

Museums & Gaming

Moderator: John Maccabee, Chief Executive Officer of CityMystery LLC

John Maccabee: Ghosts of a Chance (The Smithsonian American Art Museum's alternate reality game) has been archived at ghostsofachance.com

James Leventhal: hi all

Brenden Martin: I'd like to hear some ideas on how to apply gaming principles to history museums.

James Leventhal: dunno if my last thought actually got through to you, John

Bruce Falk: Ghosts of a Chance was terrific. Kudos, John and Georgina

John Maccabee: It did. What I want to know to answer Brenden's question is to ask what are goals for your visitors?

Richard Urban: @brenden Goggle Kurt Squire

John Maccabee: Thank you, Bruce. It was a pleasure to work with Georgina

Martin Rayala: What if museums built in levels like games so visitors would see different exhibits based on some action they do (stepping closer, pausing longer than usual, completing a task, etc.)

Caren Oberg: Take a look at Minotaur Mazes Jamestown exhibition. Not web-based, but an interesting look at using a game to explore the first year of settlement at Jamestown.

Rachel Dukeman: Does anyone remember the presentation on YoCos from Flavor Pill and the New Yorker at the AAM conf in Boston a few years ago?

John Maccabee: That's an interesting idea, what I like to explore is context, i.e. creating contexts for visitors to "play" with

Seth Blewitt: I like Martin's Idea.

salvador acevedo: I'm might be totally ignorant but my general impression is that games are all about violence and war, so I have a hard time contrasting this with a museum's mission

James Leventhal: my overriding goal is pretty simple, but it's hard to figure out how to get there. We currently have no physical structure, so we must engage people virtually

Richard Urban: I think games can also be great tools for intergenerational learning - too often they are discussed as just for kids

John Maccabee: there are about social interaction too, and problem solving

Confederate Relic Room: I think putting visitors in the place of the historical decision-makers, rather than the place of the spectators, is a step towards make exhibits and programs more compelling - like games.

Dylan McNamee: I'm volunteering for my local science museum, working on an exhibit motivating Algebraic thinking...and games are an obvious motivator (at many levels!)

Rachel Dukeman: This presentation reminded me a lot about the "Young Cosmopolitans" as being a young-at-heart kind of demographic

Carri Manchester: We, depending on the group, sometimes task them with curatorial roles. Give them enough knowledge to get started... it can be empowering for them to be identifying and interpreting them.

Pattie Boy: I am a multimedia student - what resources exist about creating learning games for museums and schools?

John Maccabee: Pattie Boy: check out ghostsofchance.com archive

Caren Oberg: Nina put up a definition: a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome. Conflict yes,. War, does not have to be.

Richard Urban: Williamsburg was working on a MMRPG that put you in different roles during the Revolution

John Maccabee: Not limiting to any one group. SAAM has all sorts of groups playing Ghosts right now.

Caren Oberg: Why do games need to be for children or thought about in ways that are child appropriate?

VP: No way Caren! I love them!

Bruce Falk: Building on Martin's thought, what if Museums hosted round table sessions in which visitors signed up to play. The challenge would be to identify meaningful games whose learning and playing objectives could be achieved in a discrete (and published) time frame. Otherwise, build out something on the net that people can drop in and out of.

Confederate Relic Room: Challenge and reward can make programs into repeat-visitation generators. We've offered an embroidered patch for completion of a series of student activities, and it's been a pretty good motivator.

Martin Rayala: I'm exploring schools that look more like interactive museums at <http://andDESIGNmagazine.blogspot.com>

Dylan McNamee: martin: andDesign seems very relevant to my mission, thanks!

James Leventhal: one way in which we're considering doing this is making our materials available online and virtually, but then we need to get people to want to engage with them

Richard Urban: @Pattie <http://www.eduweb.com/research.html>

Erika Shugart: Did you consider ghosts of a chance a success?

VP: I think associating games with tweens helps with ROI. History museums are struggling to be relevant to that audience.

Kathryn James: We are pioneering a project that combines a computer software development class with a local 5th grade science class. The 5th graders are collaborating with the college game development students to develop a game for the 5th grade science curriculum

John Maccabee: James; if you construct games around virtual content you will bring them in online

Kathryn James: Both groups get real world experience

John Maccabee: what I mean by that is to create narratives that underpin content. Narrative is very important. It weds games to storytelling, which is in our DNA

Confederate Relic Room: Great concept for group interaction in a museum setting: google "matrix games" and check one out at <http://www.juniorgeneral.org/civil%20war/civwar.html> . No tech involved.

Richard Urban: @Bruce has anyone tried a "murder mystery" kinda thing - but with a museum mystery?

John Maccabee: narrative can be historical narrative or dramatic or both

Susan Grinols: A related challenge is educating the administration about all of this.

Erika Shugart: The Koshland Science Museum did a murder mystery several years ago. It was well received

John Maccabee: who is attempting to use games at museums?

James Leventhal: there's a funny little historical society who created a flash-based game which did just that. Very Monty Python-esque, but very engaging.

Bruce Falk: SAAM attempted a version of this in the online "Night at the Museum" so did NMAH with numismatics. Bean Creative specializes in this sort of interactive comic strips

Confederate Relic Room: First game we offer as a downloadable classroom resource:

Richard Urban: @John how do we do non-linear narratives?

Martin Rayala: I recommend James Gee's book for those who don't trust games yet.

salvador acevedo: CAS is using Wii in some of their new exhibits

John Maccabee: Engaging is the key word

Confederate Relic Room:

<http://www.crrteach.sc.gov/CRR/resources/rev%20war%20naval%20simulation.pdf> We also do it as a PowerPoint game.

James Leventhal: Oh yes. The Musee' McCord Museum has a fantastic game on Victorian Etiquette: <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/keys/games/17>

John Maccabee: non-linear can be accomplished by using lots of platforms, having players seek narrative and contribute to it. Richard, does that answer your question?

Bruce Falk: Have you all seen the GMU CHNDM Omeka (at Omeka.org)? A rich, sophisticated game takes extensive resources (time, money, smart people) to develop and to promote. It seems to me this might be best handled as a joint initiative. Let museums each contribute objects or digitized artifacts or curated material and collaborate on developing game tools that can be cross-purposed. ArtShare on Facebook is a neat non-game version that I think shows some of this potential

John Maccabee: extensive games can be put together by consortiums of museums,

Kathryn James: The challenge is that change is hard to do when you are an expert at what you do. We have to get out of our Museum boxes. The point of the talk is not that we have to use games to reach people. The point is that people choose games for a reason. The point is that we can learn from games how to reach a large population of people, and how to engage them to learn and help solve problems.

John Maccabee: or use your expertise to create historical/dramatic narratives that can be used for games

Richard Urban: @Bruce, John that was one of my points behind a Museum of Museum Games - to learn what works & find ways to re-mixing

Confederate Relic Room: Watch our "Blockade" exhibit, coming 2010 - want to make gaming a big part of the programming, teaching history and economics.

John Maccabee: Or, sometimes, find what works, stick with it for a while, until you come up with variations. That may be off the point. But I worry about the ephemeralization of everything

Bruce Falk: John, yes, and if we can agree on some basic design protocols, we needn't worry about the problems of development by committee. We can either create one or more uber-games or have mutually exploitable engines (strategic algorithms, physics, etc.) that allow individual organizations to meet their specific audiences

Suzanne Fischer: I thought it was interesting during the talk when there was an immediate pushback on chat here to the idea of "fake history" for Alternate Reality Games

Erika Shugart: suzanne, I think that is because most museums don't think of their mission as happiness, but as something related to learning, which requires reality

John Maccabee: That's what we have done at SAAM with the modular game - this is in response to Bruce. We started with the uber-game, and went "modular" with it.

Bruce Falk: Suzanne - narrative needn't be "fake history," but can be a distillation of events to emphasize or focus on particular points.

John Maccabee: What that accomplished was marketing the game to a larger virtual and real-time audience, and then narrowing it to only real-time, "off-the street" players.

Confederate Relic Room: Good game-style history simulations help teach how history progressed, not how it "should have been". Thus the "fake history" pushback. Fine in her world(s), wrong in ours.

Bruce Falk: John - yes, and what I'm thinking might be fruitful would be for museums to share modules at a space like Omeka, that allow remixing and save on costs of redevelopment

Suzanne Fischer: Right, how can we use our knowledge to get people involved in the stories

Richard Urban: @Bruce were you involved with the FAS Discover Babylon project? They were working on a sharing platform for Second Life

John Maccabee: Or a bunch of museums getting together to share costs, because we create games that can take place anywhere, you only need one set of "boots" on the ground to "do" things for an online game. That's what is wonderful about ARGs

Confederate Relic Room: Been a pleasure, folks. Signing off. Thanks esp. for the "Victorian Manners" game link - very cool.

John Maccabee: James would you repeat the url for Victorian manners game. thanks.

Richard Urban: one of the problems with pointing to WOW etc. is that they have multi-million dollar budgets (and expect to recoup it many times over)

Richard Urban: we also need to think about how museums do it on a smaller scale

John Maccabee: right you are

Kim Easton: <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/keys/games/17>

Richard Urban: what successful games are within our reach?

John Maccabee: what do you mean, Richard?

Bruce Falk: Richard - no, but I'd like to know more about it. USHMM just launched a SecondLife site relatively recently (on Kristallnacht if I recall). Don't know how effective it's been. But I think it's more of an environment than a game. Participants are journalists... ostensibly a scavenger hunt for facts, causes, and effects

Richard Urban: @John well, we can't do WOW level production - are there other good games with lower costs to use as examples

John Maccabee: ghosts of a chance, he said in all modesty

Erika Shugart: we have looked into games, but budget has always been a huge issue

Richard Urban: @john see <http://fas.org/babylon/>

Erika Shugart: what was the budget for ghosts?

John Maccabee: i.e. it had characters, challenges, pay-offs, live events, etc. in the 60-75K range

Erika Shugart: thx

Bruce Falk: ARGs can be really low-cost (the cost of a moderator); I could imagine a museum investing in an FTE for a moderator for a nonstop game (the way we hire bloggers)

James Leventhal: Brooklyn Museum with Wikimedia put together a multi-museum, nationwide scavenger hunt, for this Valentines. The Magnes couldn't participate, because we don't have things in our galleries, but that was fairly cheap and seemingly simple to put together

John Maccabee: I have come up with a game module that can play for an hour and a half for 25K.

Martin Rayala: We often can't do WOW level of production because we feel that capturing large numbers of people must show that we have dumbed down our content somehow. We like being small and unpopular too much.

James Leventhal: It brought to mind, how could one leverage Web 2.0 to create social events, say geocaching or flash mobs?

David Smith: I think we have let the budget of big games like WOW stop us from thinking about how to run a game "engine" without animation - I think World Without Oil is a better model

John Maccabee: you have the World of Warcraft level of production in the museum itself. it all has to do with expectations. when you go to WOW you expect WOW.

Richard Urban: I'm following several "independent" game discussions - these are often small & viral

emerritt: One of the things I have found really impressive about Jane's games is how often they simply hijack existing tech people already have--email, blogs, cell phones, twitter, and just tie them together on a site like ning

John Maccabee: James; anything can be written into a game design, including flash mobbing and geocaching. viral is the key, also knowing which subgroup you are building the game for helps enormously

Richard Urban: @emerrit what about digital divide issues? (not that it isn't part of other games too)

James Leventhal: I'm sort of thinking of it the other way around, with flash mobbing and geocaching AS the game design (particularly for us who have exactly \$0 to allocate) (fyi - it's Perian still, masquerading as James)

Mark [Freeman]: I don't think this is a matter of cost as much as approach

John Maccabee: for ghosts of a chance we began with the arg community and built out from it.

John Maccabee: Richard; digital divide questions can be bridged by forming teams around let's say cell phones or computer use in a library or school. where one cell phone is used by teams of let's say ten people. flash mobs can begin games, is that what you mean, Perian?

James Leventhal: I'm thinking about how you might leverage the viral nature of flash mobs to support the social interaction and the game within.

John Maccabee: yes, good thinking. all of these can be considered platforms from which you can launch games, or into which you can inject games

James Leventhal: You probably couldn't do it as effectively if the Museum asked for a flash mob, but if it were somewhat subversive, that might be more effective

John Maccabee: ARGs are by their very nature, subversive. although I don't totally ascribe to that.

Richard Urban: maybe you could organize people to flash mob your local rival museum ;)

James Leventhal: oh, now THAT could be fun!

John Maccabee: Jane once organized a game in which rivals absorbed one another.

Richard Urban: A friend was a "something awful" goon, while I didn't necessarily like what they were up to, it was fascinating to from a sociological perspective

John Maccabee: Herd mentality. Sometimes I wonder if we are just giving new names to old stuff

James Leventhal: oh, probably so, since so much of it is really just basic human psychology. Ok, I need to dash. Thanks John. Good "seeing" you, Richard and everyone :)

Richard Urban: bye "james"

John Maccabee: Exactly. What I want to know from museum people is, what is your agenda? what do you want from the game? Is it about development, cultivation, education, etc. Is anyone still here?

Kat Burkhart: Engagement and challenge I think are two things we need to think about

Richard Urban: still here, but following the "happiness" thread too

John Maccabee: Because I really want to know what is the most urgent agenda that underpins your need for games

Bruce Falk: Sorry, on happiness. Must go. Thanks, again, John and looking forward to transcripts.

John Maccabee: Thanks, Bruce, good talking with you.

Richard Urban: John, I can't say much about that as a student. I think lots of museums think games=kids=audience=revenue

June Finnegan: I think games can provide a sense of connection.

Kathryn James: I think games are a familiar environment for the upcoming generations

Kat Burkhart: keeping visitors challenged over the long term, something that keeps people coming back

Kathryn James: Games are the new delivery media

John Maccabee: Kat: as far as engagement is concerned, I take it you mean, holding their attention. Games accomplish this

Kathryn James: Games also allow the museum experience to extend beyond the visit

Kat Burkhart: and giving visitors that proud moment

John Maccabee: Accomplish this through narrative that extends past the actual visit, or real time playing of the game. i.e. you have people play something at the museum and then you engage them on social networking site, etc.

Richard Urban: @kathryn games are ONE deliver media, but need to fit into other emerging forms of interaction

Kathryn James: True. It should not be all or nothing

Richard Urban: @john one nice thing about Discover Babylon is that they offered several versions - a short in-gallery version and a longer one to play at home

John Maccabee: Exactly. If you think of all these means as platforms for telling stories or supplying the social context of artwork etc

Kathryn James: The next big challenge is how do we do it with little money and resistance to change? There are college degrees now for computer game development. Museums could partner with the schools like we are doing with a 5th grade class.

John Maccabee: thank you Elizabeth.

Alex Barker: Thanks, Beth

Kathryn James: The students get real experience, the museums get games.

John Maccabee: I did something like this, created an arg at George Washington University.