

Museums and companies: comparing communications

Communicating culture, museums and companies have more in common than you might think. This article offers some ideas to corporate communicators who want to highlight the role and history of a company and to museum or culture professionals who want to gain insights from companies.



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Those who know me know that I go to museums of all kinds, from contemporary art galleries to perfume factories, from industrial recovery projects to archaeological sites.

In my wanderings, both in the flesh and online, to gather information and inspiration, I often think there are commonalities when it comes to communicating about a museum, a foundation or a company.

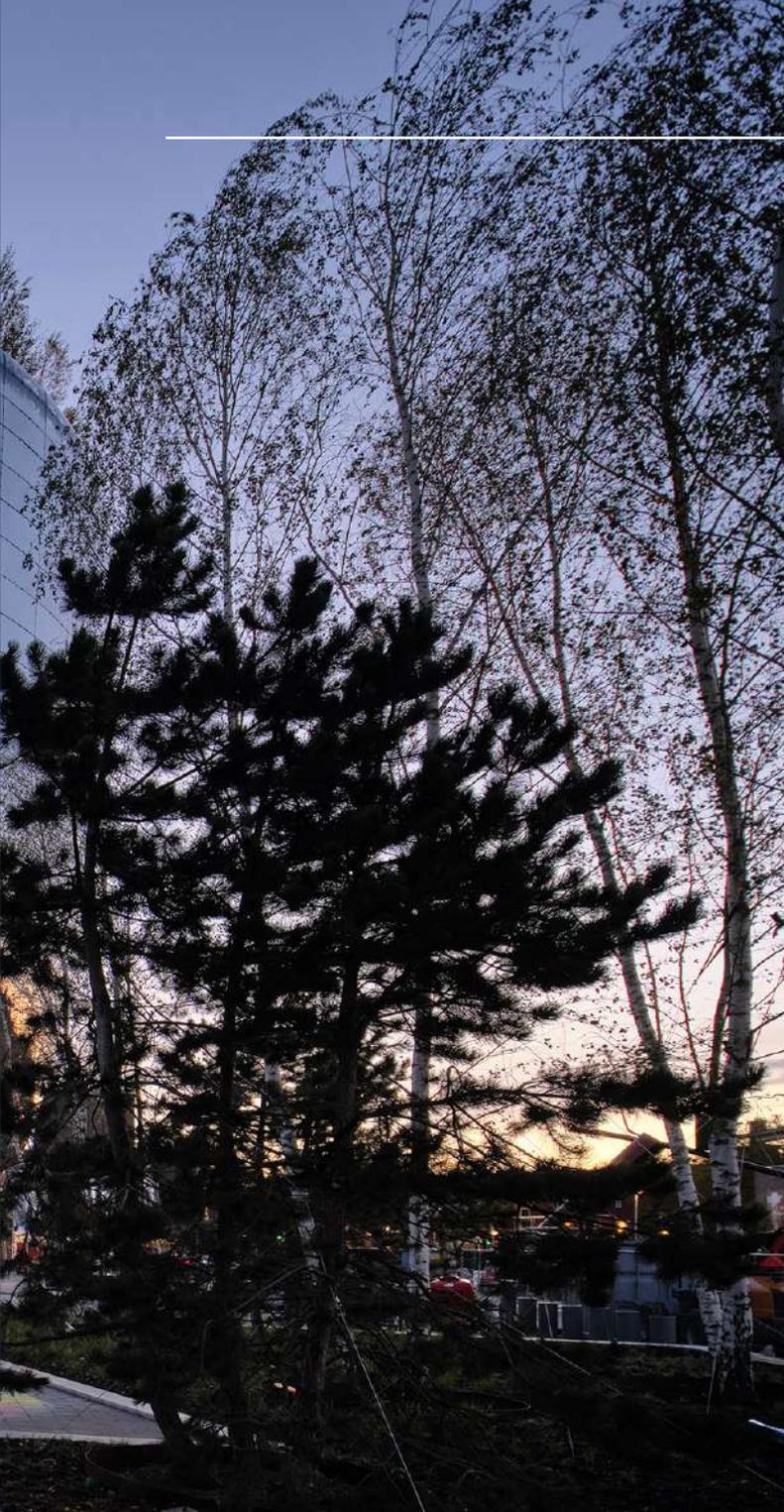
Indeed, many of the tips I give to companies could also be useful for museums and galleries.

Presenting identity and purpose

It may seem trivial, but clearly stating the purpose of a museum or cultural institution is often considered inconsequential and easily overlooked.

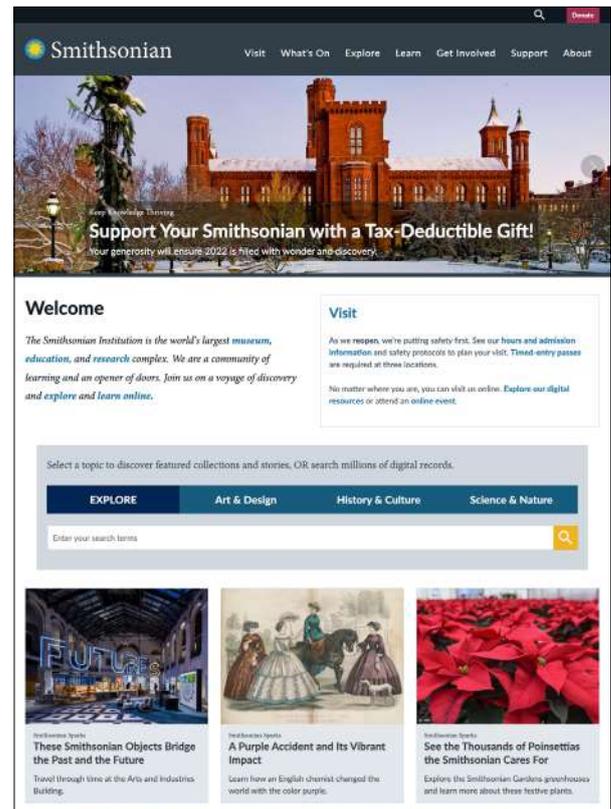
It should not be. Until a few years ago, even in corporate communications, it was often difficult to understand what a company was really about.

Lately, though, the importance of clearly defining one's identity and role has become clear.



Explaining one's role, highlighting one's history and outlining the future is a challenge that companies and museums share.

A corporate museum like Fondazione Dalmine (fondazione.dalmine.it) describes its objective in a nutshell on its home page. The Smithsonian (si.edu), a major American cultural institution, also presents its mission up front.



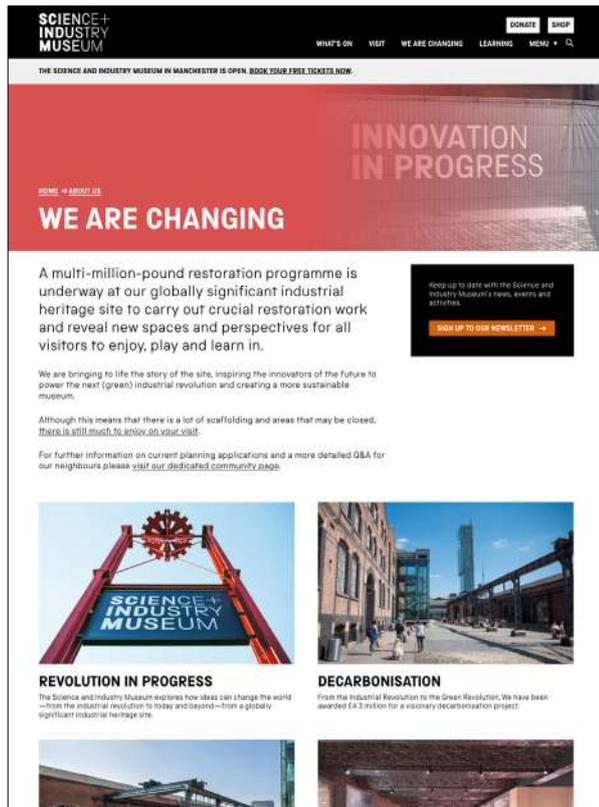
si.edu

Discussing one's future and completed projects

Museums and cultural organizations are not static. Rather, they thrive on constantly evolving projects, expansions, and reorganization.

This year alone we saw the opening of the new Pinault collection at the Paris Stock Exchange (pinaultcollection.com/fr/boursedecommerce) and more recently the Depot in Rotterdam (boijmans.nl/en/depot). Both projects are explained clearly on their websites.

Just as companies present future strategies, museums, too, can explain how they're evolving. Manchester's Science and Industry Museum displays a top-level "We are changing" entry that clearly lays out the story of its new redevelopment project.



scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk/about-us/we-are-changing

Narrating your value

In recent years, important museums have become drivers of urban regeneration – from the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the Louvre Lens to the MuCEM in Marseilles and the Fondazione Prada in Milan.

But the value of a museum is not linked just to major expansion projects. That's why it's important to explain its relationship with local neighborhoods and communities. Fondazione Zegna, for instance, is intricately integrated

into its urban landscape in the Piedmont industrial district of Biella. Technopolis in Athens is not only a gas museum, but also a space for socialization and innovation.

The value of corporate museums comes not just from the preservation of cultural history, but also from the materials they use to tell the story of the country's evolution.

This is the case of the Heritage Lab of Italgas, whose documents reconstruct the history not only of Turin but also of many Italian cities, and of the AEM Foundation in Milan.

These institutions often take themselves for granted and do not narrate their value effectively in their communication, especially in digital form.



fondazioneaem.it

Create emotional involvement

The most effective sites are those that emotionally hook visitors – not just with written and archival information, but through interactive content that brings the museum to life within and outside its walls, enhancing its information value through online tools, games and infographics.

Online browsing can be a useful tool to heighten interaction, channeling different experiences through paths that lead to various “destinations” within the site.

An interesting example is the "Play" area of the Frans Hals Museum in Amsterdam, which aims to increase the engagement with what is experienced in the museum.



franshalsmuseum.nl

Leveraging the value of corporate heritage

Italy is the European country with perhaps the most established history of creating and conveying narratives about corporate museums (museimpresa.com), which tell the story of the company and its influence on society, like Lavazza Museum and those of Ferrari, Campari and Ferragamo all do.

Those kinds of narratives get even more interesting when they link the company's history to future strategies, as does Italgas's Heritage Lab, whose goal is to be a model laboratory for digitizing company materials and sharing them with the community.

Digitization and big data analyses are key in Italgas's industrial strategy. Interestingly, this advanced communication approach doesn't just drive its business, but plays a central role in its cultural heritage management as well.



Heritage Lab Italgas a Torino