

The World in a Box: SurfWorld Online

CRAIG BAIRD, SURFWORLD



Below left: A unique feature of SurfWorld is having surfboards shaped on-site by Eiji Shiomoto who shapes a variety of surfboards for customers internationally.

Centre: SurfWorld's Facebook page with the photo of Hawaiian surfing pioneer Duke Kahanamoku that attracted over 240,000 views.

Right: Craig Baird explaining the significance of one of the many surfboards on display at SurfWorld. Photos by Cassie May.



The SurfWorld Museum in Torquay has connected with audiences through its website, Facebook and YouTube presence. Craig Baird tells us how the internet has enabled greater use and access to their collection.

Computers sit at the heart of a lot of contemporary museum activities but for some people it remains a challenge to understand or embrace the many ways computers can help in the day-to-day operation of museums. A computer may not be the panacea for every issue facing museums large and small, but it is an immensely powerful tool that cannot be ignored.

Collections management is the most obvious field where computers can underpin a museums function, by keeping track of loans, donations, status, location, valuation, origins and all the other information associated with collected items. It helps in both keeping track of the item as well as providing vital information when relating the significance of any item to the public. Even simple collection management systems allow the item to be comprehensively detailed as well as linking the items with others to help ad depth to the narrative related to it. Of course the computer doesn't do this automatically, the information has to be managed by people. As such the computer is just a tool that allows us to collect all that information, share it and

grow it as knowledge or additional information is acquired. Of course, recording all the information relating to those important items gives you the ability to share the stories associated with them and this is where technology gets really exciting.

For years we wrestled with websites and our ability to tell our story via an electronic window to the world. In truth this has been a frustrating experience, as we could never quite get to where we wanted to be. We wanted our website to be engaging and interactive and represent us really well. It was great to realise that there were people all over the world that were taking an interest in what we were doing, but it was a one way conversation and we were not able to rapidly update our website information. All content for the website was controlled offsite and any updates took time. The limitations with the website were overcome a few years ago when we instituted a Facebook page for the museum. We had a few ups and downs setting it up and understanding how this relatively new technology worked, but within a very short period interest in our Facebook outstripped our website traffic. The other big benefit was that we had control over the messages we pushed out to the world and the frequency at which we did that. The response was surprising, even unbelievable. The great thing with Facebook is that there are tools built into it that allow you to know and understand your audience to a greater degree, as built in analytics let you see all sorts of demographic breakdowns about those who are interacting with you.

There have been three light bulb moments for us in the last year, as we

share our stories with the world and endeavour to grow our audience online. One was an innocently posted photograph of a highly regarded Hawaiian surfing pioneer celebrating his birthday. This obviously struck a chord as over 240,000 people viewed the photo online! The second happened more recently, after a concerted effort to build our audience, when we succeeded in engaging with more people in one week via our Facebook page than the total of our onsite museum visitors for all of 2012. The third illuminating moment was when we placed Oral History Program interviews and other video snippets on our YouTube channel Surfworld TV.

The great thing in all of this is that through our website, Facebook and our involvement with Victorian Collections Online and Surfworld TV we are sharing information, our stories and collection via the internet and connecting the museum with a growing global audience. It is technology that is enabling us to do this and it is changing the way in which we interact with people. It brings them closer as stories and snippets from within our museum prompt a response in the broader community. For us, technology is not something to be feared or dismissed it delivers our stories to the world and increasingly connects the world to us.

Craig Baird is the Curator at the SurfWorld Museum, Torquay. SurfWorld is located at Surf City Plaza, Beach Road, Torquay, Victoria. Visit the museum online at:
<http://www.surfworld.org.au/>
<https://www.facebook.com/SWMTorquay>
http://www.youtube.com/user/surfworldtv?feature=results_main