Opening Doors Online: Virtual Tours as Wayfinding Tools

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Introduction

The Fisher Fine Arts Library (FFAL) was designed by Frank Furness and opened in 1891 as the University Library. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places (1972) and is a National Historic Landmark (1989). In 1991 it was reopened after renovations by Venturi/Rauch/Scott Brown. Due to its historic status and being one of few extant Furness designs, the library receives a large amount of visitor traffic. It also has a reputation for being a quiet study space, so it attracts scholars from every discipline in addition to the core constituencies of PennDesign and History of Art.

FFAL staff regularly direct patrons around the library, as the extensive Victorian space can be intimidating and confusing. For one, crucial to find areas like the stacks are separated from the main reading room by uncereemoniously modern and narrow doorways. Further, the library shares the building, with other tenants so spatial boundaries are not always obvious.

Wayfinding and Directional Concerns

In order to understand if there were common areas of confusion that could be easily addressed, signs, other means, FFAL staff took a systematic approach to gathering information.

For a period of six months, front desk staff recorded every question they were asked. The results were not surprising, and usually involved stacks and restroom locations. Orientation activities and new signage have helped to an extent.

Below are a few tools that patrons might use before they come to the library, so they can be familiar with the space ahead of time.

Next Steps

- Continue developing online wayfinding aids
- Work to make spaces less intimidating, by featuring them on social media and in programming
- Ask for directed feedback from student and faculty advisory groups
- Explore new shared shelf subscription for potential to showcase spaces and connect to exhibit platforms (Omeka Neatline, etc.)

YouVisit Experience Builder

https://www.youvisit.com/tour/pguar

Experience Builder is a free virtual tour builder that is part of the larger YouVisit entity. It has been used by universities to create tours that combine audio, maps, photo, and video in a responsive format.

TheBuilder is fairly easy to use and allows for quick development of a draft tour but can be glitchy when incorporating floorplans.

Instagram

@fisherfineartslibrary

Now a year old, the library’s Instagram account is ideal for posting quick highlights, schedule updates, and photos of spaces.

It can be challenging to post regularly during a busy work week, but this could become part of an internship project.

LibGuides

http://guides.library.upenn.edu/hometabs/researchguides

LibGuides can be easily adapted to include wayfinding features such as links to stacks, maps, brief highlights of spaces, and connections to related pages and resources. It can be easy to refer to a call number range and link to a map, for instance.

Class Practicum

A graphic design class approached the library and created a brand for it, including maps to aid wayfinding. This was not a project by FFAL staff; rather it was an opportunity to learn how students see the space and what they thought could help visitors better navigate the library.

Suggestions? Reactions? Add them in this box!

Image Sources

Fine Arts Library Image Collection
PennDesign-Architectural Archives
University of Pennsylvania Archives
Flickr Public Domain Images