



The Ten Principles of Museum Entrepreneurship

Erik Schilp

This document is an introduction to the themes and topics of the Museum Entrepreneurship Platform. This Platform offers workshops, training and coaching on entrepreneurship and strategy development in the museums.

The Platform is part of MuseumNext Practice.

If you would like to discuss the possibilities of the Museum Entrepreneurship Platform or the MuseumNext Practice and the role they could play in your organization, please contact us at erik@museumnextpractice.com



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About MuseumNext and MuseumNext Practice

MuseumNext is a major international conference series with events taking place around the globe.

It has been at the forefront of addressing trends, developments and innovation in the cultural sector, bringing together a passionate international community of professionals who are shaping the future of museums.

Through a network of expert consultants, MuseumNext Practice connects theory and practice by offering a portfolio of workshops, training and consulting to help museums to future-proof their organisations. MuseumNext Practice is firmly rooted in the worlds of business and culture, and the consultants who we work with help museums worldwide in tackling the big challenges of today.



About the author



Erik Schilp is an international innovator, connector and strategist. He specializes in sustainable business solutions in the arts, cultural and heritage sectors.

Erik started his career in London as Senior Marketing Manager at the American consultancy firm Strategic Decisions Group. Also in the UK, he restructured companies in the theatre and film industry and he founded his own marketing and PR agency. In Barcelona he developed 24-hour restaurants and art spaces. In the Netherlands Erik worked as Director of the Zuiderzee Museum and Director of the Museum of National History.

Currently Erik is working with Leiden University to develop and implement plans for a Museum of Language and, in co-operation with several individual artists, developing new initiatives to highlight the fight against human trafficking and contemporary slavery. He is also founder and partner of the Dutch art platform Generous Magpie.





Inspiration

In 2006, in collaboration with Wedgwood, the British artist Clare Twomey placed 4000 small birds made of typical Jasper Blue all around the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. She wanted to show that value and collection are not necessarily determined by museums or traditions. What happened was that all the birds were stolen by members of the public within five hours. This was indeed part of the plan. The collection lives on, but in the homes of many, where the birds undoubtedly have permanent pride of place. They are a Trophy, as was the name of this most famous of Twomey's projects.

Picture: Clare Twomey



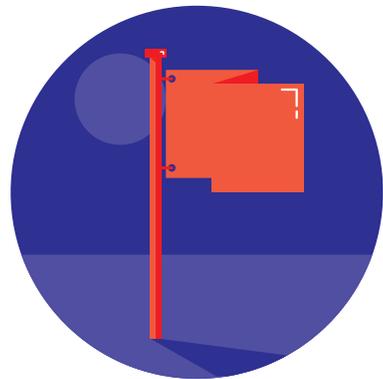
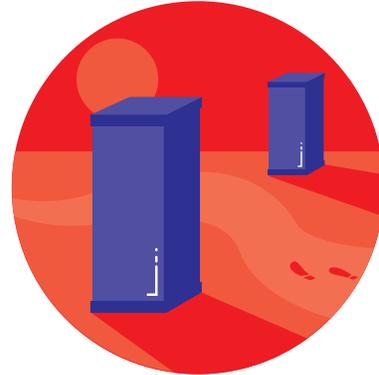


Museum Trends 2015

Mobility and space

Today, people use public space very differently than they did a decade ago. They expect their institutions to move with them. Museums can no longer expect people just to come to them. They have to get out into the world and seize people's attention wherever they can.

The most popular museums are social spaces where people come together around a story. The museum building is becoming more and more of a shared space, but the story can be told anywhere, which makes public space a museum and the museum a public space.



Ownership

The most visible collections are owned by us all, and can be curated by all of us, not just digitally. By discarding some of the traditional notions of keeping and presenting heritage, popular museums create a much more dynamic and convincing story, one that reaches many more people in a much more profound way.

Balance

The most successful museums constantly vary the approaches to their story and their appeal to potential audiences. They use analogue and digital tools and produce both in-gallery as on location, but always in a responsible and well-researched equilibrium. Portfolio management is getting introduced into the strategy of the successful museum.

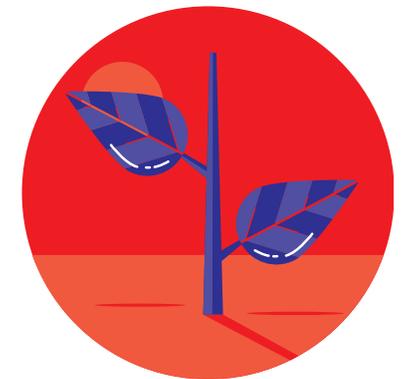


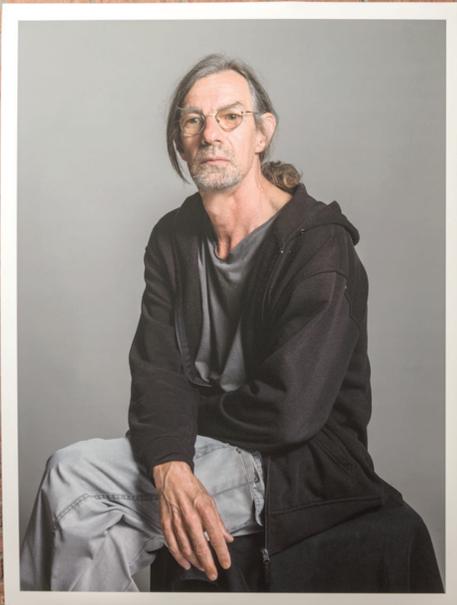
Leadership

We see a new type of professional emerging in these fast and furious times. The new museum professional is well-rounded, knowledgeable, sociable, a producer with leadership skills and financial acumen, with a diverse and vibrant network. He or she works very often freelance. Museums with an open and transparent management philosophy hire these professionals on all levels. The qualities of leadership are no longer reserved just for the leaders.

Sustainability

Sustainable growth is a slow process on the basis of long-term strategy. Sustainability in a museum is about the way the story is told and the collection is shared. It's the conviction that the best way of preserving and protecting heritage is visibility. It's about making art and heritage part of our daily routine, rather than a luxury.





Inspiration

In 2014, Dutch photographer Koos Breukel made portraits of the last remaining patients and staff of the Valerius clinic, a psychiatric institution in Amsterdam that was about to close. Rather than opting for a museum, Breukel displayed the photographs in the empty clinic. It was an emotional reminder of bygone days and the sorrow felt. Breukel's insistence on not specifying who had been a patient and who had been a member of staff made it all the more clear that we are all a bit mad.

Picture: Koos Breukel





**Museum
Entrepreneurship**
is the creative and
strategic process with
which one effectively
and sustainably
translates a story to
the largest possible
audience.



The Ten Principles of Museum Entrepreneurship



01

**Prepare for
the future**

Dream the future

What is your big visionary goal for 2020? Where would the museum like to be in terms of impact, visitors, community and visibility? Which steps are needed to get to that point, and what measures and actions do you need to take to achieve your dream?

Institutional strategy versus strategy of content

A museum is accustomed to planning ahead when compiling exhibitions and programs, but the core of its story, and the relevance of that story to a changing society, requires a more fundamental strategy. Considering our rapidly changing world, how likely is it that your organization will survive if it continues to look and behave exactly like it does today?

“I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth.”

John F. Kennedy, 25 May 1961.

From: Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs.





02

Change focus

Business versus Museum

To your visitors you are a museum, but in every other aspect you should be a business. It is important that everybody in the organization is aware of that, and knows what the implications are. An entrepreneur at the helm of an organization is not enough. The whole team needs to subscribe to this concept and the business strategy of the museum. This requires constant training and communication.

Visibility

The single most important entrepreneurial task of every museum is to make its story visible. The value of heritage is determined by its visibility and it therefore needs to be lived and touched. Visibility also creates relevance. Relevance is paramount for attracting funding and visitors. Maximum visibility cannot be achieved within the walls of the museum. It needs to be done in the public domain. The story needs to be out there, not just the museum name, a particular artefact or the collection. This is not about marketing or publicity. It is about changing the focus from a small and contained group of visitors to the larger audience of our society.

Badge of quality

Museum as a brand automatically implies quality. People expect museums to be serious places of excellence. A commercial business would be envious of this kind of starting position. But noblesse oblige. It means that every aspect of the institution needs to be professional and distinctive. Is the restaurant one of the most attractive of the city? Is the museum shop one of the best gift shops in town? Are they integrated into the vision and mission? Are the staff helpful and courteous? The effect of serving the best coffee in town cannot be underestimated as a key factor in the success of the museum.



03

Live up to expectations

*“Knowing me, knowing you.
It’s the best I can do.”*

ABBA, 1977.
From: Arrival.

Knowing me, knowing you

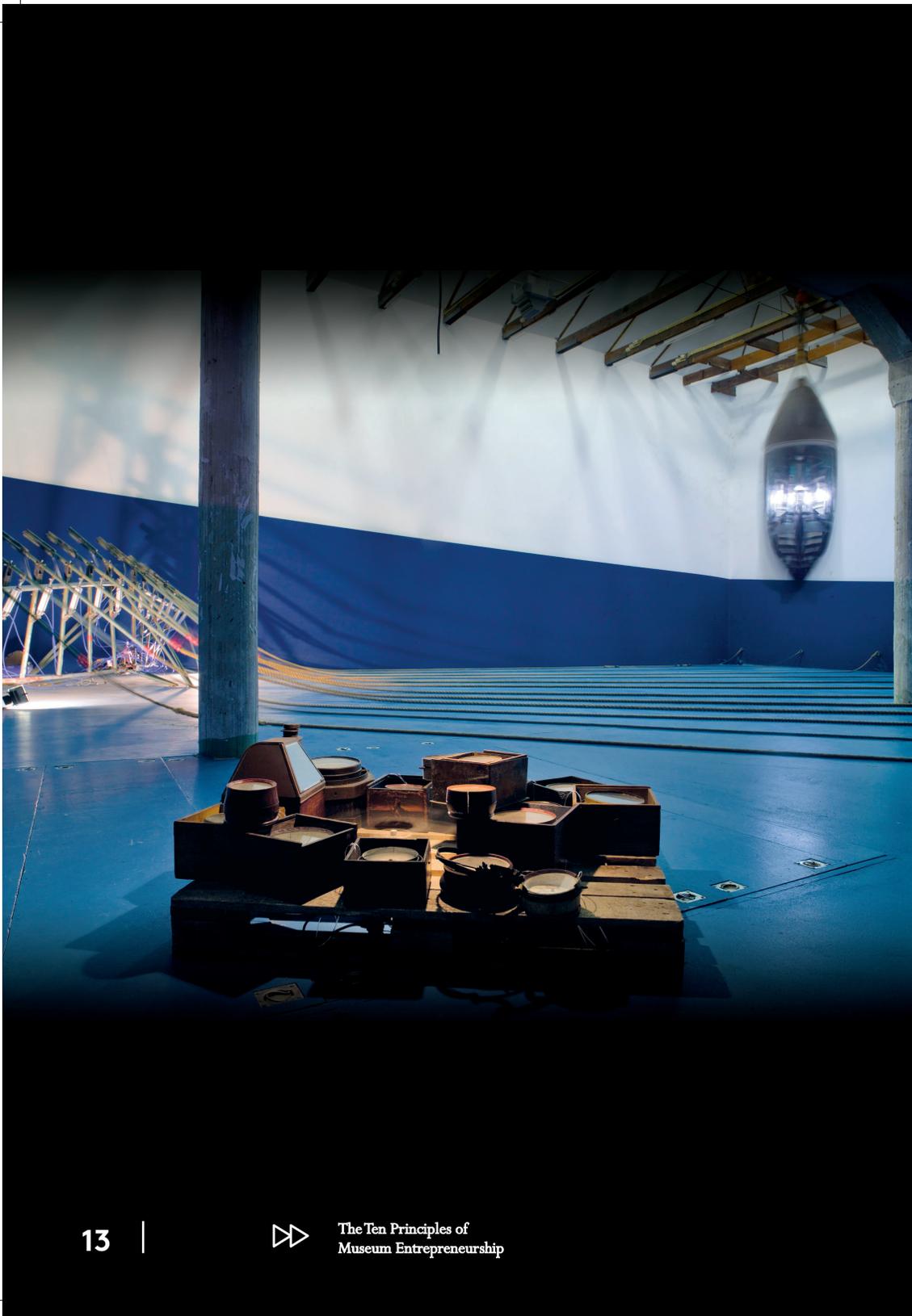
Effective entrepreneurs build strategies based on facts, experience and sensible intuition, not on tradition, random research or wishful thinking. The traditional soft approach to museum strategy needs to be supported by relevant hard data. The data provided to funders, however relevant to them, are rarely useful in an effective museum strategy. It is vital to understand how to use and translate the key data of your institution, and to implement them effectively in the strategy of the museum. The same applies to the information about your visitors. It is not enough to know who they are and where they come from. Knowing them means truly understanding their expectations, values and habits.



04

Trust the facts





Inspiration

In a collaboration between the Zuiderzee Museum and W139, a contemporary art institute in Amsterdam, Dutch artist Zoro Feigl created three magnificent new pieces of art, using so-called 'orphans of the museum' – objects that will never leave the deep dark catacombs of museum storage. He not only gave these items a new life, he converted them into an experience rather than distant objects of admiration. The boats became a lighthouse, a set of ropes became a tempestuous sea, and a series of compasses lost their direction through the intervention of one simple magnet.

Picture: Erik & Petra Hesmerg



05

Share your purpose

No man is an island

No museum changes the world alone. If your mission is to tell your story to as many people as possible, you need help. You need to build durable, sustainable partnerships with people and organizations that share your vision. Not just for one exhibition, although that certainly helps, but for the long haul. Businesses, libraries, NGOs and community initiatives are all potential allies in reaching out to new and larger communities.

*“No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe;
every man is a peece of the Continent,
a part of the maine.”*

John Donne, 1624.

From: MEDITATION XVII (Devotions upon Emergent Occasions).

Liberate the curator

Most museums have a handful of curators. They are experts in a particular field, but they are frequently engaged in many more areas of expertise. The museum that can afford to have an expert for every possible domain is rare. Another model could consist of having enough people to look after the collection, while you hire a curator on a freelance basis, the best available specialist, for each new exhibition or program. Curators can thus spread their talents and museums can provide true excellence.



06

Build a community

Real versus digital

The more people who feel they are co-owners of a museum, the more ambassadors and free publicity it will have. This is nothing new. But this relationship needs to be a real, tangible one, and not just a digital connection. A Facebook friend is not necessarily a real friend. Ask yourself questions like: What can people bring home from the museum collection? What can visitors leave behind? What can they contribute? In which way is the museum personalized for each visitor? How do you involve your direct neighbours in your museum? And what do you offer the business community? What does your museum do to latch on to actualities and to the known common fields of interest of your target audience?





07

Break the mold

“Yours is not the task of making your way in the world, but the task of remaking the world which you will find before you.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt, 22 May 1932.
From: Address at Oglethorpe University.

Disruptive innovation versus sustaining innovation

Traditional institutions like museums often choose to innovate within their existing market. Considering the relatively small amount of people who visit a museum, this means all of them are fishing in relatively small pond, while there is a huge lake full of fish nobody focuses on. A successful museum will devise a strategy that provides a healthy balance between sustaining innovation and disruptive innovation, the type that creates new markets and value systems. Not only will this be more successful, but it will ultimately also bring necessary changes to the sector.

The next generation

Museums always see the importance of focusing on young people, but they are not always successful in creating an attractive and dynamic place for the generations to come. This is partly because the focus on the day-to-day running of the museum consumes all the time available for planning and strategy. But it would also require changing the course in such a way that existing visitors might feel alienated. Nevertheless, in order to grow with the generations, a balance needs to be struck in pleasing the old and attracting the new. How many visitors are you prepared to lose if you could gain a whole new audience?

“The wise writer writes for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterward.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1920.
From: An Interview with F. Scott Fitzgerald by F. Scott Fitzgerald.





Inspiration

Just imagine what the world could look like when art and heritage are all around us and when the stories they tell are part of us. *Night Windows* (1928) and *Nighthawks* (1942) by Edward Hopper just off Broadway in New York.



Due diligence

Formulating a budget seems simple: maximize your income, control and minimize your cost and build some reserves for a rainy day. Still, there are many ways to achieve this. On the one hand, buildings, staff, production cost of exhibitions and even the cost for security, marketing and IT can be shared while, on the other hand, the systematic application for grants and subsidies, and the professional approach to achieve a high level of corporate sponsoring can significantly increase income. Basically, the budgetary process is as creative as any other process. It should therefore be subject to strategy sessions where insiders and outsiders compete for the smartest idea in the room.

A healthy mix

Most museums spend considerably more on infrastructure and staff than on the collection and programs. The museum that owns a Mona Lisa will have sufficient income from visitors to allow itself to live in a palace. Others might find they are living above their means. Who pays for housing and staff is relevant, but it is not the core business of a museum to own property or to provide employment. A healthy and responsible budgetary mix is 25% infrastructure, 25% staff, 40% collection, exhibitions and programs, and 10% marketing. An interesting mental exercise is answering the question: What do you need to do to achieve this mix?



08

Balance the budget

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

There are many ways of telling the museum's story, offline and online. Many of them require guts, as they are breaking new ground. Innovation without risk does not exist. Learning without failure is merely academic. An entrepreneurial museum has a panel of experts who collect ideas and proposals for innovation from staff and members of the public and weigh their importance, relevance and risk. The best proposals deserve a chance, and we could all learn from the process and its results.



10

Take (responsible) risks and allow for failure

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.”

Samuel Becket



09

Use the space

Building or no building

Let's agree that 'museum' is a verb, not a noun. To museum is to acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit our heritage. In order to conserve a collection, a dedicated physical space is needed. All the other tasks can be fulfilled in shared space, public space or temporary space. To many museums, their building is part of their story. To many others, the story can be told in many ways, in many spaces. The owned building could be shared, but rather than just expecting people to come to you, it might be much more effective to take the story to where the people are.



