

Museum's digital strategy to help brighten its future

The Perot Museum is executing a comprehensive digital strategy to enhance visitor experiences, community outreach and business operations

Industry: Nonprofit
Country: United States
Website: perotmuseum.org



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Colleen Walker, CEO, Perot Museum

Business need

Perot Museum of Nature and Science sought to identify and better use digital technologies to advance its business agenda and derive increased value for its donors, members and visitors.

Solution

The museum benchmarked its existing use of key technologies — social, mobile and analytics — and then developed a strategic plan to improve its use of those technologies with help from NTT DATA Services, formerly Dell Services

Benefits

- Developed a business-driven digital strategy
- Identified more than 50 improvement opportunities
- Increased business efficiency and scalability

NTT DATA Services
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Boring. Dull. Meh. That's how many of today's school-age children might describe STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics. But not if they're visiting the Perot Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas, Texas. With nearly four acres of highly interactive exhibits, fast-paced multimedia presentations and vivid contextual displays, the museum is designed to engage visitors, both young and old, with the wonders of nature and science. The approach is successful. Each year, the museum draws more than 1 million people from Dallas, North Texas and elsewhere. Not to rest on its success, however, the museum's executive management, led by CEO Colleen Walker, embarked on a multipronged, multiyear business transformation. It set out to challenge every one of its operational assumptions and determine how to do better.

Getting the most from every donor dollar

"Not only did we examine how we work inside our walls, but also outside in the community," Walker says. "For example, we wanted to enhance the way we were engaging the community. Ultimately, we want to make sure every one of our donor dollars is driving our mission forward to connect children with their futures."

Mike Costello, the museum's vice president of shared services, considers technology a critical component of that mission, whether it's supporting the museum's exhibits and educational programs or streamlining back-office operations. "To keep operating as a world-class museum, and even take what we do to a higher level, it just made sense to assess how we could drive a digital transformation across our operations, using technologies like social media, mobility, analytics, the cloud and the ever-growing internet," he says.

Turning challenges into opportunities

The museum's digital challenges were many. It had limited technology support for its critical business processes such as accounting and budgeting. It lacked integration between its other business applications. And its ability to automate, personalize and trigger outreach programs was nonexistent.

Its online presence was wanting, too. The website needed better design and usability, with shopping an especially painful process leading to high abandon rates. Worse still, the museum ranked low in local search results for obvious keywords.

"A big part of all those issues

involved our lacking specific roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for the museum's digital dimension," Costello recalls. "Clearly we had a big opportunity to improve how we use digital technologies, but we didn't have the in-house skills or experience to map out a way forward."

"We were able to rethink our entire business, and review how we use technology, with the help and advice of the team."

Mike Costello, Vice President, Shared Services, Perot Museum

Calling in digital experts

For help, the museum engaged Digital Business Services by NTT DATA Services, formerly Dell Services. The team took a practitioner-based, strategic approach with a proven “5R” methodology — Rethink, Review, Revamp, Realign and Realize — used in many other engagements with organizations across the private and public sectors.

“Their digital business consultants took the time to really understand our business at a granular level,” Costello says. “They listened carefully to help identify our pain points, to understand our membership base and our place in the community.”

The digital business consultants assessed the museum’s existing digital maturity, operational capabilities and governance. This included evaluating its digital properties, content and communications. In this phase, they made careful observations and applied online analytics tools. They also conducted in-depth interviews with the museum’s executives and key personnel.

Scaling processes for a soaring membership

Another challenge was managing an enormous membership surge during the year after the museum’s opening in December 2012. “In a matter of months, our initial membership

of 7,000 households soared to 50,000,” Walker explains. “While we welcomed such fast growth in our membership, the speed and size of that growth put huge stress on our processes, team members and entire organization, because we were way behind where we needed to be, especially in our processes.”

To help the museum scale up its capacity to meet the demands of more than a seven-fold boost in membership, the digital business consultant team worked closely with Scripps and her team to evaluate and advise on the museum’s key business processes. “We were able to think through our processes and work flows with guidance from Digital Business Services,” Walker says. “We learned where our gaps and redundancies were, so we could better align our expertise and resources to become much more efficient.”

Recommendations to drive the business

Along the way, the Digital Business Services team cataloged a growing list of areas where the museum could use digital technology more effectively, if it was being used at all. Eventually they compiled a list of more than 50 specific use cases, where technology could enhance the visitor experience, improve community outreach, boost efficiency and drive revenue growth.

“We were able to rethink our entire business, and review how we use technology, with the help and advice of the team,” Costello says. “They also helped us pinpoint our top operational areas for improvement, allowing us to prioritize the projects that have the greatest leverage.”

Boosting collaboration

Membership Director Sarah Jane Semrad notes that Digital Business Services helped her team develop process maps to help visualize work flows and their various interdependencies on people and technologies. “Understanding how all the processes in our part of the museum’s business is incredibly important,” she says. “When everyone knows what their role is in any particular process, then it’s much easier for us to hold each other accountable for doing what’s expected of us.”

Semrad finds that by having greater visibility into overall processes and individual accountability, her group’s sense of being a team has grown considerably. “To facilitate teamwork, we deployed a number of collaboration tools with their help that have enabled us to execute at a higher level than before.”

Going forward with confidence

The museum also saw a big boost in its online presence. “We dramatically raised our search rankings with a redesign and search optimization of our website, plus we boosted online sales by simplifying the shopping experience,” Walker says. “Both were digital business consultants recommendations.”

They helped the museum clarify its strategic digital objectives in the context of how those could drive its mission forward and develop a prioritized plan to realize them. This included high-level definitions of the digital capabilities needed and potential roadblocks to success.

“Their strategic plan provided the steps to help us better and more confidently execute our mission on a daily basis,” Walker says. “While we haven’t implemented all the initiatives we identified, we now have a future-ready, digital roadmap we can use to guide our way toward an extremely bright future, advised by Digital Business Services and supported by the latest technologies. And, most important, we can trust that we’re doing it right.”

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