

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
MUSEUM OF ART

# IMPROVING VISITOR ONSITE-EXPERIENCE

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**CREATED BY:**

Yilin Xue  
Kelly Hovinga  
Sophie Amberkar  
Mayank Sharma

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this inquiry is to improve visitor on site experience at the University of Michigan's Museum of Art. Our team has brainstormed a number of possible solutions to problems we have observed throughout the museum. Our solutions are the result of comparative analysis, secondary research/case studies, interviews with staff, and visitor observations. Through our research, we have decided to focus on customer service, general navigation issues, the personalization of visitor experiences, and the consolidation of feedback to increase the likelihood of return visits. The report will cover issues we observed regarding signage, maps, customer service, environment, information communication, and centralized feedback. The Michigan Museum of Art is one of the top university art museums in the country, and for this reason, there are a limited number of major issues. However, we propose the museum could make a number of minor changes to increase the likelihood of positive on sight experience, in addition to a few major design ideas.

Studies have found the first key moments of entry into a museum are often the most disorienting and difficult for first time visitors<sup>1</sup>, thus, a strong and welcoming environment are paramount to the success of a museum. During a one hour observation period, 0 out of 19 visitors approached the information desk to get material. However, of those 19 visitors, every one of them looked at the observer first thing upon entering the museum, despite the observer locating themselves across the room and pretending to read a book. As such, we suggest the museum staff the information desk with customer service trained individual. Additionally, studies have shown the accuracy of information is actually less important to a visitor than the friendliness of the customer service representative, so grounding in the artwork is actually not as important as smiling.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to adding a customer service representative at the information desk, our group suggest making the museum environment more welcoming with the inclusion of seating to combat museum fatigue, and signage on the information desk. Multiple art museum including Yale Art Museum (see figure 2) and the Museum of Modern Art (see figure 3) incorporate comfortable seating in their

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1 Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2013). *The Museum Experience Revisited*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press. Pg. 38-40.

2 Taylor, R. S. (1968). Question-negotiation and information seeking in libraries. *College & research libraries*, 29(3), Pg. 179

lobby area to welcome users and encourage them to linger. Furthermore, the British Museum of art conducted an experiment of providing a greater with a welcome sign, which had positive results.<sup>3</sup> Currently, UMMA's information desks poorly located and poorly labeled. One of the information desks is actually located behind visitors when they enter<sup>4</sup>, while the other information desk is located across a barren, neutral room. The second information desk is far enough away from the door, that visitors cannot accurately read the screen. One visitor admitted they liked the old entrance, because it felt more like an art museum. To combat this problem, we suggest including a welcome sign in multiple languages and labeling the various maps located at the information desk.

Another consistent problem we encountered from observations and interviews is museum navigation through maps and signs. Not a single person we interviewed, employee or visitor, liked the map or the signs. Quotes include:

- “The signage is not good at all.” [E01]
- “We don’t have signs by our elevator to tell people what is on each floor.” [E04]
- “Some of the galleries are named after donors on their signs, but the gallery names are not on the map or related to what is in them.” [E04]
- “The maps are crap” [E01]
- “Visitors come to the store to ask where to find a certain work.” [E02]
- “The digital sign is updated but people don’t actually look at it.” [E04]<sup>5</sup>

From our observations, students struggled to find the location of exhibits and galleries because the signs are outdated, the map does a poor job of orientation, and there simply are not enough signs. As such, we suggest incorporating a layered map, and Orientation signs like those found at the British Museum(see figure 10).

A final issue we found was the synthesis of visitor feedback. Currently, UMMA does not have a standardized method of collecting and sharing visitor feedback. From our interviews, we found

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3 Silvers, D. M. (2016 , Aug. 26) “The British Museum: Running Design Sprints in Museums.” Retrieved Dec. 08, 2016, from <http://sprintstories.com>

4 One visitor is actually admitted she did a full 360 degree turn looking for the information desk when she entered.

5 The brackets refer to the interview participants and the id we assigned them.



that UMMA once had a suggestion box, but the results were unsatisfactory. However, the original suggestion box only had pieces of paper without guided questions. We suggest a survey with guided open ended questions and numerical ranking to maintain the relevancy of feedback. Additionally, we suggest a consolidated feedback method through the website, which will allow for easier analytics and sharing between the departments. Consolidating feedback and sharing information is paramount to making future decisions for the museum.

For further information, please see the various sections of the report.

## OVERVIEW OF SOLUTIONS

- We suggest hiring a dedicated customer service representative for the information desk. Multiple studies show that a positive customer service experience has a greater influence on customers returning than the actual service or product they are receiving. Museum goers are already feeling out of place and on edge from being in a foreign environment, a friendly face with positive body language from someone they consider an expert increases the likelihood of return. (For More Information see section Face-to-Face Customer Service)
- We suggest improving the Navigation materials by including a layered map on every floor, and making sure the labeling is consistent across deliverables. By providing more visuals on the signs and implementing color coding, users will feel more at ease in a new space. Additionally, a comprehensive site map accompanied by directories will reduce navigation anxiety. (For more information see section Wayfinding)
- We Suggest implementing an Audio Tour option users can access via their WiFi compatible devices. Specifically, we suggest the creation of a website that acts like a traditional audio guide with numbers next to artwork and directions. The website could be accessed through a visitor's phone or iPod, or even the tablets offered at the museum shop. Additionally, the guide could provide directions from collection to collection, reducing navigation issues. (For More Information see section Technology at UMMA)
- We suggest incorporating comfortable seating at key entrances to provide a welcoming atmosphere. When visitors currently enter UMMA, the space is vast and potentially overwhelming for the user. Since most visitors enter through Alumni Memorial Hall and Frankel Family Wing, positioning comfortable seating

would allow the visitors time to orient themselves with the museum and feel welcomed. Once entering the museum seating would offer the visitor time to take a seat and look over the visitor guide and map out the exhibits and artwork they would like to see (See Section Creating a Welcoming Space)

- We suggest centralizing feedback methods. UMMA has no formal or consistent method of collecting feedback from its visitors about the events, exhibitions and tours; nor a formal way of sharing that information throughout the various departments. In terms of input methods for feedback, portable internet based surveys and customer feedback kiosks can effectively gather data about the visitor experiences. To make surveys attractive and engaging, we suggest logos and colorful images. In conclusion, making use of online feedback options and hard copy forms for on-site evaluations would make feedback methodology consistent. Additionally, consolidating feedback methods will set UMMA up for future analysis of visitor experience and problem solving. (For More Information see section Centralizing Feedback )

# INTRODUCTION

The goal of this inquiry is to improve visitor on sight experience in the University of Michigan's Museum of Art. Our team has brainstormed a number of possible solutions to problems we have observed throughout the museum. Our solutions are the result of comparative analysis, secondary research/case studies, interviews with staff, and visitor observations. Through our research, we have decided to focus on customer service, general navigation issues, the personalization of visitor experiences, and the consolidation of feedback to increase the likelihood of return visits. The report will cover issues we observed in signage, maps, customer service, environment, information communication, and centralized feedback. The Michigan Museum of Art is one of the top university art museums in the country, and for this reason, there is a limited number of major issues. However, we propose the museum could make a number of minor changes to increase the likelihood of positive on sight experience, in addition to a few major design ideas.

## BACKGROUND

Considerable effort has been invested in making UMMA more accessible to students and the public through the inclusion of study spaces, after hour events that focus on activities and socialization<sup>6</sup>, and interactive media like “Voices of UMMA,” however, museums have a negative stereotype to overcome<sup>7</sup>. The first step to overcoming that negative stereotype as a monolith of dominant cultural norms is through meeting the needs of visitors.

In the seminal work: *The Museum Experience Revisited* by John Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, the researchers found that visitors chose to go to museums in their leisure time because it fulfilled some personal need or aspect of personal identity. The book is a collection of interviews of museum visitors from different age groups, race, gender, economic classes, and educational backgrounds. There has been a movement towards using leisure time to expand horizons in recent years, and museums are strongly entrenched in communities’ educational sector<sup>8</sup>. In the context of UMMA, students go to the museum during the school year because it serves a personal need by reinforcing their identities as academics. Art students may choose to visit UMMA for inspiration, while the general student may seek out UMMA to impress a date or simply to escape for a time from coursework. However, the University of Michigan’s student body is not the only visitors to the UMMA, which leads to our discussion of the family clientele.

Despite the amount of variation found in visitor expectations, visitors’ actions within a museum are relatively constant. The initial few minutes after entering the museum are important to the success of a visit and are strongly tied to the emotional state of the visitor. Researchers have broken down visitors into three categories: inexperienced visitors, experienced visitors, and guided tour visitors. UMMA is more interested in visitor return rates, so the focus of this report will be on inexperienced visitors. Inexperienced visitors’ time in a museum is broken down into four sections:

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6 From interview with Employee 04 and Employee 05

7 Rice, D. (2003). Museums: Theory, practice, and illusion. *Art and its publics: Museum studies at the millennium*, Pg.80. The movie character Rocky climbs the stairs to a famous museum in Philadelphia, symbolizing the American dream of the lower-classes ascending past dominate rich culture through hard work.

8 Falk, J. H., and Dierking, L. D. (2013) Pg. 38-40.

1. Orientation (3 to 10 minutes)
2. Intensive looking (15 to 40 minutes)
3. Exhibition “cruising” (20 to 45 minutes)
4. Leave taking (3 to 10 minutes)<sup>9</sup>

Naturally, there is variation within this breakdown depending on the tolerance of an individual for museum going, but the formula tends to be relatively consistent. Although the actual exhibits themselves play an important role in visitor satisfaction, a point that can either make or break a museum experience is the orientation phase.

Inexperienced visitors initially feel immense discomfort when entering a museum. According to Falk and Lynn:

“Most inexperienced visitors are initially disoriented; they spend the first few minutes in the museum determining what there is to see and in which direction to move. They stop, look around, and perhaps obtain a map. They try to make sense out of the maze of people, objects, and architecture awaiting them. As pointed out by Hayward and Brydon-Miller, orientation experiences can have a significant impact not only on people’s initial actions, but also on their ultimate satisfaction.”<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, people of lower income brackets have been proven to show higher levels of anxiety in museum settings because the environment is more novel and foreign.<sup>11</sup> Some ways that museums have attempted to reduce this anxiety is by providing maps. Unfortunately, many studies have been conducted that suggest few adults are actually proficient at reading maps; although, just holding a map tends to reduce visitor anxiety anyway.<sup>12</sup> Luckily, directional signs with arrows have been proven to reduce confusion during museum navigation<sup>13</sup>, thus mitigating some of the frustrations exhibited by visitors. Visitors also tend to consult people in their group, guards, or information desk

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9 Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2013). Pg.134.

10 Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2013). Pg.134.

11 Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2013). Pg.140.

12 Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2013). Pg. 134-5.

13 Bennett, G. K. (1941). The museum technique applied to market research. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 5(4), Pg. 185.

attendants for additional information upon entering a space, as well as covertly watch other visitors for social cues, but rarely do they ask fellow visitors.<sup>14</sup> This particular tendency of visitors to look for help from an actual person presents a distinct problem for UMMA, as their information desk is not manned by a person and their security guards are not trained in the actual artwork of the exhibits. This explains why visitors have been known to visit the gift shop of UMMA to ask shop attendants for information.

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14 Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2013). Pg.135.

# Creating a Welcoming Space

UMMA offers an expansive collection for visitors to engage with, but learning and exploring different works can also saturate a visitor with information. The museum should consider increasing the available seating for users to either take a moment to further engage with a piece or rest their mind and body after looking at an exhibit. Museum fatigue should be further considered when creating seating arrangements in exhibits and throughout the museum itself. Decreased visitor interest after a given time towards an exhibit is what defines museum fatigue<sup>15</sup>. Research has shown “that interest reaches a high plateau for the first 30 minutes of a visit and decreases thereafter.”<sup>16</sup> While many elements can aid in reducing museum fatigue, providing available and well-positioned seating is key. UMMA is a spread out space that requires walking on mostly tile or concrete flooring which can physically strain visitors. Offering comfortable seating in key areas throughout the museum can help visitors to relax and take in their experience.



Figure 1 (UMMA Alumni Memorial Hall Entrance)



Figure 2(Yale Art Museum Entrance<sup>17</sup>)

15 Davey, G. (2005). What is Museum Fatigue? *Visitor Studies Today*, 18. Retrieved October 20, 2016, from <http://academia.com>

16 Davey, G. (2005). Pg.18

17 (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from [http://www.worldalldetails.com/Picturereview/1246-Yale\\_Center\\_Connecticut\\_U.S.A.\\_Art\\_Gallery\\_Room\\_interior.html](http://www.worldalldetails.com/Picturereview/1246-Yale_Center_Connecticut_U.S.A._Art_Gallery_Room_interior.html)



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Figure 3(MoMA seating in entrance<sup>18</sup>)

When visitors currently enter UMMA, the space is vast and potentially overwhelming for the user. Since most visitors enter through Alumni Memorial Hall and Frankel Family Wing, positioning comfortable seating would allow the visitors time to orient themselves with the museum and feel welcomed (see figure 1). “From the design of the building entrance or....to the easy availability of seating.... a museum can either be appealing or threatening. When amenities help people feel comfortable, that peace of mind allows them to concentrate on the exhibits.”<sup>19</sup> Multiple art museum like Yale Art Museum (see figure 2) and the Museum of Modern Art (see figure 3) incorporate comfortable seating in their lobby area to welcome users and encourage them to linger. MoMA in particular hired designer Richard Shemtov to create seating in the lobby and

18 (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from [http://dune-ny.com/featured\\_projects/dune\\_moma](http://dune-ny.com/featured_projects/dune_moma)

19 Hood, M. G. (1993). Comfort and caring: Two essential environmental factors. *Environment and Behavior*, 25(6), Pg. 717.

throughout the museum that would not distract from the design or the artwork.<sup>20</sup> Shemtov's end product consisted of wavy seating that allowed visitors to sit and view the artwork at different vantage points, but also lounge with a group of people or view the work solo.<sup>21</sup> Once entering the museum seating would offer the visitor time to take a seat and look over the visitor guide and map out the exhibits and artwork they would like to see.

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20 (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from [http://dune-ny.com/featured\\_projects/dune\\_moma](http://dune-ny.com/featured_projects/dune_moma)

21 (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from [http://dune-ny.com/featured\\_projects/dune\\_moma](http://dune-ny.com/featured_projects/dune_moma)

## Face-to-Face Customer Service

As discussed previously, the first few moments for a visitor in a museum are often the most anxiety inducing, and a strong customer service culture can mitigate some of that anxiety. Although museums are not strictly part of a consumer society, every institution is judged upon the merit of what they provide, and thus customer service interactions play an important part in museum goership. There are hundreds of books discussing positive customer service culture, but one of the most hailed is Zingerman's Guide to Giving Great Service. The author suggests there are three Steps to Great Service:

1. Figure out what the customer wants.
2. Get it for them accurately, politely, and enthusiastically.
3. Go the extra mile for the customer.<sup>22</sup>

Although Zingerman's is a deli, the same principles apply, such as finding out what the visitor wants (to figure out where they are going), then answering the visitors questions (where is the bathroom, what is a good exhibit, etc), and then going the extra mile (share some personal interest, or ask them to enjoy themselves). Multiple studies show that a positive customer service experience has a greater influence on customers returning than the actual service or product they are receiving.

Currently, UMMA relies on the store to serve as their face to face customer service. The store employees are excellent at their jobs and considerable effort has gone into their service training. From one of our interviewees, we were told that store clerks were encouraged to take time to explore new exhibits to better answer visitor questions. Additionally, store clerks have sheets of information to help them answer customer questions, and are informed to wander around the store to avoid intimidating visitors by being behind the desk. Although the clerks are excellent at their jobs, the store is located at only one of the entrances and around a corner. The first things visitors experience when entering the museum is usually an empty desk.

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<sup>22</sup> Weinzweig, A. (2012). Zingerman's Guide to Giving Great Service. Hyperion. Pg. 38.



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One of the consistent responses we got from interviews was the desire for an actual employee at the information desk, and our observation of visitors and research supports the importance of staffing the desk. During a one hour observation period, 0 out of 19 visitors approached the information desk to get material. However, of those 19 visitors, every one of them looked at the observer first thing upon entering the museum, despite the observer locating themselves across the room and pretending to read a book. In an alien environment, a human face is usually the first thing a person looks for, presenting an excellent opportunity to create an initial positive impression. Additionally, the British Museum conducted a case study looking at way finding in their museum. From the survey, they realized that people were not actually using the website to orient themselves before arriving at the museum, leading to initial questions like “Where do I start?” and “What do I do?”<sup>23</sup> Without a physical person providing orientation, the quality of the museum experience is reduced while anxiety is heightened.

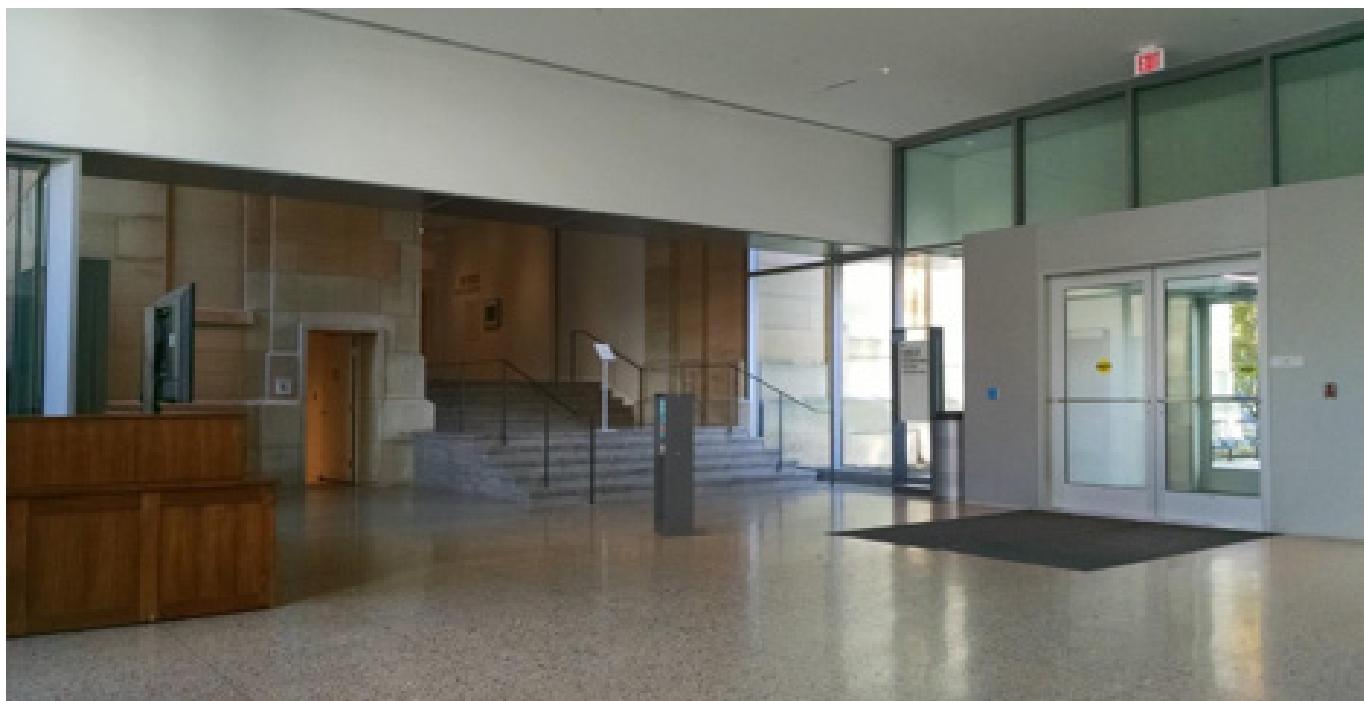


Figure 4 (Entrance to UMMA)

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23 Silvers, D. M. (2016)

Human presence has a strong influence on creating a welcoming environment. In response to the navigation challenge at the British Museum, the design team came up with “meeter-greeter,” who would stand outside the museum with a sign saying “Can I help?” Their discoveries include:

- Most visitors did not ask about museum objects, but about bathrooms and coat check.
- Visitors that speak other languages besides English were delighted when the sign holder could speak multiple languages.
- When the “meter-greeter” held up a sign saying they spoke French, visitors felt “relieved and welcome”
- Contrary to staff expectations, most visitors are at the museum for the experience and not the actual museum objects.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 5 (Meeter-Greeter outside the British Museum<sup>25</sup>)

24 Silvers, D. M. (2016)

25 Silvers, D. M. (2016)

Even though visitors may not have asked the “meter-greeter” any questions, the fact that the meter-greeter was present created a more welcoming environment.

Although researchers have written little about museum customer service, they share many similarities to library customer service. In both cases, the institution is considered a knowledgeable expert<sup>26</sup>; and in both cases, visitors feel an undue amount of anxiety when first entering the premise<sup>27</sup>. In libraries, it has been shown that body language and friendliness has a stronger effect on positive customer feedback than the actual quality of information received<sup>28</sup>. In one of our interviews, an employee recounted their best customer service interaction. Although the museum visitors did not buy anything from the store, they bantered with the store clerk and cracked jokes. The visitors left smiling. It stands to reason and evidence that museums would benefit from some of the same training in anxiety reduction. Museum goers are already feeling out of place and on edge from being in a foreign environment, a friendly face with positive body language from someone they consider an expert increases the likelihood of return.

Due to the strongly positive influence human interaction has on making a visitor feel welcome, we advise UMMA to hire an information desk specialist with customer service training. If this course of action proves to be untenable, we advise using volunteers. Although it is difficult to train volunteers and the knowledge base might not be as vast, a positive and friendly face that knows where the bathroom is might actually be more important than the quality of information provided. We also suggest the staff for the information desk be multilingual; and if not, the information desk should have a welcome sign in multiple languages.

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26 Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2013). Pg.68.

27 Kuhlthau, C. C. (2004). Seeking meaning: A process approach to library and information services. Libraries Unltd Incorporated. Pg. 30.

28 Taylor, R. S. (1968). Question-negotiation and information seeking in libraries. College & research libraries, 29(3), Pg. 179.

# Wayfinding

One of the repeated themes we encountered in our interviews with staff and visitors was a general dissatisfaction with the maps and signs. Quotes included:

- “The signage is not good at all.”<sup>29</sup>
- “We don’t have signs by our elevator to tell people what is on each floor.”<sup>30</sup>
- “Some of the galleries are named after donors on their signs, but the gallery names are not on the map or related to what is in them.”<sup>31</sup>
- “The maps are crap ”<sup>32</sup>
- “Visitors come to the store to ask where to find a certain work.”<sup>33</sup>
- “The digital sign is updated but people don’t actually look at it.” <sup>34</sup>

Additionally, during our observations, we found visitors rarely approached the information desk to get maps. One of the visitors we interviewed was attempting to use the iPad from the gift store to navigate, but kept getting lost.

There are four different types of signage that UMMA currently utilizes that could be enhanced to improve navigation for visitors, these include:

- Identification signs
- Directional signs
- Orientation signs
- Regulatory signs

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29 Interview with Employee 01

30 Interview with Employee 04

31 Interview with Employee 04

32 Interview with Employee 01

33 Interview with Employee 02

34 Interview with Employee 04



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Identification signs are visual markers often accompanied by a universal image that indicate the function of a space. They are often thought of as the “building blocks of way finding” and “provide the first impression of a destination.”<sup>35</sup> Identification signs that use graphic symbols can become a powerful, concise communication tool.<sup>36</sup> From our interviews we gathered a common question from visitors is “where are the restrooms located?” The museum currently does not use identifications signs in conjunction with directional signs. By incorporating identification signs such as restrooms, elevators and information in high traffic areas this will help further communicate the location of these points of interest.

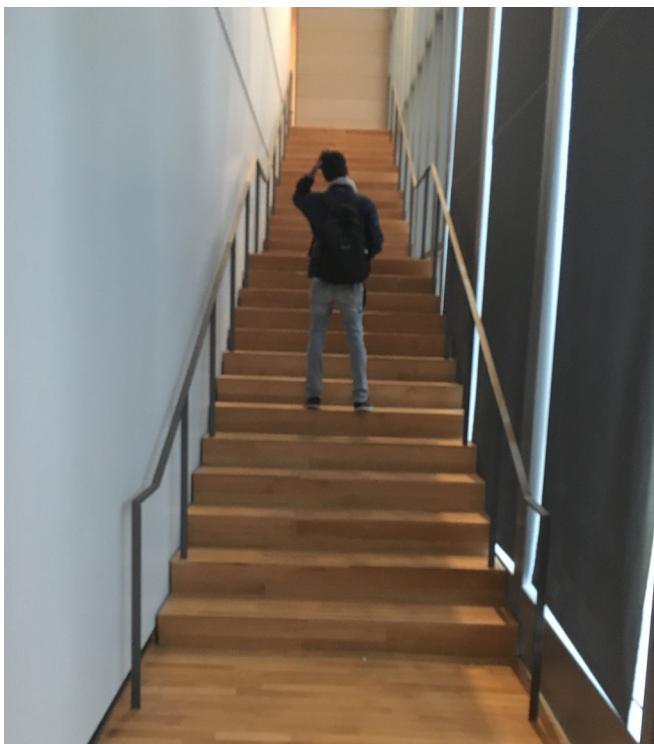


Figure 6 (student trying to figure out where the stairs go).



Figure 7 (Student unsure if the room is an exit).

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35 Gibson, D. (2009). *The wayfinding handbook: Information design for public places*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, Pg. 48.

36 Gibson, D. (2009), Pg.96.

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Directional signs provide necessary cues to route users to specific destinations and encourage movement. Currently there are directional signs at UMMA, however they tend to blend in with the architecture and thus do not help visitors with wayfinding (see figure 8). Although it's important to have directional signs harmonize with their environment, they also need to be obvious and recognizable.<sup>37</sup> Creating new directional signs that contrast more with the white walls will help further communicate the location of spaces to visitors (see figure 9).



Figure 8(UMMA Directional Signage)



Figure 9(Directional and Identification Signs at the British Museum)<sup>38</sup>

Orientation signs help put users at ease in a new space and are often comprehensive site maps accompanied by directories. Orientation signs work closely with directional and identifications signs to navigate a user around a space. Places should use the same labeling methods on maps to prevent confusion.<sup>39</sup> Currently UMMA has a map located on the visitor guide, however there are no

37 Gibson, D. (2009), Pg. 49.

38 Whybrow. (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from <http://www.whybrow.co.uk/portfolio/british-museum>

39 Gibson, D. (2009), Pg. 50.

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physical large scale maps mounted throughout museum(see figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10 (Orientation Sign from the British Museum<sup>40</sup>)

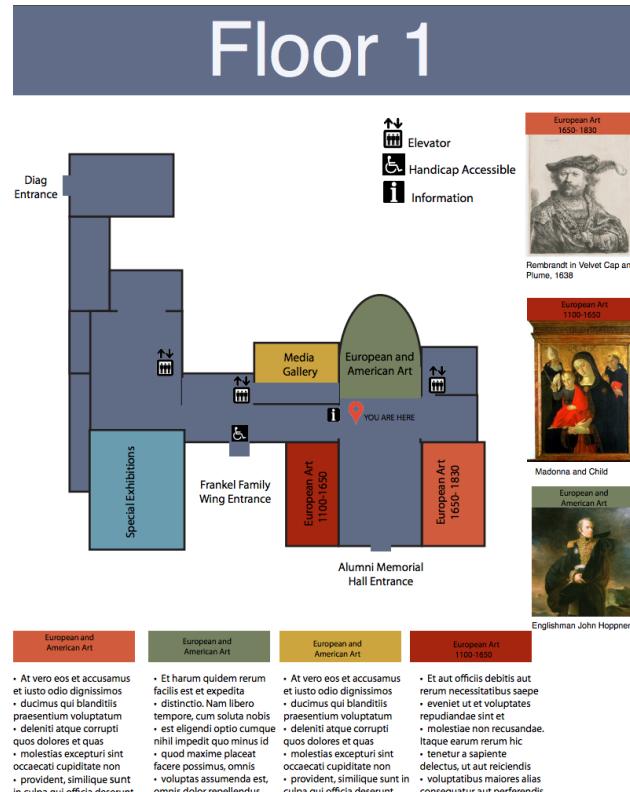


Figure 11 (UMMA Orientation Sign Mockup)

When a visitor first enters the museum they immediately encounter a “no flash photography” sign which creates a point of contention for the museum goer. Regulatory signs like the “no photography” should be unobtrusive but also immediately communicate the correct guidelines to the end user.<sup>41</sup> From information gathered in our interviews, several employees pointed out that visitors are confused if photography is even allowed in the museum and frequently ask the security guards.<sup>42</sup> Changing the verbiage on the no photography signs could help eliminate confusion

40 Whybrow. (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from <http://www.whybrow.co.uk/portfolio/british-museum>

41 Gibson, D. (2009), Pg. 54.

42 Interview with Employee 02



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and encourage the visitor to engage more with the art. For example, change the sign to state photography is encouraged but stipulate that flash photography is not allowed to preserve the integrity of the artwork.



Figure 11(UMMA regulatory sign)



Please no flash photography, food or beverages in the museum.  
Photography without the use of flash is encouraged as long as it's for personal and non-commercial use.

Figure 12(Mock regulatory sign)

Maps provide an overview of a space for visitors and help orient them to an area by establishing relationships to different elements, and as such we encountered a few problems with the physical UMMA map. However, we have brainstormed a number of viable solutions. Using factors such as "You are Here"(See figure 11) help situate users and enable them to discover the locations of rooms and objects.<sup>43</sup> Since art museums like UMMA frequently have rotating exhibits the labeling

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43 Gibson, D. (2009), Pg. 100.

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on maps can be subject to change and laminate or digital forms can allow easy alternations.<sup>44</sup> UMMA already has digital screens in place that could be refurbished and used just for digital maps (see figure 5). By clearly stating what gallery collections and famous artworks are located on each floor, visitors will navigate the museum more efficiently. From our interviews a common question the store received was “what should I see ?”<sup>45</sup> We suggest the visitor guide include a section of staff’s tops picks or most popular works.

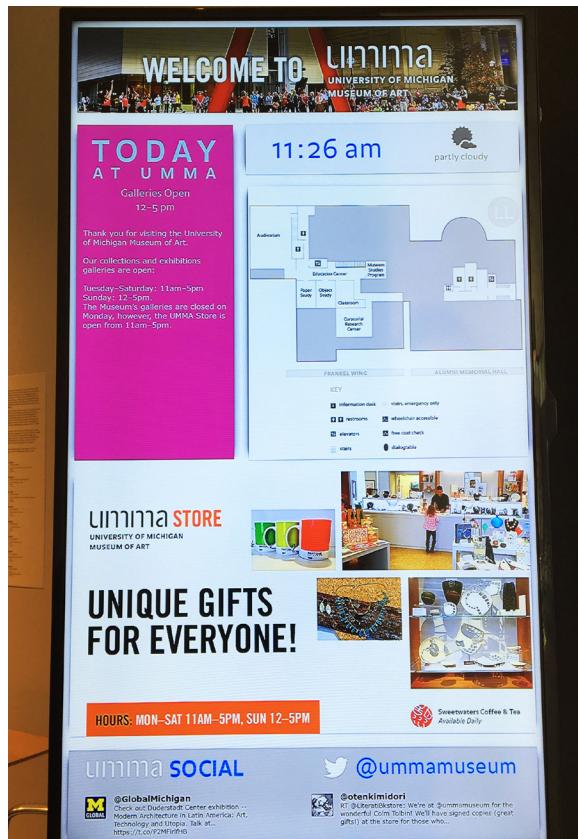


Figure 12 (current digital screen at UMMA)

44 Gibson, D. (2009), Pg. 100.

45 Interview with Employee 02

## Advertising & Information Communication

Revisit-ability of a museum is thus dependent on the museum's ability to live up to the visitors expectations, and part of living up to expectations is an accurate and informative method of communicating what the museum offers. John Falk and Lynn D. Dierking noted in their work *The Museum Experience Revisited* that visitors chose to go to museums to fulfill certain personal needs and aspects of personal identity.<sup>46</sup> Throughout our interview, we noticed although the museum tailor their experience to different audience types, there seems insufficient effective communication in reaching various audiences. Some feedback we received was:

1. The community is missing general information about the museum<sup>47</sup>.
2. Visitors are unaware of the museum's collections, ongoing exhibitions, guided tours, events, gallery hours, and even its existence<sup>48</sup>.
3. The Museum relies on existing email groups, which mostly reaches out to the existing audience rather than acquiring new visitors<sup>49</sup>.

In the practices of marketing and communication, it is important for the marketing department to first develop personas to visualize different types of users. After the creation of personas, the department then tailors a message and communication method for each type of audience<sup>50</sup>. Falk's earlier work has provided five basic archetypes of museum visitors that can be used for reference in our client's case. The following chart provides a more straightforward description of the characteristic for each persona:

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46 Falk, J. H, and Dierking, L. D. (2013). Pg.135.

47 Interview with Employee 02 & 06

48 Interview with Employee 06

49 Interview with Employee 04

50 Schweibenz, W. (2008). Know thy visitors: Personas for visitor-centered museums. *The International Journal for the Inclusive Museum*, 1(2), 103-109.



## EXPLORERS

Visitors who are curiosity-driven with a generic interest in the content of the museum. They expect to find something that will grab their attention and fuel their learning.

*"I remember thinking I wanted to learn my science basics again, like biology and that stuff. . . . I thought [before coming], You're not going to pick up everything, you know, but you are going to learn some things."*



## FACILITATORS

Visitors who are socially motivated. Their visit is focused on primarily enabling the experience and learning of others in their accompanying social group.

*"[I came] to give [my] kids a chance to see what early life was like . . . it's a good way to spend time with the family in a non-commercial way. They always learn so much."*



## PROFESSIONAL/HOBBYISTS

Visitors who feel a close tie between the museum content and their professional or hobbyist passions. Their visits are typically motivated by a desire to satisfy a specific content-related objective.

*"I'm starting to put together a saltwater reef tank, so I have a lot of interest in marine life. I'm hoping to pick up some ideas [here at the aquarium]."*



## EXPERIENCE SEEKERS

Visitors who are motivated to visit because they perceive the museum as an important destination. Their satisfaction primarily derives from the mere fact of having 'been there and done that'.

*"We were visiting from out-of-town, looking for something fun to do that wouldn't take all day. This seemed like a good idea; after all, we're in Los Angeles and someone told us this place just opened up and it's really neat."*



## RECHARGERS

Visitors who are primarily seeking to have a contemplative, spiritual and/or restorative experience. They see the museum as a refuge from the work-a-day world or as a confirmation of their religious beliefs.

*"I like art museums. They are so very quiet and relaxing, so different than the noise and clutter of the rest of the city."*

Figure 12 (Breakdown of Audience Archetypes<sup>51</sup>)

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51 Falk, J. H. (2013). Understanding Museum Visitors' Motivations and Learning. *Museums: Social Learning Spaces and*

For UMMA, explorers will be its most common type of audience for a university museum. Learning experience is then a key component of what the museum can offer to meet this type of audience's expectation. In evaluating the museum's current programming, the following seems like a good fit for explorers:

1. Curator Lectures
2. Guided Tours
3. Description of Artworks Distributed throughout the Museum
4. Special Exhibitions

UMMA has all these forms of programming, and consistently receives excellent reviews for their curatorial and educational staff.<sup>52</sup> However, the museum could still improve communication of their programming. UMMA's curatorial lecture is only advertised on their website, but not on Twitter and Facebook. Although the interview with the communication department suggests issues with Facebook advertisement, it is still the most commonly used social media network. As for special exhibitions, although it has been effectively advertised through digital media, there's no on-site material dedicated to it, other than the monthly magazines. We were also told that the museum offers free tours curated by their student docents every Sunday, however, it is difficult to find this information on the website.<sup>53</sup> The gallery talks and tours are under the category "happenings" on the website and listed under "Events." However, under the calendar section, the tours are called "engage with art," which can be confusing for users.

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Knowledge Producing Processes, Arken-Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. Pg 117.

52 Interview with Employee 05.

53 Interview with Employee 05.

# UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MUSEUM OF ART



UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
MUSEUM OF ART

ART      HAPPENINGS      LEARN      ABOUT      SUPPORT          

## EVENTS

- Today
- This Week
- Exhibitions-Related
- Tours
- For Students
- For Families
- All Events

## EXHIBITIONS

- Current
- Upcoming
- Past

## NEWS

- Community
- UMMA Magazine
- News Archive
- The Annex
- Subscribe to eNewsletter
- Media Inquiries
- Hours
- Admission
- Floor Plans
- Accessibility
- Group Tours
- Request Study Room
- Directions / Parking / Transportation

## PLAN YOUR VISIT

### FAMILY ART STUDIO



Sign up for a free Family Art Studio at UMMA!

Figure 13 (UMMA Happenings Webpage<sup>54</sup>)

search events

- Filter by: All
- Artists and Curators
  - Artmaking
  - Exhibitions Related
  - Family
  - Film
  - Gallery Talks and Tours
  - Performing Arts
  - Special Events
  - Student Events
  - Writers Series

SAT	<b>Storytime at the Museum</b> 11:15am – 12pm Family / Gallery Talks and Tours
SUN	<b>It wasn't Art at the Start: Engaging with Art</b> 1pm – 2pm Gallery Talks and Tours
SUN	<b>Engaging with Art</b> 1pm – 2pm Gallery Talks and Tours
SUN	<b>Japanese Prints of Kabuki Theater from the Collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art</b> 2pm – 3pm Gallery Talks and Tours

Figure 14 (UMMA Calendar of Events<sup>55</sup>)

As such, we suggest an approach more like Yale's and Harvard's museum websites, in which the guided tours are clearly labeled under the visit section.

54 Events. (n.d.). Retrieved December 09, 2016, from <http://umma.umich.edu/events>

55 Events. (n.d.). Retrieved December 09, 2016, from <http://umma.umich.edu/events>

# UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MUSEUM OF ART

**YALE  
UNIVERSITY  
ART  
GALLERY**

VISIT EXHIBITIONS PROGRAMS COLLECTIONS EDUCATION JOIN AND SUPPORT PUBLICATIONS ABOUT

Enter your keywords

Home » Visit » Group Tours and Class Visits » Group Tours

## VISIT

HOURS AND DIRECTIONS

GROUP TOURS AND CLASS VISITS

VISITORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

## GROUP TOURS

SHARE <

The expanded Yale University Art Gallery offers free, hour-long tours to engage the public with its encyclopedic collection. Led by Yale students of diverse academic backgrounds and perspectives, these tours provide visitors with a range of ways to look at, engage with, and enjoy works of art.

## GUIDED TOURS

Figure 15 (Yale University Visit Webpage)<sup>56</sup>



Fogg Museum  
Busch-Reisinger Museum  
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

Visit Browse Our Collections Digital Tools Index Magazine Support Teaching & Research About

Thursday, December 1 Log In or Register

## Visit the Harvard Art Museums

Plan Your Visit  
Exhibitions  
Calendar  
Floor Plan  
Shop

## About the Harvard Art Museums



The Harvard Art Museums are open to the public seven days a week at 32 Quincy Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the edge of Harvard Yard.

Harvard Art Museums  
32 Quincy Street  
Cambridge MA 02138  
Get Directions

Figure 16 (Harvard's Art Museum's Visit webpage)<sup>57</sup>

On both Yale University Art Gallery and Harvard Art Museum's website, VISIT is the first option on the navigation bar. It gives a more direct approach in getting visitor's attention. Group Tours and class visits falls in the sub-category on that page, which is also easy to notice.

56 Hours and Directions. (n.d.). Retrieved December 09, 2016, from <http://artgallery.yale.edu/hours-and-directions>

57 Plan Your Visit. (n.d.). Retrieved December 09, 2016, from <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/plan-your-visit>

## Technology at UMMA

There has been ongoing debate whether to incorporate technology in the museums. Museums still address the main questions they have always addressed:

- How do we interpret the object?
- Who is our audience?
- How can museums reach a broader audience?
- How museum experiences can be more connected and meaningful? <sup>58</sup>

The challenge of the modern museum is to find a way to use technology in a fiscally responsible and logical way to answer the traditional questions. While many art museums have quickly shifted their focus to technology, UMMA on the other hand, has tried to stick to the core questions that need to be addressed. One of our interviewees brought up that technology can either add to an experience or detract from it.<sup>59</sup> They don't want visitors to look at their mobile phones, instead they want them to look at the artwork and explore new ideas.

However, despite UMMA's strong adaptation of technology in their space, we find there are ways to make further improvements. Currently, visitors can check out tablets from the store to navigate the museum and receive additional information about the artwork. However, we found this self-guided tour actually led to confusion instead of clarification based on our observations and interviews. One of the people we interviewed was a first time visitor to the museum and had taken one of the tablets. She expressed considerable frustration in navigating the museum, and when she showed us the tablet, the screen was white. <sup>60</sup> Additionally, from our interviews, we found the tablets are rarely used since few visitors knew they were available through the museum store.

<sup>61</sup>There are considerable advantages to having self-guided tours in museums, as they help solve

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58 Curran, E. (1995). Discovering the history of museum education. *Journal of Museum Education*, 20(2), 5-6.

59 Interview with Employee 05

60 Interview with Visitor 01

61 Interview with Employee 02

issues regarding navigation and personalization of the museum. From our interviews we discovered although self-guided audio tours were considered a number of times, changing technology had made the cost seem prohibitive. We suggest the creation of a website that acts like a traditional audio guide with numbers next to artwork and directions. The audio files could be accessed through a visitor's phone or iPod, or even the tablets offered at the museum shop. By placing the audio tour on a website, the museum avoids some of the issues with technological advancement.

## Centralizing Feedback

By conducting several interviews with UMMA employees we found several issues related to proper synthesis of feedback and evaluation methods. When it came to evaluating events like education exhibits and tours, teachers generally get a survey with simple open ended questions about their experience.<sup>62</sup> The survey is on paper and teachers are given an envelope along with a stamp to send the survey back at a later date. These surveys are one time and for specific events. We were also unable to find statistics on how often these surveys are actually sent back to the museum. Even though feedback from the exhibitions was mostly positive, the feedback methodology itself is inconsistent.

In the past UMMA has also tried a comment box, which turned out to be ineffective. One of our interviewees mentioned the submissions in the comment box could range from pictures to non-exhibit related statements.<sup>63</sup> However, the paper from the comment box lacked instructions and questions—they were essentially blank pieces of paper.<sup>64</sup> Currently, UMMA relies on its employees to collect the feedback from visitors, but this increases the employee's workload and does not provide a unified method of sharing the feedback throughout the office. Present feedback venues include the UMMA store, website, calls, face-to-face chats and feedback cards at certain events.<sup>65</sup> Even though UMMA utilizes several avenues to collect feedback from visitors about events, exhibitions and tours is not a consistent or formal method.

Evaluation is an important process in the creation of effective museum exhibits and environment. For the best results in evaluation and correction, museums should focus on early feedback stages (formative and front end). Many museums have their own set of core evaluation methods, such as personal meaning mapping (by making group respond to “before” and “after museum events),

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62 Interview with Employee 05

63 Interview with Employee 07

64 Interview with Employee 07

65 Interview with Employee 04

focus groups (by asking reactions of people), questionnaires etc.<sup>66</sup> In terms of input methods for feedback, portable internet based surveys and customer feedback kiosks can effectively gather data about the visitor experiences. To make surveys attractive and engaging, we suggest utilizing logos and colorful images to capture the visitor's attention. We also suggest providing incentives for filling out the surveys, such as a one time discount at the museum store. Making use of online feedback and hard copy forms for evaluations would make feedback methodology consistent and allow multiple outlets for visitors to convey their experience. Through updating feedback methodology users will have a more effective channel to comment on their visit and it will help UMMA more effectively analyze and address current and future concerns.

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66 Haley Goldman, K., and Koepfler, J. Museums and the Web 2009: the international conference for culture and heritage on-line.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, UMMA is an exceptional institution at providing learning experiences and unique exhibits and events; however, further effort can be dedicated to improving customer service, navigation, and consolidating feedback. The first few moments in a museum are often the most difficult for a new visitor, and a friendly face located at the information desk can go a long way towards improving the experience. Additionally, the museum can include seating in the entryway and clear labeling on the information desk place visitors in a much better mind set. When a visitor leaves the information desk, frequent and accurate signs in addition to layered maps make a considerable difference in way finding. Finally, UMMA needs a method and protocol to consolidate their visitor feedback; which will provide information and data for future endeavors.

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This section is in addition to the interviews and observations we have conducted. Photo citations can be found in the footnotes.

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