



Gretchen Jennings
Editor

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Dear Readers,

The topic for this issue—Visitor-Generated Content and Design—is one that includes both traditional and novel approaches to exhibition development. When readers of the future look at this issue I think they will observe that the museum field in 2009 (just as the rest of society) was in a state of uncertainty and transition regarding the uses and value of digital media. The newer forms of social media—Twitter, Facebook, and the like—are attractive to many individuals and institutions, including museums. Creating a museum presence on any or all of these seems relatively easy and inexpensive.

But in the long run, what do all of these social media platforms mean for our practice? Will they just make more work for the IT personnel who create, monitor, and manage these sites for the museum? Or will social media have an actual impact on how museums operate – how they collect, mount exhibitions, design their spaces, and evaluate their work? Will these activities become tasks, even responsibilities, shared with the public? How will the cultural authority and impact of museums be affected?

And what about more traditional forms of participation, such as talk-back boards, discussion exhibitions, or community curated shows? Will these flourish and expand or will they dry up as museums embrace the digital revolution?

The articles in this issue provide examples of all of the forms of participation described above and more. Dan Spock and Nina Simon as well as the authors of five case studies reflect on the challenges both traditional and new forms of participation present for exhibition content and design. Bliss Jensen and Lynda Kelly write about using social media for front end evaluation, and an article about discussion exhibitions at the Science Museum of London presents findings about this format. It should be said, however, that much work remains to be done in the area of research and evaluation on the use and impact of social media in the field. We also have three very practical articles related to our topic—on intellectual property rights, on teaching about community input in exhibitions, and on some helpful blogs and sites related to social media. Finally, the exhibition critiques focus on the Minnesota History Center's **MS150**, an exhibition featuring themes and artifacts chosen by the general public to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the state.

Although future readers may sense a field in transition, I hope they and current readers will appreciate the vision and foresight provided by the thoughtful writers in these pages.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Jennings