



2015 NASCIO STATE IT RECOGNITION AWARD SUBMISSION

Title: ***TheStoryofTexas.com***

Category: Government to Citizen (G to C)

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Initiation Date: September 2013

Completion Date: September 2014

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----- THE BULLOCK TEXAS STATE HISTORY MUSEUM IS A DIVISION OF THE STATE PRESERVATION BOARD -----

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TheStoryofTexas.com was created to change the history museum experience by providing all visitors, whether in person or online, multiple opportunities to connect their stories with the past, present, and future of Texas. To accomplish this, the Bullock Texas State History Museum created a new, responsive website that balances meaningful historical content with engaging, interactive features. Interdisciplinary stories of events, places, and people reflect the richness and diversity of Texas and position the site as a destination to learn beyond the canon of history. An online artifact gallery provides close-up exploration of the artifacts that embody that history. The Texas Story Project, a digital archive preserving user-generated stories from across the state, celebrates Texans and their communities through personal memories, family heirlooms, community traditions, and images and video. The custom design, navigation, content presentation, and interactivity of ***TheStoryofTexas.com*** reflects the spirit of the Bullock Museum and provides a groundbreaking virtual space for the people of Texas.

BUSINESS PROBLEM AND SOLUTION

This website project was initiated in order to expand the Museum's statewide outreach efforts and to complement its on-site work by providing a virtual experience online that would allow all Texans, regardless of location, to experience exhibitions, explore artifacts, learn about Texas history through interactive content and distance learning opportunities, and contribute personal and community histories to a digital story archive called the Texas Story Project (TSP). A dynamic calendar and integrated ticketing system were also envisioned to aggregate the delivery of programming information and to streamline users' online purchases.

TheStoryofTexas.com and its custom-built content management system (CMS) entirely replaced an existing Museum website and extended previous site functionality by incorporating user-generated content (TSP and increased social media sharing/presence) and interactive history content. In addition, integration of the Altru-based ticketing system allowed for more granular tracking of visitor experiences.

Total project costs for website design and development include a \$1.9M contract to design firm Monkee-Boy of Austin, Texas, and three Museum staff members dedicated to digital outreach efforts, focused for 11 months exclusively on website content development.

The custom CMS was built using CakePHP and demonstrates an innovative use of technology:

Advanced Infrastructure:

- page-based content follows responsive and Section 508 Compliance restrictions
- tools to quickly build and manage menus, galleries, timelines, sliders, site alerts, and an interactive map of Texas
- auto-publish content including home pages, page banners, galleries, and alerts
- granular permissions for users to create, edit, and publish micro sections of content

- SEO tools allowing advanced management of titles, keywords, URLs, alt tags and image, and captions and transcripts associated with audio, video, and downloads
- custom-built tagging system to categorize, display, and search site content
- advanced API integration with Instagram
- advanced calendaring system to manage the Museum's events and integrate with BlackBaud Altru ticketing system

Unique user generated content (UGC) tools to

- easily capture the stories of Texans
- allow Museum staff to review, edit, and publish stories across the site
- streamline communication with Texas Story Project public contributors
- associate stories contextually with any artifact, exhibit, or educational content
- promote stories geographically through an interactive map of Texas
- curate social media to ensure quality and appropriateness

Usability: The site is fully responsive back to IE8, and follows Section 508 Accessibility guidelines. Usability tests were completed to ensure difficult functionality is easily adopted by the target audiences.

Security: The site follows industry standards and best practices for server and application security. All security has been independently verified by technology consultants at Deloitte.

Accessibility: The site follows strict Section 508 Compliance in accessibility. Custom-built tools allow online users with no/low vision (through a High Contrast toggle) and no/low hearing (through image alt tags, captions, and corresponding video and audio transcript capabilities) to experience the site. Site is screen-reader friendly and accessible on all devices at all screen resolutions.

Privacy: User Generated Content tools ensure the privacy of its users and protect the privacy of children under the State's strict COPPA (Child's Online Privacy Protection) regulations.

Examples include:

- a custom-built Instagram tool that allows Museum staff to curate Instagram pictures from the #BullockMuseum feed thus ensuring no unauthorized images or content appear online.
- a workflow included in the Texas Story Project story submission form that qualifies users as either being over 13 years old or in the presence of a parent, guardian, or teacher before submitting content.

Q4-2014 data provides the following information on site/mobile usage increase from 2013 to 2014:

- Total website visits increased 73% from 116,550 to 201,104
- Mobile visits increased 100% from 34,841 to 69,648
- Search engine visits increased 49% from 86,356 to 128,564
- Return visits to the site increased 81% from 13,317 to 24,102
- Social media engagement increased 480% as follows:
 - Facebook: 670 visits to 7,245
 - Twitter: 137 visits to 1,005
 - TripAdvisor: 543 visits to 748
 - Yelp!: 223 visits to 378
- Online ticket sales increased 147% from 15,454 to 38,127

Extrapolating from the number and length of sessions on the "Plan Your Visit" page on the new **TheStoryofTexas.com** website, the increase in physical visits to the Museum from Q4 2013 to 2014 can be estimated as:

- Museum visits increased 18.3% from 5,388 to 6,372
- New visitor Museum visits increased 12.8% from 3,212 to 3,622
- Texas-located visitors increased 73% from 101,000 to 174,5000
- Non-Austin/metro area visitors increased 123% from 27,570 to 61,550

In coordination with the Museum's marketing department, the Web and Digital Media department has launched promotional campaigns for **TheStoryofTexas.com** and the Texas Story Project through social media, print collateral, public media advertisements, direct-mail contacts, targeted phone calls, and a specially-created digital exhibition displayed at the Capitol in Austin during the first week of February, 2015.

SIGNIFICANCE

Any person who uses the internet and who is interested in Texas history benefits from **TheStoryofTexas.com** website.

The benefits of the website launch show a direct correlation between increased visitation to the Museum, as well as statewide engagement and awareness about the dynamic exhibitions, artifacts, events, films, programming, and educational opportunities the Bullock Museum provides to visitors – now, regardless of their location – by a new, immersive website. Educator engagement with the website, and overall traffic to the site, reflects a 283% increase in visitation to educational resources pages, and a significant uptick in repeat visitation and engagement.

BENEFIT

Actual Benchmark Numbers: (real data from 12 months before the launch)

- Total Visits/Sessions -- 477,169 (39,764/month)
- Total Mobile Visits -- 151,260 (12,605/month)
- Total Visits from Texans -- 406,760 (33,897/month)

Projected Usage Data (+25%): (what we were hoping to hit originally)

- Total Visits/Sessions -- 596,461 (49,705/month)
- Total Mobile Visits -- 189,075 (15,756/month)
- Total Visits from Texans -- 508,450 (42,371/month)

Actual Usage Data (10/14 - 03/15): (real data for first 6 months after the launch)

- Total Visits/Sessions -- 392,948 (65,491/month)
- Total Mobile Visits -- 142,348 (23,725/month)
- Total Visits from Texans -- 332,384 (55,397/month)

True Percentage Growth (10/14 - 03/15): (actual percentage growth when comparing to monthly averages)

- Total Visits/Sessions -- 64.7%
- Total Mobile Visits -- 88.2%
- Total Visits from Texans -- 63.4%

As this entry demonstrates, the data analysis of the site shows that ***TheStoryofTexas.com*** website reflects the 2014 state CIO priorities in that the site has increased the access to digital information via visitor engagement and mobile platform access, has addressed user security issues with custom-designed management and privacy solutions, and has been developed using efficient and successful budget and cost-cutting controls.

TheStoryofTexas.com

Bullock Texas State History Museum

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