

Indianapolis Museum of Art launches IMA Lab

IMA Lab will spearhead innovations in museum technology by consulting to other museums and not for profits on digital projects

IMA Lab recently redesigned imamuseum.org, which now features improved collection searching capability and enhanced interactive components

Indianapolis, February 9, 2010 – The Indianapolis Museum of Art announced today that it has launched a consulting arm of the museum’s technology department that will focus on supporting peer institutions and other not for profits in the use of innovative digital technology. The team, known as IMA Lab, was created to address needs specific to the museum community not met by existing software vendors. IMA Lab will provide consulting services to other institutions, including the use of open source tools and innovative technology to enhance the ability of museums meet their objectives. For more than four years, the IMA technology team has played a leadership role in developing these kinds of resources for the museum field including Artbabble.org, steve.museum, and the AAMD object registry. IMA Lab will allow team members to build upon past successes and to pursue projects for other museums and not-for-profits.

“Because museums generally do not have budgets that allow for specially tailored solutions, they are often left with software and technology situations that are inadequate to meet their needs,” explained Robert J. Stein, chief information officer at the IMA. “The museum technology field is a relatively small and specialized vertical market. Collaborative platforms and shared tools leverage the experiences and talents of each museum, and open-source technology projects owned by a community of invested stakeholders allow for greater advancements. The idea for IMA Lab was born after receiving repeated requests from our peers to respond to RFPs and repurpose some of the technology we had already created for the IMA for use in their institutions.”

By sharing resources and tools, the museum technology field will be better equipped to rapidly develop and better serve the needs of museums. Recent examples of how the IMA Lab has worked with museums to enhance their use of technology include:

- AAMD Object Registry for the Association of Art Museum Directors – Available at <http://aamdobjectregistry.org/>, the AAMD Object Registry provides a central online location for AAMD member museums to list artworks that are either new acquisitions of archaeological material and works of ancient art or information on the resolution of formal claims made to AAMD member museums regarding works of art believed to have been stolen by the Nazis between 1933-1945.
- Steve.museum – For more than three years, IMA technologists have been partners in the steve.museum collaboration of museums. The steve.museum project explores social tagging, which may provide profound new ways to describe and access cultural heritage collections. The project has aided in researching social tagging and museum collections, and developing open source software tools for tagging collections and managing tags. Working with several other institutional partners, IMA technologists have provided strategic and technical leadership as well as software development efforts for this project.
- Champion Sports Insider and Culture Beat for the Balboa Park Online Collaborative – Using the Artbabble.org platform, the IMA Lab team created two video portals for the San Diego-based Balboa Park Online Collaborative, one for the San Diego Hall of Champions and one for the World Beat Center. Both sites include the Artbabble.org style of notes within videos that link to more information about subject matter covered in the videos.

The sites, Champions Sports Insider and Culture Beat are not yet live, but are currently seeking additional content partners and will be launched in the coming months.

The IMA Lab team is lead by Robert Stein, Chief Information Officer. Meg Liffick, Assistant Director of Public Affairs; and Charlie Moad, Senior Applications Developer are also a part of the IMA Lab leadership team. Biographies of all IMA Lab team members are available at imamuseum.org/imalab.

In the coming months, the IMA Lab team will pursue opportunities within the museum technology field. IMA Lab's staff has deep experience in application technology and new media. The team will work to bring both innovative ideas and solutions to challenges faced by museums and not-for-profits. The IMA Lab team represents a wide range of expertise and background in fields such as:

- Online Strategy
- Web Design & Development
- Content Creation & Production
- Information Architecture
- Custom Software Development and Systems Integration
- Mobile and iPhone Applications
- Social Media and Online Marketing Strategy

Redesigned IMAMUSEUM.ORG

The IMA Lab team recently unveiled a redesigned Web site for the IMA at imamuseum.org. The new site is designed to be clean, simple and intuitive, and to integrate the IMA's new brand identity, which first debuted in 2009. Key features of the new site include improved navigation, enhanced search capabilities, and better integration of new media content. The redesign addresses feedback gathered from annual surveys of IMA Web site users who wanted and expected a site that provided a lot of information, images and links while still being simple and easy to use. The new site has been in development for more than six months, and in addition to user feedback, key improvements were the suggested by museum curators and educators.

"We believe the redesigned site achieves two things," said Robert J. Stein, chief information officer at the IMA. "It's easier to use, while also providing the kind of in-depth information that people are hungry for, whether it's getting directions to the Museum, searching the collection or engaging with the array of art, nature and design elements throughout the campus."

One of biggest improvements of the newly redesigned site is the enhanced search capability. The IMA Lab team completely redesigned a powerful search engine for the site, which pulls together enhanced access to the collection, integrated with website content, IMA events, blogs, videos and social media features. This live search from every page provides powerful and immediate feedback to users for more than 60,000 pages of web content including artist pages for every artist featured in the IMA's collection. The new search function integrates descriptive tags generated through the Steve.museum project to help users browse the IMA's collection. The search results allow users to determine what works from the permanent collection are on view at the Museum, and to create online or museum tours on particular themes and subjects.

The new site also simplifies accessing the Museum's new media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Art Babble. Clicking on a "More Like This" column on the right side of the new site's pages, users can access related content such as, video clips, blog postings, podcasts, and more. There is also a page on the new site that serves as a central clearinghouse for links to the IMA's presence on sites throughout the Web.

The redesign team also improved the calendar of events, which is a notoriously problematic part of many museums' Web sites. The old IMA site used a block-style calendar and event listing that sometimes jammed too many events into a single small block or page. The new calendar features

a timeline that users can scroll through: it uses different color blocks to differentiate activities: blue for classes, yellow for performances, orange for talks, red for films, green for special events, purple for tours, and black for exhibitions.

Another new development on the site is the streamlined purchasing of tickets and memberships. Using open-source tools together with custom developed software, the IMA Lab team has developed a much simpler system for users to join and renew IMA memberships online as well as to order tickets to events, and to make donations to the IMA.

About IMA Technology

The Indianapolis Museum of Art has received numerous awards for its digital efforts, including recognition from the W3 awards, Tellys and Webbys. In addition to its commitment to produce digital audio and video content, and the development of Artbabble.org, the Indianapolis Museum of Art has demonstrated a commitment to museum technology as a means to engage and educate its visitors and to promote transparency. The IMA was one of the first museums to make live statistics available. The Museum's web dashboard, available at dashboard.imamuseum.org, includes real-time tracking of IMA key facts and figures such as attendance, works of art on loan, expenses and other institutional measures of success.

The IMA has a significant presence on Flickr, Facebook and YouTube, and it has recently launched an expanded blog on its website (www.imamuseum.org/blog). The blog features regular contributions from IMA staff. Other digital initiatives of the Museum include special exhibition websites and downloadable digital audio tours. The IMA received a \$385,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to develop steve.museum, a tool enabling social tagging of artworks created in collaboration with 10 leading art museums.

About the Indianapolis Museum of Art

Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, the Indianapolis Museum of Art is among the 10 largest encyclopedic art museums in the United States, and features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European and contemporary art, as well as a newly established collection of design arts. The IMA offers visitors an expansive view of arts and culture through its collection of more than 54,000 works of art that span 5,000 years of history from across the world's continents. The collections include paintings, sculpture, furniture and design objects, prints, drawings and photographs, as well as textiles and costumes.

Recognizing the inherent connections between art, design and nature, the IMA offers visitors experiences at the Museum, in 100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park, which will be one of the largest contemporary art parks in the United States when it opens in June 2010, and at Oldfields–Lilly House & Gardens, an historic Country Place Era estate on the IMA's grounds.

The IMA completed a \$74 million expansion project in May 2005. The construction added 164,000 square feet to the Museum and includes renovation of 90,000 square feet of existing space. In order to present major exhibitions of its own and to accommodate major traveling exhibitions, the expanded Museum was outfitted with new 10,000-plus-square-foot Clowes Special Exhibition Gallery on the Museum's first level. In November 2008, the IMA opened the renovated 600-seat Tobias Theater. Nicknamed, "The Toby," the theater is a venue for talks, performances and films.

Located at 4000 Michigan Road, the IMA and Lilly House are open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The IMA is closed Mondays and Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days. For more information, call 317-923-1331 or visit www.imamuseum.org.

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