Developing Digital Events
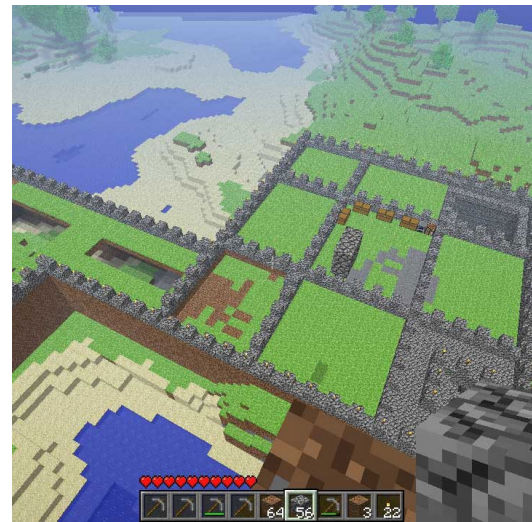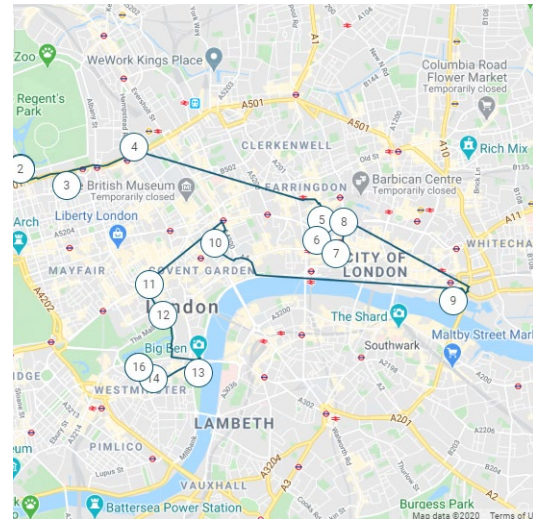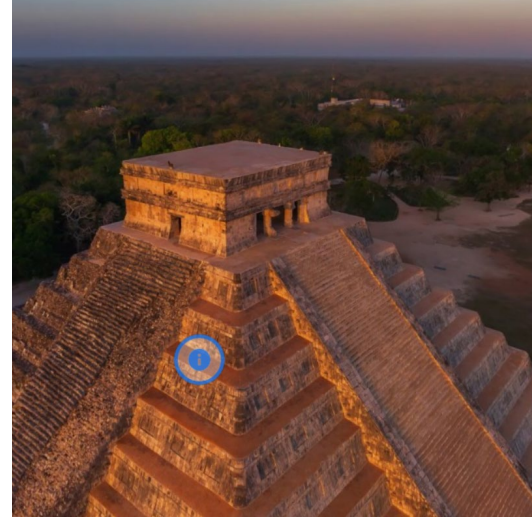
A beginner's guide

heritage open days

Contents

Introduction

So, you're thinking of holding a digital (or partially digital) Heritage Open Days event? You've come to the right place.

In this guide, we'll go through just some of the ways in which you can create meaningful and engaging online experiences, looking at both digital substitutes for traditional HODs events, as well as some more *ahem* experimental methods. But first some quick words of reassurance – nothing in this pack will require expensive equipment or professional training. All that's needed are creative ideas and a bit of trial and error.

Ready to get started? Well grab a cuppa and let's dive into the world of digital heritage!

Do I need to be using digital technology?

It may seem a little strange for a digital guide to start with this question, but it's important to remember that technology is not the solution to everything. Often going 'old-school' is the easiest, cheapest and most impactful way of communicating with your visitors. For example, why bother presenting static text and images on a screen when a printed piece of paper will achieve exactly the same thing? However, used correctly digital technology has the potential to offer new and exciting ways to present your places and stories, whilst protecting staff, volunteers and visitors, and staying within government guidelines.

Good signs you're on the right track

- I'm using technology to open up new possibilities for visitors

- I'm making best use of a technology's range of functionalities

- My event still has a strong, compelling narrative behind the tech

Warning signs you may be taking a wrong turn

- This technology looks cool, I'll think about how to make it fit with my event later

- My aim is to perfectly replicate our usual in-person experience

- I'm using technology because it's the only way to engage younger audiences

Digital Toolbox

Creating a digital event doesn't necessarily require any expensive or complicated kit - all of the digital experiences within this guide can be created using equipment that you probably already have. However, if you're feeling extravagant, a little spend on some extra equipment can make a big difference to the quality of your digital event.

Essential

Computer/Laptop

This will be needed mainly for bringing all your content together to form your digital event. Most tasks that require bringing together multiple elements are far easier to do on a computer than on your phone.

Smartphone

Your smartphone will mainly be used to gather the content necessary for your digital experience (photos, videos, audio files). It will also be used for live streaming.

Internet connection

A stable connection is important for live streaming content. Wifi is best, but a strong 4G or 5G mobile phone connection will also work.

Optional

Tripod & smartphone mount

This will help you capture stable footage and photos. Not essential, but useful for live streaming and taking higher quality images. A basic setup will cost between £25-£30.

Digital camera

If film or image quality is really important to you, a DSLR or high-end digital camera may be needed. However, usually a decent smartphone will do just fine.

Smartphone compatible mic

If you are planning on doing lots of recording outdoors and in a noisy environment or if sound quality is an important aspect of your event, it might be worth investing in one of these. These can cost as little as £10-£15.

Smartphone gimbal

Stabilises your footage on the move resulting in a more professional finish. Some will even take perfect panoramic or 360° images automatically. Expect to pay around £70-£100 for a decent gimbal.

Going Digital

Transforming a traditional in-person HODs event into a digital experience is easier than you may think. In this section, we'll explore some digital or part-digital alternatives to the events that HODs visitors know and love.

Guided tours and exhibitions

Guided tours and special exhibitions are a staple of the HODs festival, and luckily there are loads of ways in which you can bring these to an online audience. It's important to remember that no virtual tour will ever truly replicate the magic of being at a place, nor the personal connection between visitors and guide. But this shouldn't be your aim. Instead think about what technologies can offer that a traditional tour doesn't. This could include showcasing part of a building which is normally closed, a before-and-after look at a restoration project, or even taking your visitors on a quest. This pack will take you through ways you can do this for both online and onsite visitors.

Talks and demonstrations

Sharing the wealth of knowledge and skills from our community of organisers is a key part of the HODs festival. Although nothing can truly replace the charm of face-to-face interactions, this pack will take you through just some of the many options available to broadcast a talk or demonstration directly into people's homes.

"

A good virtual tour functions precisely because it doesn't try and replicate the lived gallery experience too exactly, but rather works within the limits of the technology and to the strengths of the institution.

"

QUOTED FROM THE RISE OF THE VIRTUAL GALLERY TOUR

Virtual Tours

Fully online tours that can be enjoyed from home.

360° / Panoramic photos

A 360° or panoramic photo enables you to capture more than just a single snapshot of a scene by stitching multiple images together. Whilst a panoramic image only includes the horizonal viewpoint, as the name suggests, a 360° image includes a view of everything around you. Viewers can turn and move around these images to look at the surrounding environment.

What are they good for?

These images work well to showcase the interiors of buildings and small outdoor spaces (e.g. a courtyard) as they give visitors a sense that they are physically within the space. They can also work well to show a viewpoint that most visitors wouldn't be able to see, such as from the top of a church tower or mountain peak. You can even make the experience interactive by challenging your visitors to spot various features within the images.

How do I do them?

Many modern smartphones will include the feature to take panoramic images, and some even have 360° functionality built in. If yours doesn't you will need to install a third-party app – we recommend either Google Street View or Panorama Camera. Creating the image is simply a question of following the instructions on your phone or app and keeping a steady hand (this is where a gimbal can really help).

Once you have your image you can upload it to Facebook, or publish it through either the Google Street View App, the popular image management platform Flickr or one of the many other 360° photo viewers out there.

Requires:

- Smartphone
- Gimbal (optional)

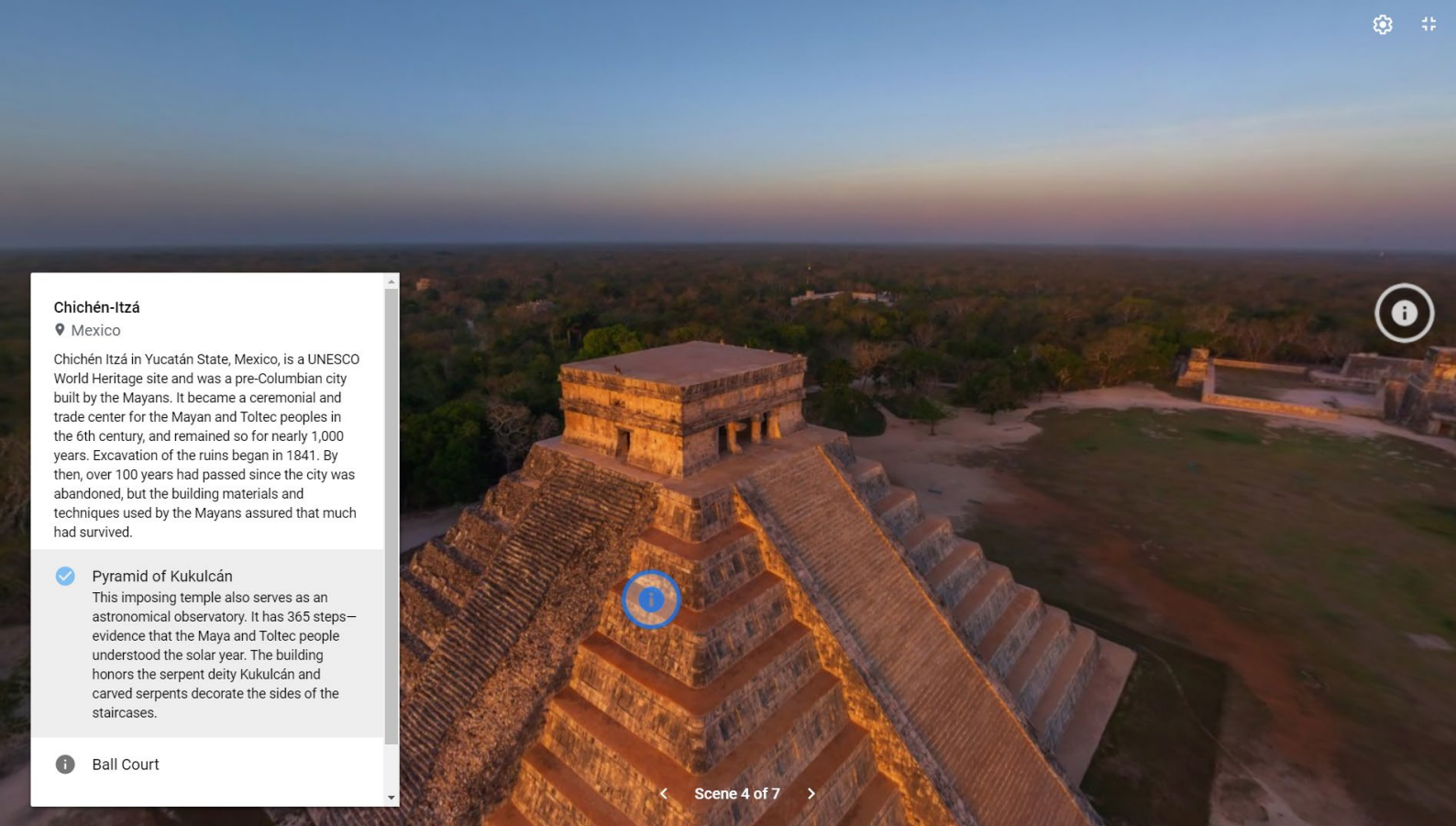*Further guidance:*

- Google Street View App
- 360 photos and Facebook

Examples:

- 360° photos on Facebook
- 360° photos on Flickr

▼ A 360 IMAGE OF HELVELLYN IN THE LAKE DISTRICT.

SOURCE: HTTPS://BIT.LY/3EXWM6H

▲ A VIRTUAL TOUR OF THE MAYAN RUINS IN MEXICO BUILT AND PRESENTED IN GOOGLE TOUR CREATOR. FURTHER INFORMATION ON KEY MONUMENTS HAS BEEN PROVIDED, WHICH USERS CAN ACCESS BY CLICKING ON HIGHLIGHTED BUTTONS.

SOURCE: HTTPS://BIT.LY/2YW94LU

Google Tour Creator

This is possibly the best bit of Google software that you've never heard of. Google Tour Creator uses your 360° photos (see previous) and takes them to the next level. Take multiple 360° photos and import them into tour creator to build your very own virtual tour – for FREE. You can add clickable points of interest with detailed information, provide high-resolution closeups of specific objects, and even include background music or narration. Powerful stuff.

What is it good for?

Google Tour Creator works well for tours of buildings and natural spaces alike. As it is based around 360° photography, remember to ensure that each part of your tour has multiple features of interest – a big open landscape might look great on standard images, but can appear a little barren in 360° if there are no easily identifiable landmarks.

How do I do it?

You'll firstly need to create your 360° images (see previous) or use existing images from Google Street View. You'll then want to add in points of interest, with some descriptions and perhaps some closeup images. Try to only have a few points of interest per 360° scene – you don't want to overwhelm the viewer.

Requires:

- Smartphone
- Internet
- Computer/Laptop
- Gimbal (optional)

Further guidance:

- Quick start guide
- Video guide

Examples:

- 7 wonders tour
- Medieval Britain tour

Alternative option:

- Marzipano

Hybrid Tours

In-person events best enjoyed onsite, but with limited need for face-to-face interactions.

QR Codes

QR or 'quick response codes' are essentially bar codes (usually square in shape) that can be scanned by a smartphone. Users just need to scan the code, using an inbuilt reader or app on their mobile, to access whatever media has been linked to that code, which can include webpages, videos and images.

What are they good for?

QR codes are great for self-guided tours and enhancing site visits. They can replace or expand what's available on a traditional information panel, and guide visitors to more interactive content such as quizzes, videos and audio files.

How do I do them?

Create your content online (video, webpage etc.) and then use a free QR code generator to link this content to a specific code. Once you have your code(s), print them out and place them at the relevant points around your site. It is always good practice to include an alternative web address underneath the QR code as a backup.

Requires:

- Computer/Laptop
- Smartphone
- Printer

Further guidance:

- QR Code best pratice
- Free QR Code generator
- QR Code reader (Android)
- QR Code reader (iOS)

Examples:

- How the Canals & Rivers Trust have used QR Codes

Izi.travel

Simply put, Izi.travel is a free audio guide development platform, but it offers far more than this. You can create virtual exhibitions that include high-resolution images, text descriptions and audio narration. You can even create outdoor walking trails linked to Google Maps, and use smartphone GPS systems to automatically trigger narrations when visitors reach specific points. Perhaps most impressively of all, you can create quests that challenge your visitors to reach different landmarks and complete objectives to proceed to the next step. Sounds fun right?

What is it good for?

Izi.travel is great for self-guided tours around a town, building or landscape – whether that is done in an explorative fashion or through a specific quest is down to you. Whereas Google Tour Creator is a purely virtual experience, Izi is designed to blend digital and in-person experiences. However, it can also work well for fully virtual exhibitions, particularly if you want to go into extensive detail on individual objects or art works.

How do I do it?

Creating an Izi tour or exhibition does require a little time and patience. Before starting you should carefully plan your route and narrative, physically walking it beforehand if possible. Aside from text descriptions, you'll probably want to take pictures and potentially record audio narrations, both of which you can do using a smartphone. See our 'Digital FAQs' section for how you can do this.

▼ A SCREENSHOT OF A SHERLOCK THEMED TOUR OF LONDON TAKEN FROM IZI.TRAVEL. USERS ARE FREE TO EITHER FOLLOW THE ROUTE AS DESIGNED OR PICK AND CHOOSE WHICH LANDMARKS TO VISIT.

SOURCES: HTTPS://BIT.LY/3EXPLMP; HTTPS://BIT.LY/2V8G1HF
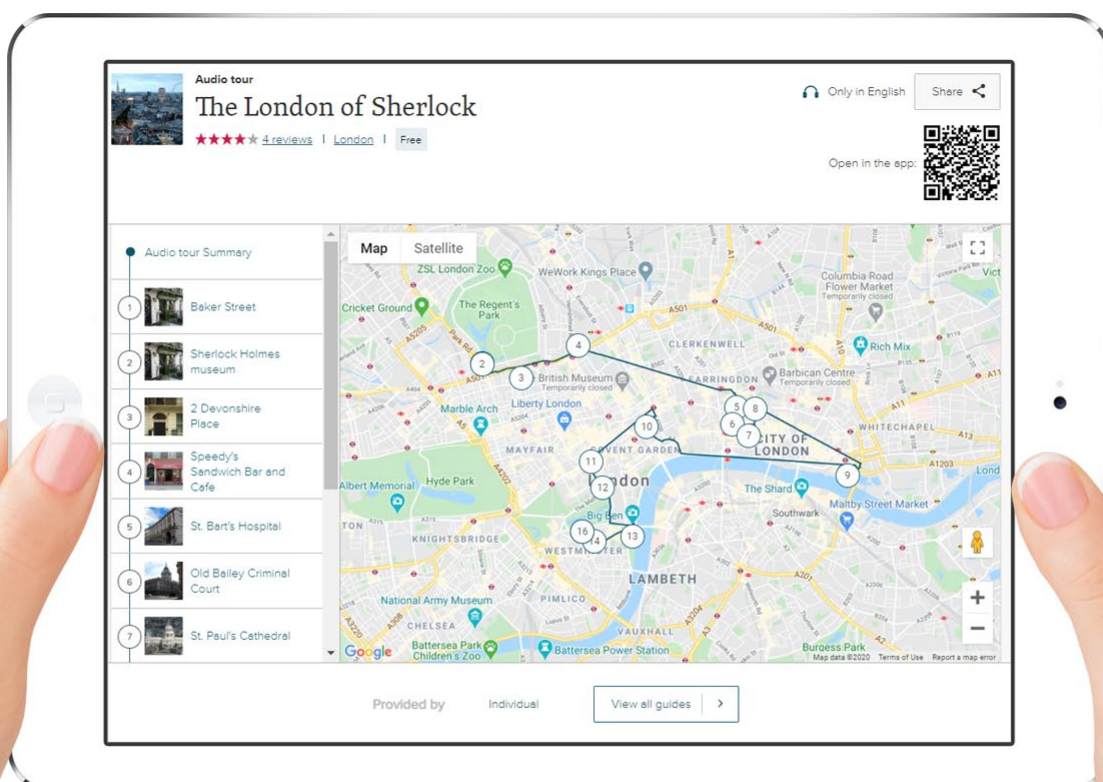
Live Streaming

From cooking demonstrations to concerts, the idea of live streaming (also known as broadcasting) was launched around a decade ago, and has since taken social media platforms by storm. Now, companies, organisations and individuals simply have to point their camera and tap record to broadcast messages to their followers, both locally and across the globe.

What is it good for?

Live streaming can be used to broadcast anything from a curator talk to a woodworking demonstration. Aside from being informative and entertaining, live streaming is all about the interactions between the presenter and audience, as it offers the ability to respond to questions and take actions in real time. All three of the following live streaming platforms essentially offer the same core service, but there are some important differences which will affect which one you choose.

Twitter Periscope

Twitter uses a service called Periscope to power its live streaming service. It offers very similar functionalities to Facebook's service, such as adding guest speakers and alerting all your followers when the broadcast starts. However, the main point of difference is that there are no privacy settings available for your stream, so anyone and everyone will be able to see your broadcast.

Pros: good functionality, easy to use

Cons: no privacy settings, difficult to register viewers in advance

> *Live streaming has proven to be one of the most effective ways to get audiences engaged...on Facebook alone, one out of every 5 videos is a live broadcast and viewers interact 6x more on live streams than videos on demand.*

Requires:

- Computer/Laptop
- Smartphone
- Internet
- Tripod and mount (optional)
- Gimbal (optional)
- Smartphone mic (optional)

Further guidance:

- Guide to Facebook Live
- Guide to Youtube Live
- Guide to Twitter Periscope

Examples:

- An entire festival streamed on Facebook
- How live streaming created the world's largest virtual pub quiz

Youtube Live

YouTube Live offers a variety of features including private streaming and filters. Compared to Facebook and Twitter, this platform is also easier to watch for viewers without an account. However, to broadcast live directly from your mobile, YouTube requires you to have 1,000+ subscribers to your channel (don't ask us why!). So, unless you have an established channel, you'll likely have to stream using your computer and a webcam, which obviously limits your movement!

Pros: easy for viewers to access, supports high-definition video

Cons: limited smartphone options, slightly more complicated to set up

Facebook Live

Facebook allows you to livestream from your page, personal account, group or event. This level of flexibility means you can better control and limit who sees your live stream. Viewers don't necessarily need a Facebook account to watch a live stream (unless you stream within a private group or event), but it helps. In terms of marketing, a scheduled live stream on Facebook will send notifications to all your followers and/or event attendees at 1 hour, 20 minutes and 1 minute before your stream starts.

Pros: good for beginners, great free marketing, private live streaming options, easy screen share

Cons: can alienate viewers who are not familiar with Facebook or don't have an account

5 tips to get started:

- If you're broadcasting using your smartphone, invest in a tripod and/or a smartphone gimbal to ensure your footage is stable.

- Make sure that a light source is never directly behind you as this will impact on the film quality.

- Be responsive and interactive – otherwise you may as well not be live!

- Have another person on hand to moderate and reply to comments.

- Always end your broadcast by giving your viewers further actions (e.g. following your page, subscribing to your newsletter).

▶

A BASIC LIVE STREAMING SETUP USING A SMARTPHONE AND A 'GORILLAPOD' STYLE TRIPOD FOR STABILITY.

SOURCE: HTTPS://BIT.LY/2CVIOH6

Video Conferencing

If broadcasting across social media (see previous) isn't for you, then you might want to consider using video conferencing software. There are many options but, in our opinion, Zoom is the best. Simply create your virtual meeting and invite participants to join using a link. The pro version of Zoom costs £11.99 for a month's subscription, which will enable you to host a virtual meeting with up to 100 participants.

What is it good for?

Zoom is perfect for hosting smaller events - lectures, debates and discussions, even virtual pub quizzes. It has functions that enable you to record the event, share presentations, video and audio content, and even split participants into different discussion groups. Participants can join a Zoom event through their mobile phone or computer.

How do I do it?

You can sign up to a free version of Zoom to try out the functions before committing to spending on the pro version. The software is fairly easy to use and Zoom have created loads of great video tutorials to help you out.

Requires:

- Computer/Laptop
- Internet

Further guidance:

- Zoom video tutorials

Other options:

- Crowdcast
- Zoho
- GoToMeeting

◄

A SCREENSHOT OF A ZOOM MEETING TAKEN FROM THE ZOOM INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO. USERS HAVE THE OPTION TO DISPLAY OR HIDE THEIR VIDEO AND AUDIO CONNECTION FOR INCREASED PRIVACY.

SOURCES: HTTPS://BIT.LY/2NPLZZV; HTTPS://BIT.LY/2NZYGD2

New Possibilities

Digital heritage isn't just about being a substitute for in-person events. Technology can offer new ways to engage audiences with your places and stories, and there are plenty of quite low-tech solutions to produce engaging and interactive digital activities. Here you'll find some of our favourite examples, but it's worth investing a few hours looking at what others have created. If you don't know where to start, check out Museum Next and Culture24 for inspiration.

Geocaching

In a nutshell, geocaching is the world's largest treasure hunt! It works by using GPS coordinates and clues to help players navigate their way (usually using their smartphones) to a specific location where they have to find a hidden physical container (called a geocache). Inside the geocache is usually a logbook for those who have found it to sign, and some people might also leave an item in the container for the next person to take as a memento.

We know it sounds like an unusual pastime, but geocaching has become a world-wide phenomenon with an estimated 80,000+ individual caches in the UK alone. Some geocaches are even in extreme locations, such as the summit of Mount Everest or within shipwrecks – although we don't expect you to go that far!

Geocaching can provide a fun way for visitors to engage with your site, as demonstrated by this article from the National Trust. Why not use the objects within your cache and its placement as part of your site's interpretation?

To get started you'll need to create an account with Geocaching who have a whole section on their website telling you everything you need to know about finding and hiding caches, as well as the rules and regulations you should abide by. Happy hunting!

▶

AN EXAMPLE OF A TYPICAL GEOCACHE. THE CONTAINER WILL USUALLY CONTAIN A LOGBOOK FOR FINDERS TO WRITE IN, AS WELL AS OBJECT(S) FOR THEM TO SWAP.
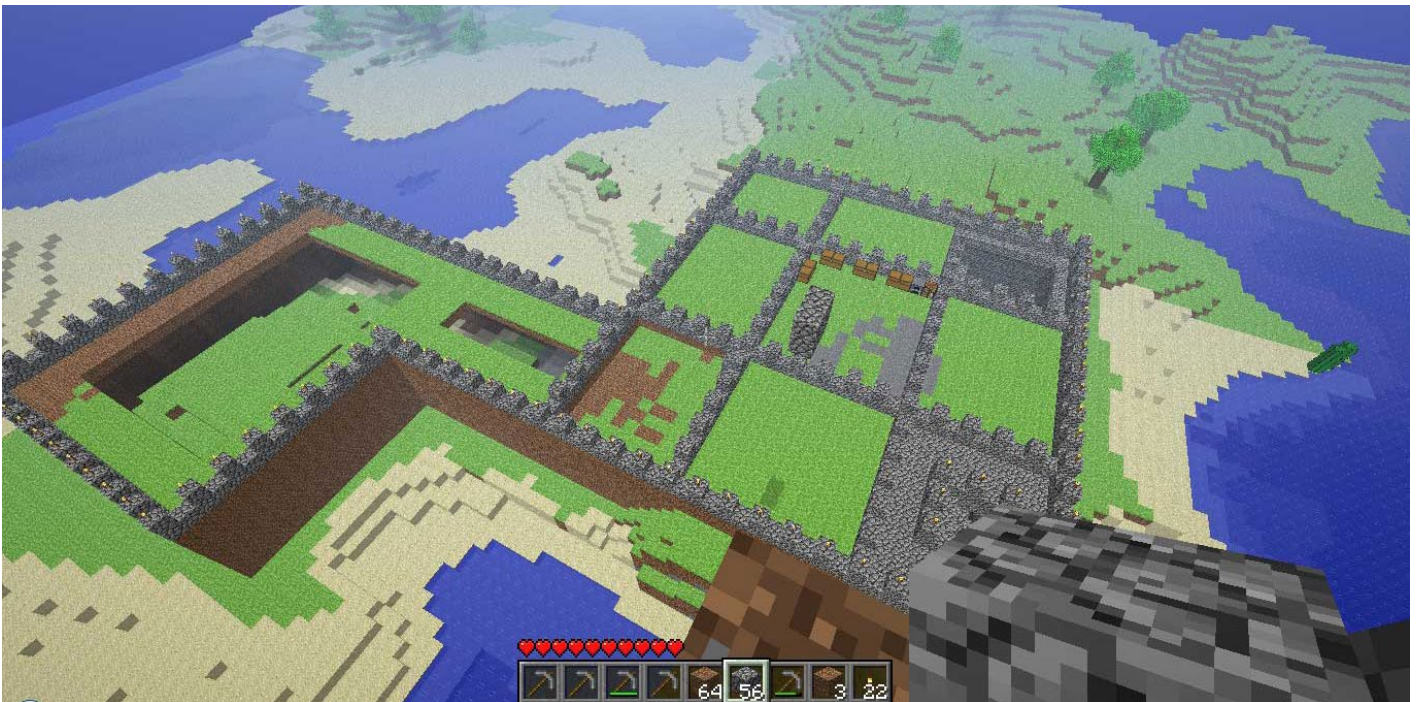
SOURCE: HTTPS://BIT.LY/3G53MNP

Google Docs & Forms Escape Rooms

Google Docs are traditionally used for individuals and teams to create, share and organise documents like files and spreadsheets. However, a man with the username Anthony Smith recently transformed how he was using this seemingly everyday digital tool by turning it into an interactive digital escape room! Either working alone or as part of a team, users have to navigate through a seemingly endless stream of documents and pages, cracking codes, finding keys and solving puzzles along the way to escape. It literally took us hours. Try this escape room for yourself here.

Creating something like this is fairly complex and time consuming, but you can produce something equally engaging in less time with Google Forms (traditionally used for creating surveys). Here's an example of a Harry Potter themed digital escape room and a how to guide for how you can achieve something similar.

▲ A SCREENSHOT OF A CASTLE BUILT IN MINECRAFT.

SOURCE: HTTPS://BIT.LY/3DUPTVG

Minecraft

Minecraft exploded onto the video gaming scene in 2011. It is described as a 'sandbox game' where users are free to create their own worlds and experiences using 3D blocks. Think of it as virtual Lego. It took a little while, but museums and other cultural institutions have now caught on to the potential of Minecraft. From asking users to create their own reimaginations of the past, to providing pre-made worlds for visitors to explore, organisations across the world are now using Minecraft to provide interactive and engaging learning experiences, particularly for younger audiences.

Here are some great examples of how museums have used Minecraft effectively, and this is an instruction sheet for a recent Minecraft challenge run by the National Museum of Wales.

Hidden Nature

Hidden Nature remains our theme for 2020 and given the current climate reconnecting with the natural world has never been more important. Although holding socially distanced in-person events is easier when outdoors, the examples listed here will highlight how technology can be used to both enhance an in-person experience and give opportunities for virtual visits. For further guidance on non-digital events around this year's theme, check out our Hidden Nature pack.
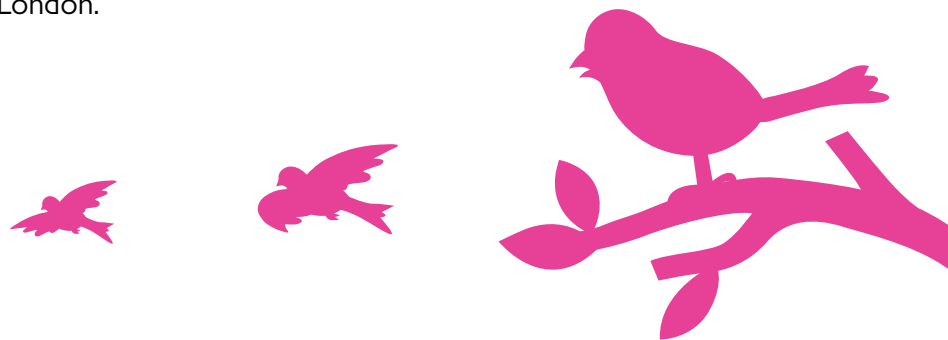
Virtual tours

Fully online tours are an effective way for people who are unable to leave the house to connect with nature. Travel and Leisure Magazine and The Guardian have pulled together some great examples of virtual tours from around the world, many of which could be done using 360° photography and videos taken on a smartphone. Wild London's virtual tour of the Great North Wood is an excellent example of how to achieve something similar using Google Tour Creator, while the National Open Garden Scheme have used short videos to create virtual garden visits.

Hybrid tours

There is often a greater distance between different points of interest in outdoor spaces. Consequently, they lend themselves well to self-led tours using either GPS guided software or strategically places QR codes. Izi.travel can easily be used to create self-guided tours, as demonstrated in this tour of Mesa Verde National Park in the USA. For an example of a simple self-guided trail slightly closer to home, check out this QR code trail at Scadbury Park in South East London.

Live streaming

Live streams from natural spaces and museums have boomed in popularity during lockdown. The subject matter and format of these has ranged from carefully planned talks at the Natural History Museum to more fly-on-the-wall style experiences at Chester Zoo – the Woodland Trust have even been running a 24-hour live stream of a wild Osprey nest on Lock Arkaig.

Other possibilities

If virtual tours or live streaming aren't your thing there are plenty of other options available for using digital technology as part of a Hidden Nature event. Why not use audio to connect people with the natural world, as seen in this example of a 'digital dawn chorus' from the Durham Wildlife Trust. Equally, you could send your visitors on a scavenger hunt using Geocaching - a great activity for people of all ages. Check out this article from the Avalon Marshes highlighting the benefits of Geocaching and this guide from Geocaching.com about how to cache in harmony with nature.

Accessibility

Ensuring that Heritage Open Days events can be enjoyed by as many people as possible has always been a central part of our ethos. Digital events are no exception to this, and accessibility should be an important consideration when developing your event. Here are some ways to improve the accessibility of your digital HODs event.

- Make sure any important content in a video is told both audibly and visually

- Include written descriptions of images and audio descriptions within an audio track

- Include closed captions or subtitles on video content

- Transcribe audio-only content

- Ensure text is presented on solid backgrounds in high contrast (e.g. black on white)

- Consider the readability of your content and avoid unnecessary complex language

- Use short sentences. Break these up with punctuation and paragraph breaks

- Avoid flashing images or jerky camera movements

- Don't replace words with emojis

- Consider accessibility throughout the development, marketing and delivery of your event

- When using hashtags capitalise each word (e.g. #HeritageOpenDays)

Further guidance:

- [7 steps to improving your digital accessibility](#)
- [Accessibility on your social media channels](#)

"
If you don't design your websites and apps in an accessible way you are not only losing customers - you are denying people with disabilities their independence.

▶

QUOTED FROM [7 STEPS TO DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY](#)

"

Digital FAQs

Need some help? Here are the answers, guides and suggestions for some of the most commonly asked questions about digital technology.

Photography

Can you recommend a guide on how to take great pictures using your smartphone?

Yes – check out these fantastic video guides from Explore Churches.

I want to edit my photos, is there an easy way to do this?

Many free photo editing mobile apps exist. In our opinion VSCO and Canva are two of the best. Canva can also be used on a laptop/desktop computer. If advanced image editing is what you are after, then GIMP is the best free option available.

I need to reduce the file size of an image, but I don't want to reduce its quality. What should I do?

For Apple computers, try a free tool like ImageOptim – it removes unnecessary data to reduce file sizes without compromising the appearance of photos. For all other computers try this free image optimizer.

Film production

Where can I find guidance on shooting videos on a smartphone?

We recommend watching this YouTube video, or reading this article from the New York Times.

I want to edit some videos I have taken - is there any free software I can use to do this?

Yes - for simple tasks (trimming/converting etc.) on a laptop / desktop computer, try this or find further options here.

On a smartphone, the Adobe Premier Rush and GoPro apps are two of the best and easiest to use.

I want a quick way to do a video walkthrough of a site/create a time-lapse video, is there an app for this?

Yes – try Hyperlapse.

Sharing and transferring files

I don't have a website – where can I store a file for visitors to download?

Try using Google Drive – here's a guide on how to use it to share files.

How do I transfer files from my smartphone to my computer?

Here's a guide if you have an Android mobile, and this one will help for iPhones.

My email won't let me send large files to a colleague or friend – what can I use instead?

Use WeTransfer. It's safe, free and easy to use.

Audio

How do I record audio files?

If you're using a smartphone, the Voice Recorder app is easy to use and allows basic editing of files. If you'd prefer to record using a laptop and microphone, Ocenaudio software is free and easy to use.

I'd like to record a podcast, is there any guidance on this?

Yes - there are many guides on creating podcasts. Here is of the most comprehensive ones we've found and here is a great guide for beginners.

Live streaming

Can I 'go live' across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube simultaneously?

Yes – but you'll need to pay for a service such as Switchboard Live, which adds an extra layer of complexity and cost.

Can I use higher quality equipment (DSLR camera, lapel mics etc.) to go live?

Yes – however you'll need some extra software like OBS to make it work. This might be useful If you're broadcasting a musical performance, or something that requires really high-quality audio or detailed video. Otherwise, it will be much simpler to use a smartphone.

Can I share a PowerPoint presentation or pre-recorded video when going live?

Yes – You can do this directly in Facebook Live. YouTube live and Twitter Live will require an external piece of software to do this known as an encoder. OBS is a free encoder you can use.

Websites

I want to build a website for my site / organisation. Is there an easy and low-cost way to do this?

Yes – these days, building a website isn't as hard or as expensive as it sounds, and there are several easy-to-use options which don't require you to know how to code! Prices start from as little as £3 per month for a basic site.

WordPress is the most popular website building tool out there and can result in some pretty professional looking results. Using WordPress takes a little practice, but with the extensive guidance they provide, the system quickly becomes familiar. If you decide WordPress isn't for you, then Wix is another popular choice, and similarly provide lots of guidance to help you get started.

For both these options try to ensure you pick a mobile-friendly (or 'responsive' to give it the technical name) theme to build your site. This is important as users are increasingly accessing the internet through their phones and not computers.

I need to shorten a long URL, is there a tool that can do this?

Bitly is a popular and free way turn a long website address or link (a URL) into a short one. You can either shorten a single URL instantly for free, or create a free account which will save and organise all your shortened URLs. With an account you can even track how many times your link has been clicked in the last 30 days.

Contact

Need some more support on creating digital events? Get in touch and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

Email: info@heritageopendays.org.uk
Twitter: @heritageopenday
Facebook: @heritageopendays
Instagram: @heritageopendays
Newsletter: https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/about/contact/hods-newsletter

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