

RIJKSMUSEUM



The Rijksmuseum is a Dutch national museum dedicated to art and history. Founded in 1800 in the Netherlands

Revenue model: grants and government funding, charging for in-person version (museum admission), selling merchandise

www.rijksmuseum.nl

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Interviewee: Lizzy Jongma, the data manager of the collections information department

Profile written by Paul Stacey

The Rijksmuseum, a national museum in the Netherlands dedicated to art and history, has been housed in its current building since 1885. The monumental building enjoyed more than 125 years of intensive use before needing a thorough overhaul. In 2003, the museum was closed for renovations. Asbestos was found in the roof, and although the museum was scheduled to be closed for only three to four years, renovations ended up taking ten years. During this time, the collection was moved to a different part of Amsterdam, which created a physical distance with the curators. Out of necessity, they started digitally photographing the collection and creating metadata (information about each object to put into a database). With the renovations going on for so long, the museum became largely forgotten by the public. Out of these circumstances emerged a new and more open model for the museum.

By the time Lizzy Jongma joined the Rijksmuseum in 2011 as a data manager, staff were fed up with the situation the museum was in. They also realized that even with the new and larger space, it still wouldn't be able to show very much of the whole collection—eight thousand of over one million works representing just 1 percent. Staff began exploring ways to express themselves, to have something to show for all of the work they had been doing. The Rijksmuseum is primarily funded by Dutch taxpayers, so was there a way for the museum provide benefit to the public while it was closed? They began thinking about sharing Rijksmuseum's collection using information technology. And they put up a card-catalog like database of the entire collection online.

It was effective but a bit boring. It was just data. A hackathon they were invited to got them to start talking about events like that as having potential. They liked the idea of inviting people to do cool stuff with their collection.