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Digital Humanities Studio

February 10, 2019

Studio Assignment 1: Digital Project Review

Digital Project Review: The Digital Penn Museum

Content

Intro

The Digital Penn Museum is a formal extensive resource that educates the general public about artifacts in the Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The two main purposes of the Digital Penn Museum include: providing an educational tool for research and offering an informational site for potential visitors. This webpage does an excellent job of simultaneously providing educational historical information as well as advertising for visitors to pay a visit or rent out the place for an event. The Digital Penn Museum offers an extensive list of various digital museum collections, including 391,565 objects and 1,129 videos. The pictures of these artifacts and digital videos have online descriptions to further explain the historical meaning and context, similar to how a museum would have descriptions laid out for visitors to read. The design of the website has been carefully planned and contains a lot of information that is well organized. The information is organized by being categorized into one of the eight main tabs across the top of the screen page, which makes the user interface friendly to use.

Review

Digital Penn Museum's "brand"

The webpage of the Digital Penn Museum comes off as well-designed and welcoming. While a university museum may not have a "brand" like how clothing stores do, "brand" here refers to

the overall feeling and design of the website. The brand of the Digital Penn Museum's website is clear, concise, interactive, and welcoming. By featuring pictures of kids and families on the homepage of the website, the Digital Penn Museum is portraying a friendly educational environment. The website encourages education for all ages, by showing people of varying ages. While the visitors at the museum in Pennsylvania may mostly consist of students and faculty from the University of Pennsylvania, the Digital Penn Museum has a broader target audience. Since the website is free for everyone to access, the users of the Digital Penn Museum may include anyone who has an interest in learning more about archaeology or anthropology and the artifacts that the museum owns.

Figure 1. The homepage features pictures of people of varying ages, contributing to the friendly and welcoming brand of the website.

There are benefits as well as restrictions of having a museum online. A benefit is that it allows people from all across the world to access information about historical objects at any time of the

day. However, since the Digital Penn Museum is a website with pictures, it is not the same as first-hand viewing objects in person. Also, showing up in-person to a museum allows one to experience more than just looking at the objects. For instance, one can experience events and activities scheduled to happen that day. Overall, their brand of the Digital Penn Museum is welcoming, well-organized, and educational.

Plan a Visit

The Digital Penn Museum advertises for people to come visit the museum in Pennsylvania. The website serves as an effective marketing tool where online visitors can easily become customers by purchasing their museum tickets directly from the website. Extensive logistical planning information is provided on the homepage, including updates about building renovations and recommendations for people with limited mobility to take alternate routes throughout the museum. This proves the thoughtfulness and careful consideration that has gone into the planning of this website as an additional source of information for the museum. This extensive information on the website may be a business tactic to help raise more money by attracting visitors.

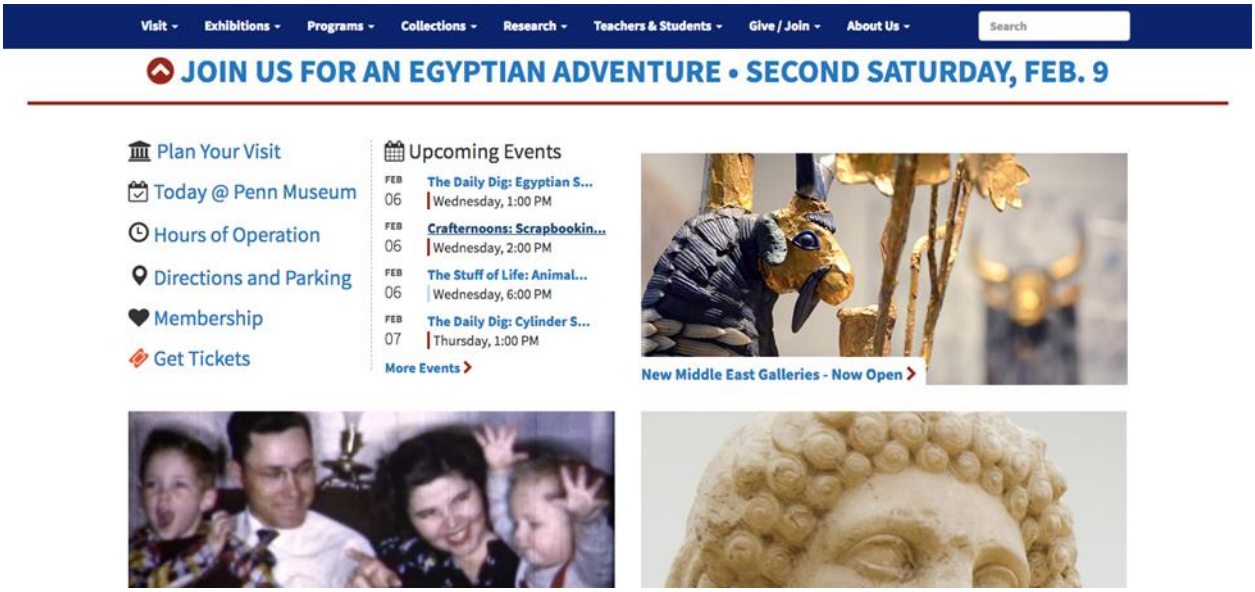

Figure 2. The homepage includes an organized list of links to help plan a visit to the museum in Pennsylvania.

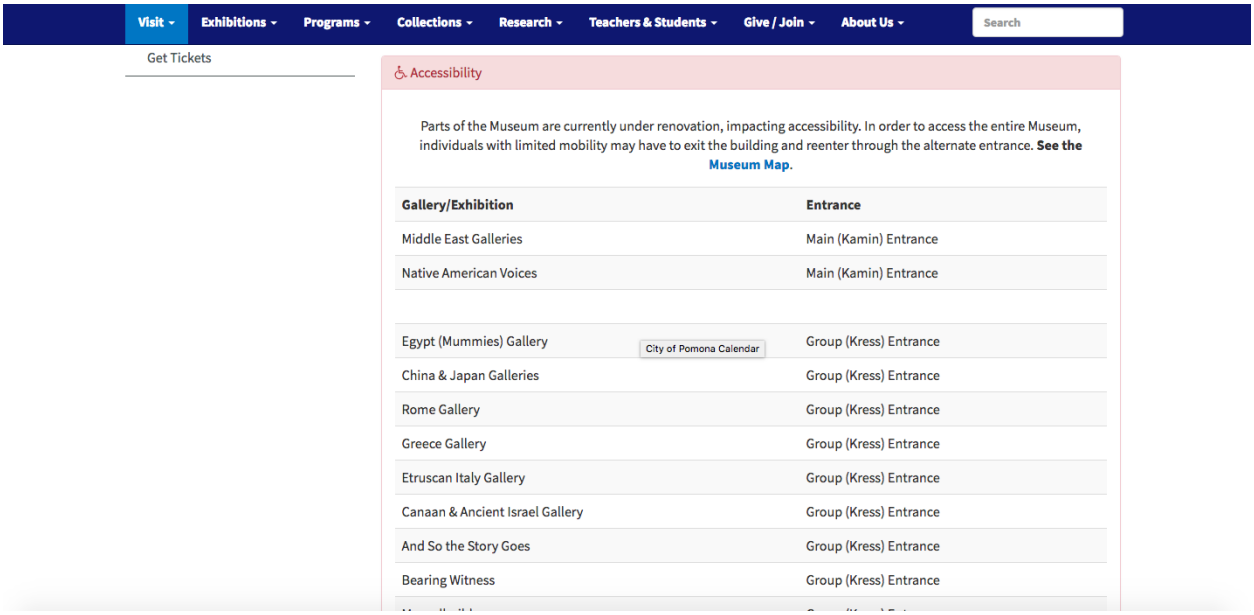

Figure 3. Extensive information is provided to prospective visitors about museum renovations and alternative entrances to the galleries.

Highlighting Historical Moments

The Digital Penn Museum offers an extensive list of online descriptions, pictures, and supplementary resources for the thousands of featured historical objects. The Collections tab on the homepage opens up a new window which divides into subsections including: Highlights, Objects, Map, Videos, Articles, Blogs, and Websites. One of the key outstanding features is the object location map, which includes over 1,000 geocoded locations that are color-coded depending on the number of objects from that location. Users are able to zoom in on the map to visually see where objects are from. This shows that not only has a lot of work been done on the geographic research, but also on the website design to ensure the map is user friendly.

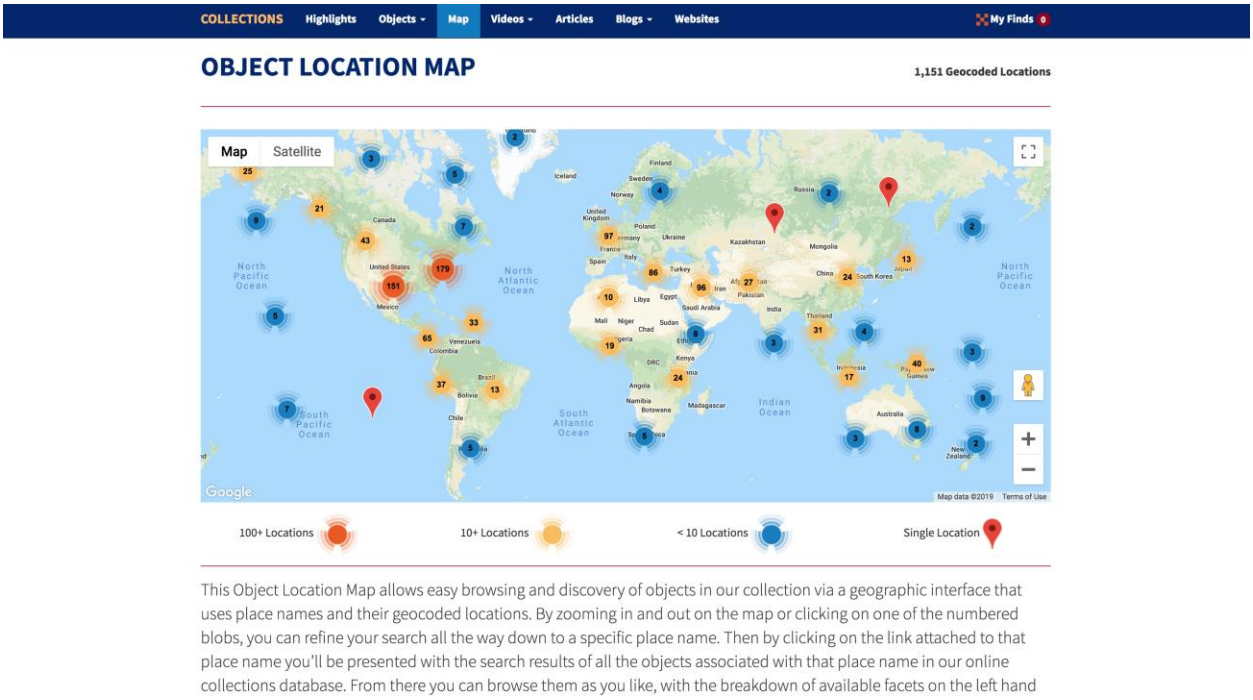

Figure 4. The interactive object location map provides a visual for users to see where the museum's objects are originally from.

The Digital Penn Museum provides an extremely detailed amount of information about historical objects from around the world. Since there are thousands of objects featured on this website, the

information can be organized depending on different sorting categories. These sorting categories include: geographical region of the object, whether the object is currently on display, special exhibitions, and an online object highlights page. One of the featured objects from the highlights page is the Granite Sphinx of Ramses II. As seen in Figure 5, the webpage of the object includes a description of the object, relevant history, important quotes, and a text box that notes that the object is not on display. This helps the user to understand the background of the object and informs that the object will not be found in-person at the museum. Figures 6 show historic photos with the Sphinx as well as historic press clippings announcing the delivery of the Sphinx to the University of Pennsylvania. This information gives the user an impression on the historical importance of the artifact in the past, prior to its arrival at the museum. As seen in Figure 7, there includes a link to a book written about the artifact as well as links to other museum videos, lectures, blogs, magazines, and websites that offer additional information. This gives the user a direction on where to look for more information about the artifact. The webpage on the Granite Sphinx of Ramses II serves as an example to prove that the Digital Penn Museum website includes extensive information about museum objects.

Figure 5. The webpage on the Granite Sphinx of Ramses II includes a description, history blurb, and image.

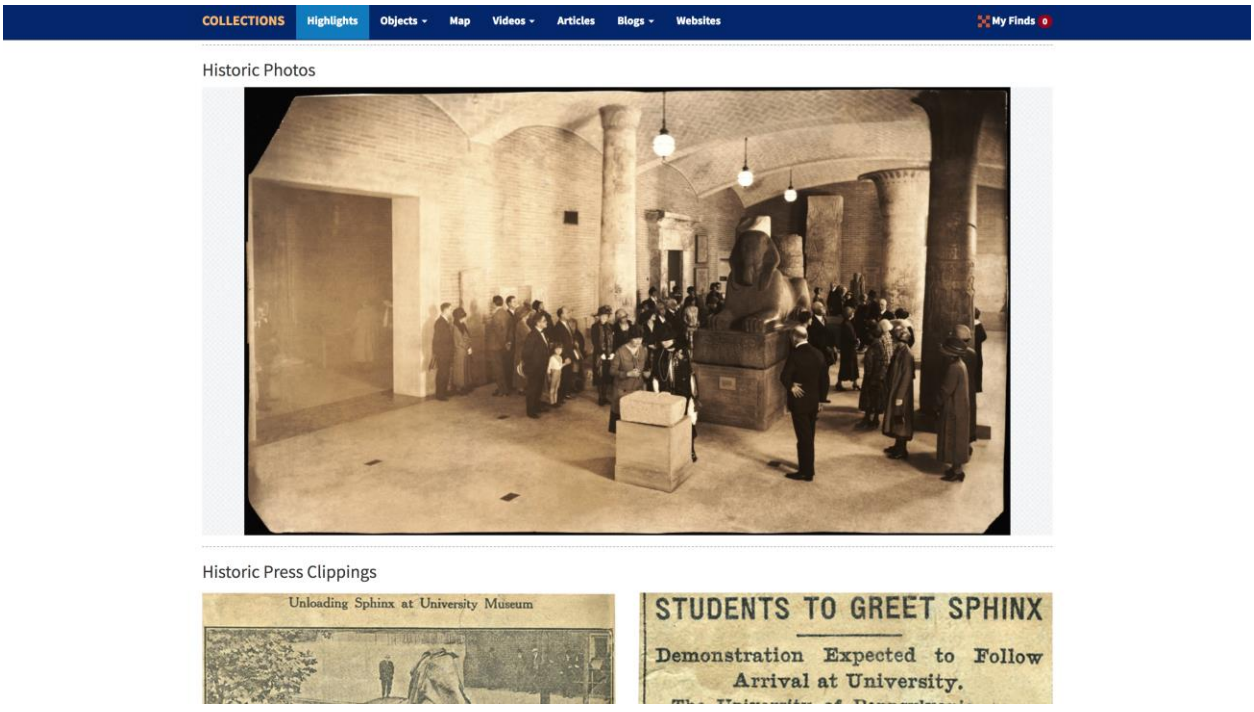

Figure 6. The webpage on the Granite Sphinx of Ramses II also includes historic photos and press clippings.

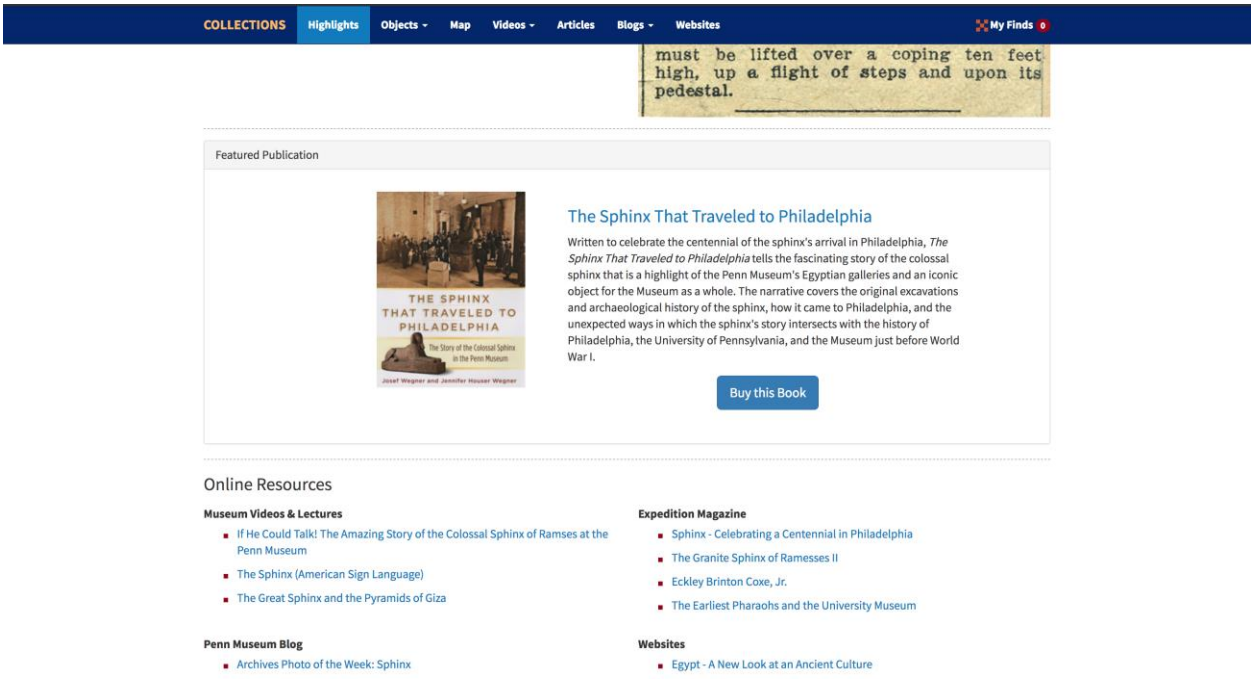

Figure 7. The webpage on the Granite Sphinx of Ramses II includes other links for further research on the artifact.

Bridging Ancient History with the Modern World

As a website about a museum of archaeology and anthropology, the Digital Penn Museum does a surprisingly remarkable job at applying modern day technology to enhance the avenues of information the museum utilizes. The purpose of a museum is to educate people by gathering information to a certain location that hosts collections and exhibits. The drawback of museums is that it limits the spread of information to only the people who are physically able to attend and willing to pay for the museum. The Digital Penn Museum serves as an avenue to solve this issue by offering a free digital platform of a museum that anyone can access. By offering digital descriptions about historical events and pictures of ancient artifacts, the Digital Penn Museum does an extraordinary job at utilizing modern technology to supplement ancient history. The

Digital Penn Museum even offers social media links to their social media platforms, as well as links to YouTube videos to continue learning about a specific topic. This shows that the Digital Penn Museum has gone above and beyond its purpose as a digital museum, but even offers additional digital resources and avenues.

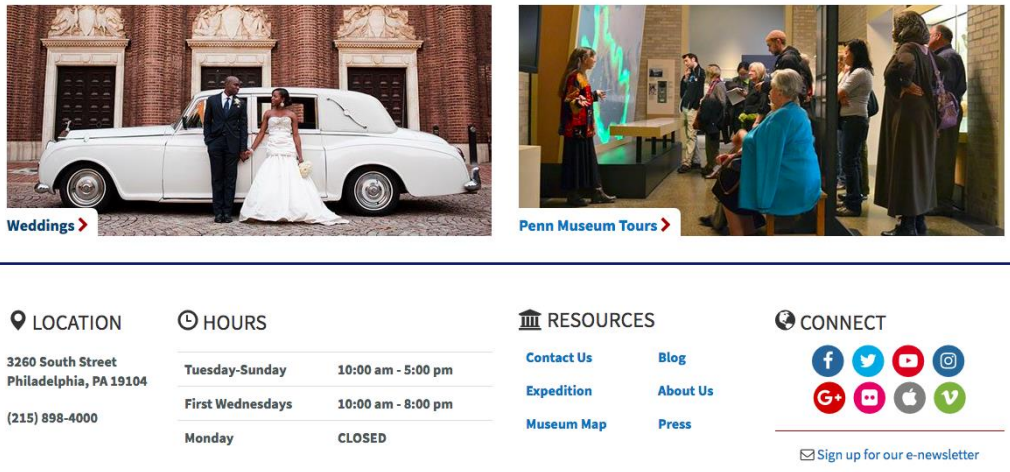

Figure 8. The Digital Penn Museum is well-connected across modern-day social media platforms and offers links to further digitally connect with the museum.

Furthermore, the Digital Penn Museum includes a design that is similar to online shopping websites. For instance, the website has a search bar at the top of the homepage where one can search for certain objects, videos, or articles. The search findings are presented in a grid format, where relevant items can be clicked on to learn more information. Historical objects have "object records," which reveal more detailed information about the item. The object records are especially useful to people conducting research about the history of a specific object. A button called "add to my finds," similar to "add to my cart" on a shopping website, compiles all the items that someone has "added" to their finds. This modern take on collecting historical objects

is a spin-off of modern day online shopping. The designers of this website clearly wanted to make the user experience friendly, creative, and interactive.

The Digital Penn Museum features over 300,000 object records on the Digital Penn Museum. However, it is important to note that the About Online Collections page explains that records still need to be reviewed for accuracy and thus the Digital Penn Museum should be contacted before publishing any object information.

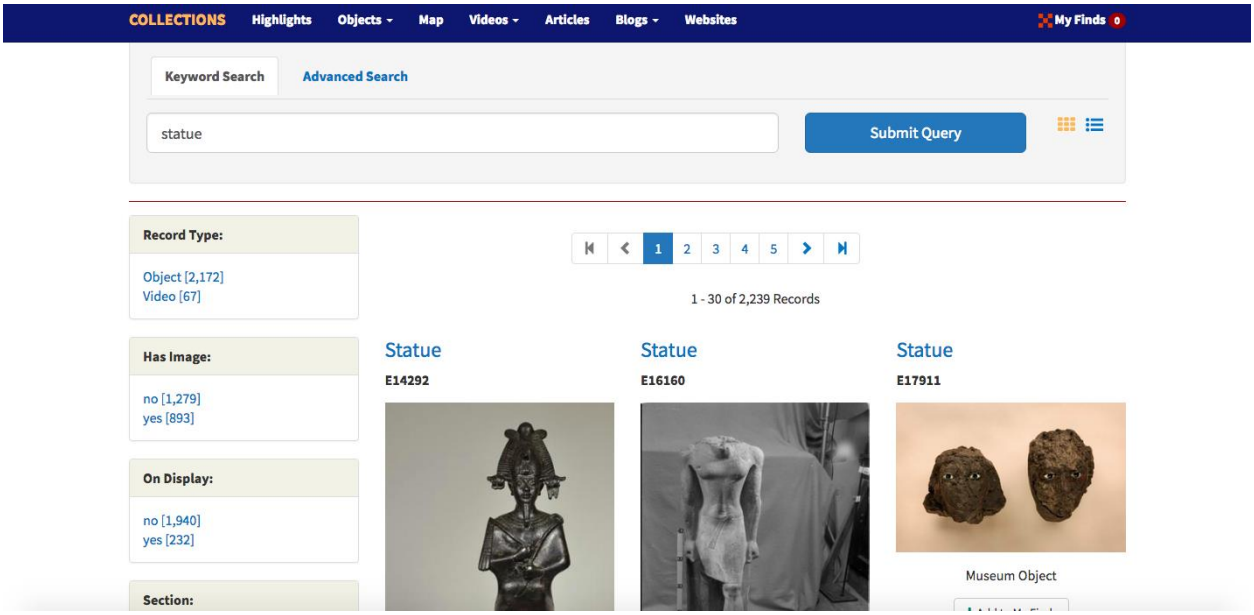

Figure 9. The Collections tab is designed similar to an online shopping website by offering a search bar and showing pictures of the search results in a grid format. The search can be further refined by the options on the left.

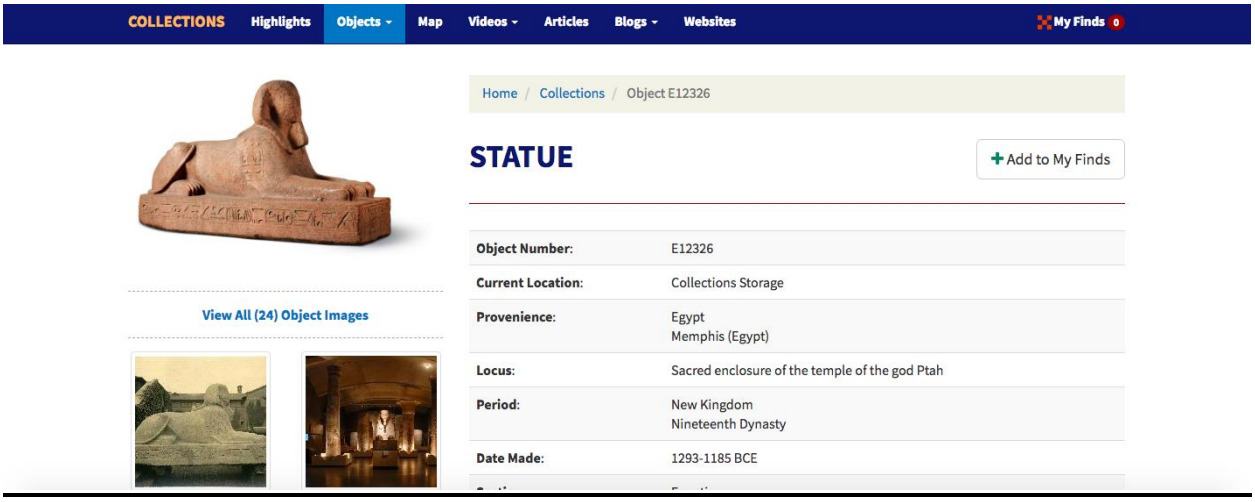

Figure 10. Information about individual objects contain an extensive "object record" list and include an "add to my finds" button, as if website users are online shopping for objects.

Contributing Organizations

While the Digital Penn Museum continuously offers thanks to contributing organizations and foundations throughout the website, it also has one cumulative About Us tab where it collectively lists individual contributors. This tab includes the board of overseers, other volunteer groups, and the advisory board. Individual names are listed out, but there are no group organizations or grants noted on this page. The About Us tab is lacking because there information provided here seems to be referring to the museum in Pennsylvania, rather than information about the creation of the Digital Penn Museum website. It would be beneficial to have more information about the Digital Penn Museum specifically and the role of the contributors to this webpage.

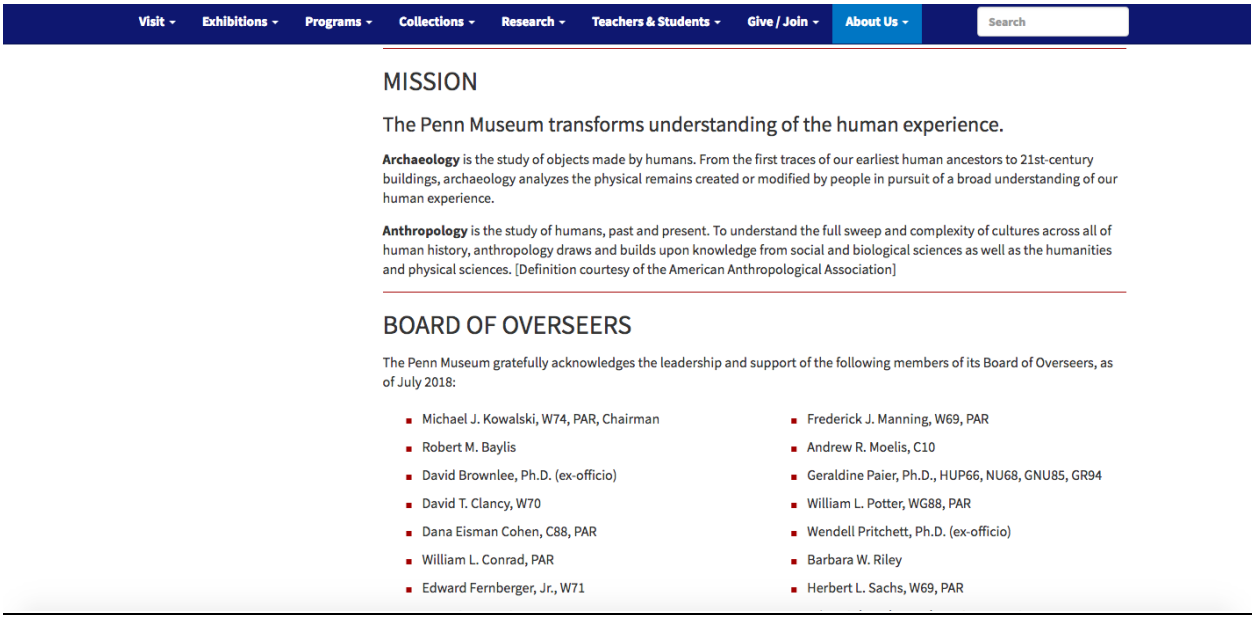

Figure 11. The About Us tab of the Digital Penn Museum lacks to clearly differentiate acknowledging the contributors of the website vs. the contributors of the museum.

Conclusion

Overall, the Digital Penn Museum is an extensive resource for those looking to expand their knowledge of archaeology and anthropology. The source includes thousands of objects and videos that can easily be accessed by the general public. The use of this site is organized, well-designed, and easy to use. The information is dense and vast throughout the website, but appears to be less overwhelming due to the creative design. The site offers a modern take on the museum by including YouTube videos, social media links, and interactive maps to make the experience fun and friendly. Pictures of kids and adults also help to make the site seem less overwhelming and inundated with information, but rather friendly to people of all ages. The Digital Penn Museum is clearly well-established and seems to be finalized, as almost no user errors were found. This site has most likely been a work in progress for years and the work has paid off. The

daily events calendar appears to be updated daily, thus showing that this site is continuously monitored. The Digital Penn Museum is worth a visit to anyone who wants to learn about archaeology or anthropology. The site welcomes people of all ages and guarantees a fun and welcoming learning experience.

Metadata

Title: The Digital Penn Museum

Description: An online collection of artifacts and digital information from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

URL: https://www.penn.museum/collections/

Author: Michael J. Kowalski (Chairman of the Penn Museum)

Place: University of Pennsylvania, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Date Accessed: February 10, 2019

Availability: Free

Resources

"Penn Museum." Web. 10 Feb 2019. https://www.penn.museum/