. Includes 2-3 content workshops.

Storytelling Package B

Tantalus experts assess your organization's assets, provide an Interpretive Plan that includes key themes and messages. Includes 5-6 content workshops.

Storytelling Package C

Tantalus experts assess your assets, provide an Interpretive Plan with key themes and messages, a content grid, as well as potential means of expression. Includes 8-10 content workshops.

Put the talented team of Tantalus Cultural Storytelling consultants to work for you.

Our unique networked structure provides our clients access to the latest strategies from around the world and the ability to leverage experience in wide-ranging industries and markets.

Leveraging your cultural story starts with a conversation. Email me hamida@thetantalusgroup.com



About Tantalus' Cultural Storytelling Expert Hamida Ghafour



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Hamida is a senior content curator with 18 years of experience as a content specialist working for, and with, exhibition design agencies and news organizations across Europe, North America and the Middle East.

She was curator of the Shindagha Museum Complex in Dubai and lead curator of the Abu Dhabi Presidential Palace. She is curator of a museum in Shanghai and has developed exhibition content for non-profit organizations, private corporations, and cultural institutions.

As former foreign correspondent who has lived and worked in Europe, South Asia, the Middle East and North America, she specializes in the social, political and economic dynamics of these societies, and how to translate their complexities to wider audiences. She is also author of a non-fiction book on Afghanistan.

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