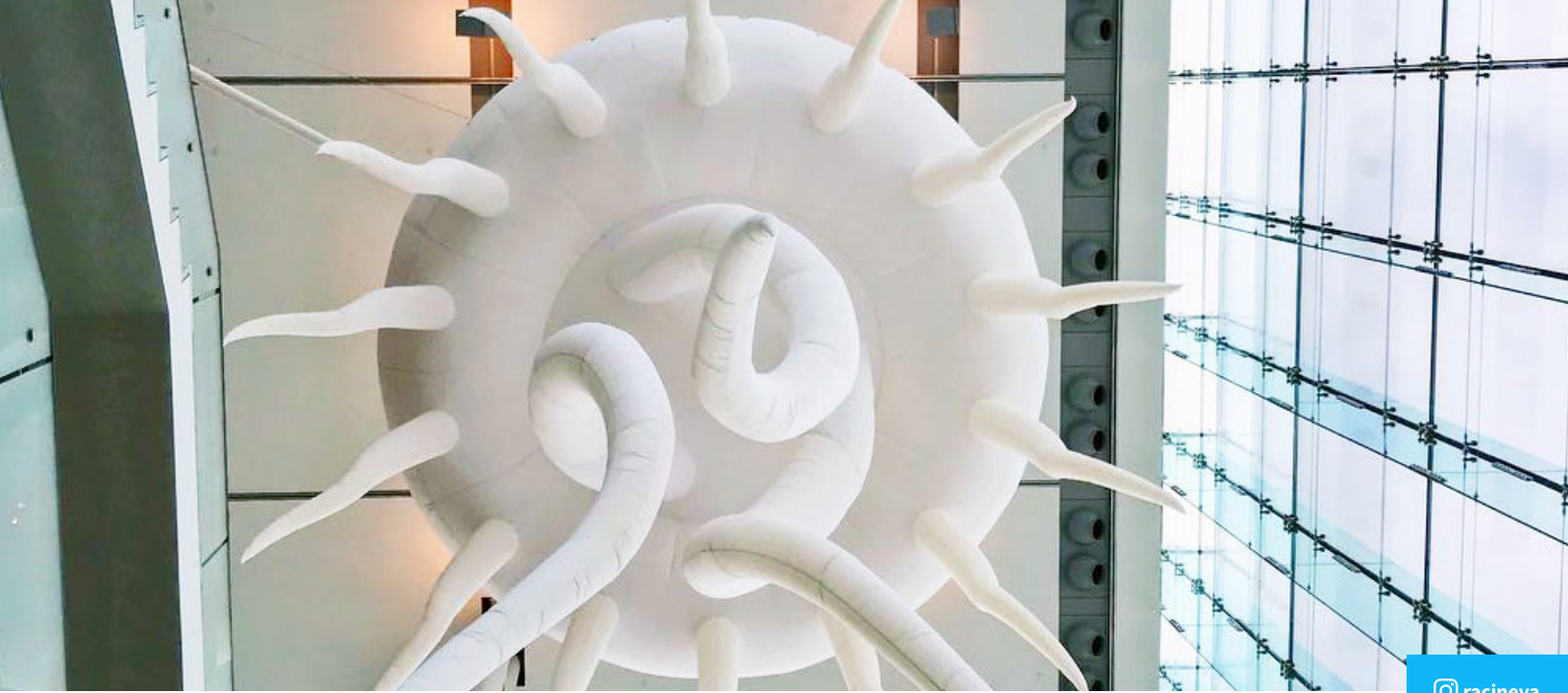# The Complete Guide to UGC for Museums

CrowdRiff

Hello!

As a museum marketer, you know the power of visual storytelling, and you also know the challenges that come with visual storytelling today. With virtually every museum in the world shut down for several months during the pandemic, many institutions are still recovering their visitation, staff, and funding levels, etc. At the same time, it has become harder to rise above the noise and speak your truth—both as a cultural institution and a business. Because we work with so many museums, we have a unique vantage point into what different organizations are doing to embrace technology, meet the diversity of audience expectations, and maximize engagement today.

In this eBook, we share how 8 leading museums have made user generated-content (UGC) work as part of a successful marketing strategy. We also offer practical advice on acquiring the rights to UGC. Many of the inspiring UGC images in this eBook were sourced from social media and rights-approved through CrowdRiff.

We hope this gives you a better understanding of what UGC does, and the value it can bring to your museum.

The CrowdRiff Marketing Team

What's Inside

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What is UGC?

In today's digital world, user generated content (UGC) is being created in extraordinary volumes and is an essential part of every museum marketer's toolkit. But what exactly is user-generated content and why is it so important?

UGC is any content about your brand that your visitors create and share all on their own. UGC can be both visual and textual. It includes photos and videos shared on social media, as well as reviews and testimonials posted on third-party review sites, like Google, Yelp, or TripAdvisor.

Countless user-generated visuals are created and shared by your visitors and greatest brand advocates every day. Whether it's

photos of parents exploring your museum with their children, a group of students participating in a workshop, or visitors listening to an artist discuss the inspiration behind their work, UGC visuals can humanize your brand and connect with future museum visitors. These photos and videos can be repurposed as content for your museum across a range of mediums. From social media posts to digital displays to Galleries on your website, UGC can be used just about anywhere owned visuals are used.

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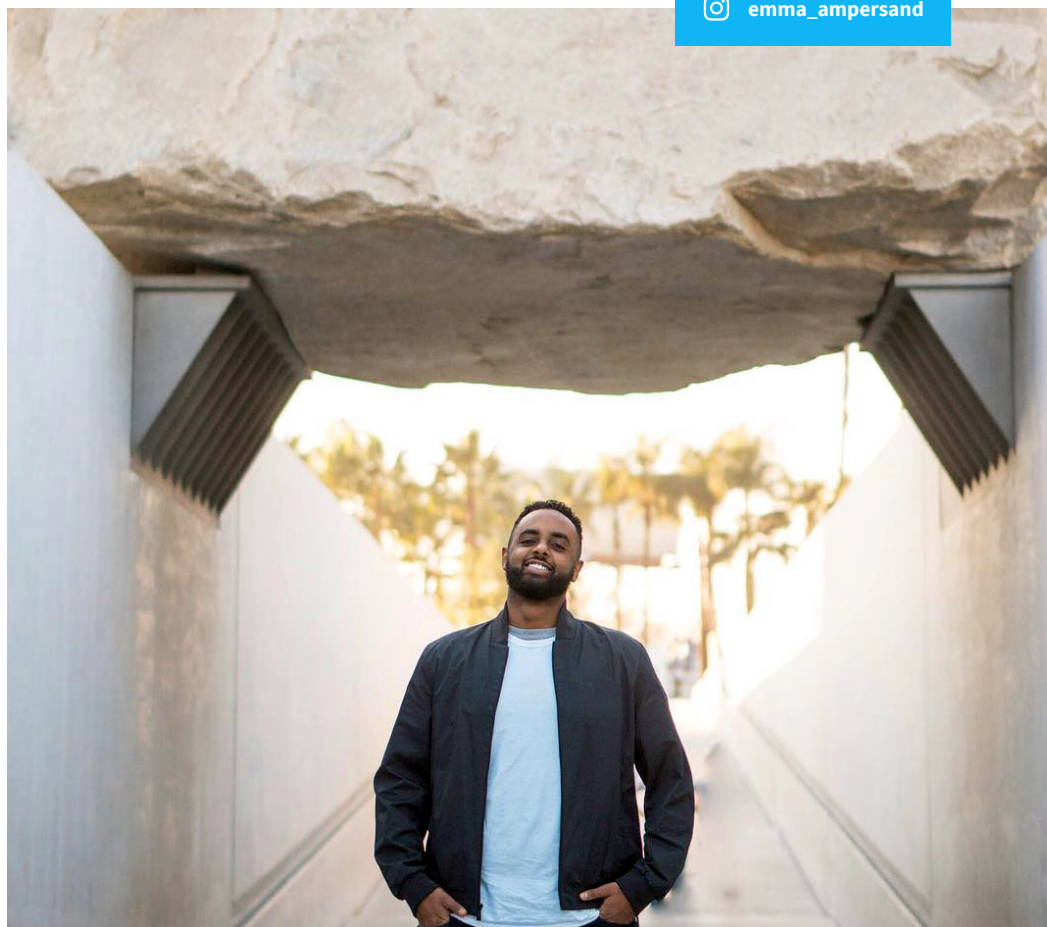
Museum Marketing:
Current Challenges

Visual UGC is a valuable marketing asset for any museum or gallery. Before we dig into the benefits of UGC, let's look at three of the biggest challenges facing museums in the age of digital marketing.

1 Embrace technology while honoring your mandate

The obvious and most daunting challenge facing museums is the continued pandemic recovery. Museum attendance is still down an average of 38% in the United States[1], for example, compared to pre-pandemic, and embracing new technologies that help enhance the experience will help entice visitors to come back.

As curators of both art and history, museums play an important cultural role as a bridge between old and new. But in order to stay relevant today, museums need to adapt to the evolving needs of their communities. In many cases, that means embracing digital marketing and building a presence in online spaces. Otherwise, museums risk getting left behind, as people are drawn to other places that make the effort to stay top-of-mind for modern consumers, as Michael E. Shapiro, Director Emeritus of the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, puts it[1]:

Take the "Immersive Van Gogh" experience, for example. The exhibit has been to 40 cities in the U.S. alone since first launching in 2021 and more than five million people have visited one of the exhibits.[2] Not only is it a lesson in how to engage communities far beyond your physical museum building, but the exhibit also demonstrates how to immerse visitors in a completely new way into an art work.

While Van Gogh's "Starry Night" was painted more than a century ago, the new exhibit shows how the painting is very much alive and ready to be experienced in new ways using new technologies. The exhibit was certainly created for the social media age and provided the perfect backdrop for countless UGC images to get a new generation excited about art. Museums should take note of the Van Gogh exhibit's success and imagine how they could use technology to completely reimagine their own spaces.

Other institutions like the upcoming Universal Hip Hop Museum in the Bronx plan to have a presence in the metaverse and make virtual reality a cornerstone of the new museum's offering.[3] The augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) market is expected to rise to over $250 billion by 2028.[4]

Even older technology like blogs could help the more than 50% of museums who don't have one make their information more accessible.[5]

The possibilities to use technology to complement the experience are endless, and all museums have to do is start experimenting to see what resonates.

Directors need to embrace technology as a vehicle for speaking to and attracting audiences to the museum, without undercutting the special experience of the immediate and direct work of art.

[1]Source: https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:-HzzqoSMyHAJ:https://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/2009807/the-biggest-obstacles-museum-direc-tors-face-today+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca
[2] https://www.immersivevangogh.com/boston/
[3] https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/the-revolution-of-hip-hop-exhibit-universal-hip-hop-museum-1235125380/
[4] https://www.statista.com/statistics/591181/global-augmented-virtual-reality-market-size/
[5] https://themuseumcreative.com/blog/how-to-make-museums-more-interesting

2 Meet the diversity of audience expectations

Building authentic connections with visitors is one of the biggest challenges facing museum marketers today. As museum audiences continue to evolve and diversify, so too do their expectations and needs. For instance, a recent study found that roughly 40% of millennials and 35% of the general population felt that history and art museums were "not for people like me[2]," although many museums are making progress on creating more inclusive experiences and introducing diverse perspectives into exhibitions.

Furthermore, museums often struggle to find an ideal balance between their role as entertainers and educators. In order to stay competitive, museum marketers must find a way to appeal to a wide range of visitors with diverse backgrounds, interests, and experiences.

livingdattlife

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3 Increase engagement and maximize revenue

Thanks to an array of devices, your visitors have direct access to information about just about anything. The question is, how can museums leverage their visitors' curiosity and interest in a way that adds to their experience and knowledge?

As technology gets more sophisticated, there are new opportunities for museums to create engaging, interactive exhibits, as well as contests, workshops and new revenue streams, like selling non-fungible tokens (NFTs). For example, Unit London and its Florence-based technology partner Cinello created licensing agreements with several prominent Italian museums to sell a hybrid offering of limited edition LED reproductions in period-style wooden frames, each accompanied by a unique NFT as part of a recent exhibition. When the exhibition closed, it had fetched nearly $250,000.[6]

Or what about offering a virtual membership to let people who may not live near your museum, or simply prefer virtual experiences, enjoy your events and exhibitions from wherever they want to? The challenge is determining how to best use technology and social media to drive sales andinspire brand advocates to share their experiences.

[6] https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/25/arts/design/museums-nfts.html
[7] https://www.aam-us.org/2020/07/22/how-museums-can-generate-revenue-through-digital-content-and-virtual-experiences/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI-yvHsotDd-QIVQgJMCh0t3ASGEAMYASAAEgL19_D_BwE

Why Should Museums Use UGC? What makes UGC such a powerful tool for your museum?

By incorporating UGC into your digital marketing strategy, your museum would be able to:

1 Adapt to audience needs without losing sight of your mission

Museums have always been exceptional visual storytellers. With UGC content, you can tell a story that represents the range of different experiences enjoyed by your visitors. UGC helps museums set, meet, and exceed audience expectations. It's also more than twice as likely to be viewed as more authentic than branded content.[8]

joeyexplores

2 Tell a diverse, authentic brand story that engages your audience

UGC brings an authenticity to your brand story by featuring real people your audience can relate to – which makes it easier for them to picture themselves having those experiences, too. For many museums, UGC is the ultimate form of social proof. In fact, 62%[5] of consumers report that they are more likely to click on content like ads, websites, social posts, or emails, that feature customer photos rather than an image created by the brand.

mtlvws

3 Promote exhibits, increase ticket sales, and stretch your marketing dollars

Another major benefit of UGC for museums is that it doesn't cost anything to create. Your visitors are actively generating content for you, providing your museum with a large, growing resource of UGC that can be used alongside branded visuals. And it's a proven formula – 64%[6] of consumers agree that when a brand they like re-shares content by customers, they are more likely to share content about the brand or its products.

Think about the possibilities of using UGC to promote your museum as an event space, like the New Museum, to double down on new revenue streams.

[5]Source: https://www·nielsen·com/content/dam/nielsenglobal/apac/docs/reports/2015/nielsen-global-trust-in-advertising-report-september-2015·pdf
[6]Source: https://www·comscore·com/Insights/Press-Releases/2012/3/comScore-Study-Finds-Professionally-Produced-Video-Content-And-User-Generated -Product-Videos-Exhibit-Strong-Synergy-in-Driving-Sales-Effectiveness

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How 8 Leading Museums Are Using UGC In Their Marketing

1

THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

As a leader in the evolution of digital museum culture, the **Royal Ontario Museum (ROM**) uses UGC to shape their visual marketing strategy around their community. The ROM curates UGC for a number of creative uses, including on-site digital displays and photo walls, as well as their online and social presence.

The ROM promotes UGC through various hashtags, most notably at #MyPandemicStory to invite kids and teens to share their stories and perspectives of the pandemic.

The museum shares UGC on their website and social channels to drive sales and build excitement leading up to a visit, but they also use UGC to inspire visitors to take (and share!) more photos during their visit.

For example, as soon as visitors arrive, they see UGC photos on the digital display behind the admissions desk. This reinforces the sense of community fostered online and encourages more visitors to lend their voice (and visuals) to the conversations happening on social media.

T. REX ALIVE!
T. REX EST VIVANT!

Take photos with T.rex and share with **@ROMtoronto #ROMtrex** to see them at rom.on.ca/dinos.

Prenez des photos et partagez-les **@ROMtoronto #ROMtrex** pour les voir sur notre site à rom.on.ca/dinos!

UGC has played a major role in building the ROM's visual influence and helping them engage with visitors before, during, and after their visit. By showcasing UGC in both digital and physical spaces, the ROM gives visitors the chance to get involved in what the museum is currently doing and sharing. And it seems to be working! Since adding UGC Galleries to their website, the ROM has achieved a 4X increase in time on site and cut their bounce rate by 30%[7].


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> **"Over the last year using CrowdRiff, it's been really easy to show the power of earned media and UGC. We no longer tell people that we are cool, people are doing it for us."**
>
> **Ryan Dodge**
> Previously Digital Engagement Coordinator at the ROM

Pro Tip

Look for creative ways to use UGC to foster a sense of community both online and off. By featuring UGC photos on digital displays near the entrance of your museum, you can set the tone for making each visit a visual, social friendly experience.

2
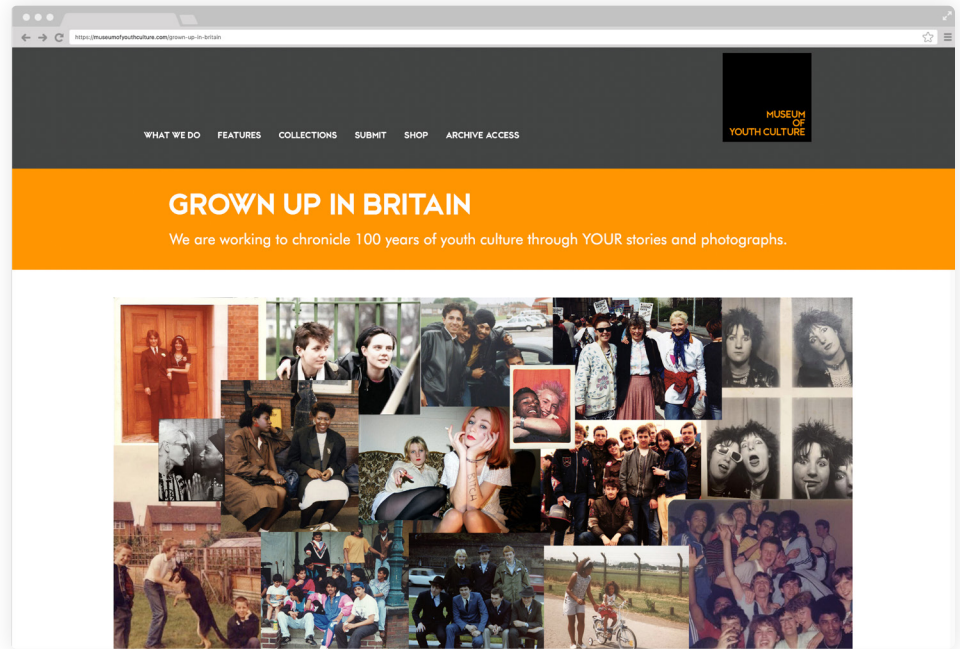
FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

At the end of the day, most museums exist to tell stories. That's the mission of the UK's Museum of Youth Culture: to tell the story of life growing up in the country.[9]

In fall 2019, the museum launched a marketing campaign called "Growing up in Britain,"[10] asking people from all walks of life across the UK to contribute photos of their childhood to their already massive photography archive. Museum staff hosted pop-up events at community gatherings across the country to spread the word about their campaign and encourage people to share their photos and stories.

The museum has received more than 6,000 submissions to date and continues to share the photos across their social channels and website. One of the first big projects to come from the submissions is a coffee table book filled with photos from the campaign that was released in late 2021, and the museum is also creating a wall calendar in 2022.
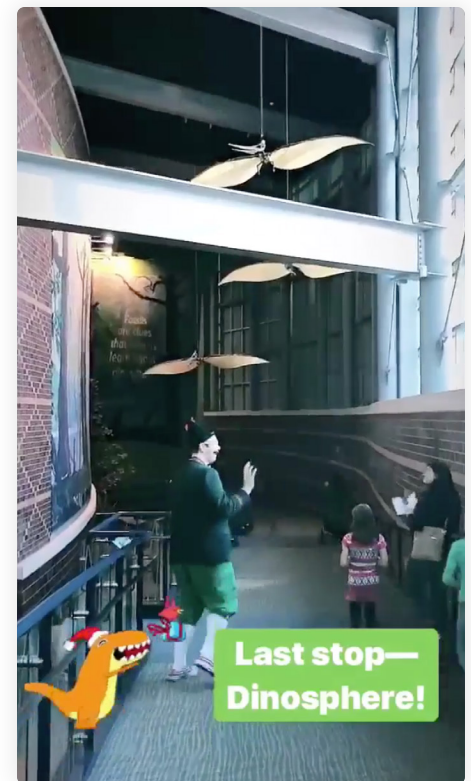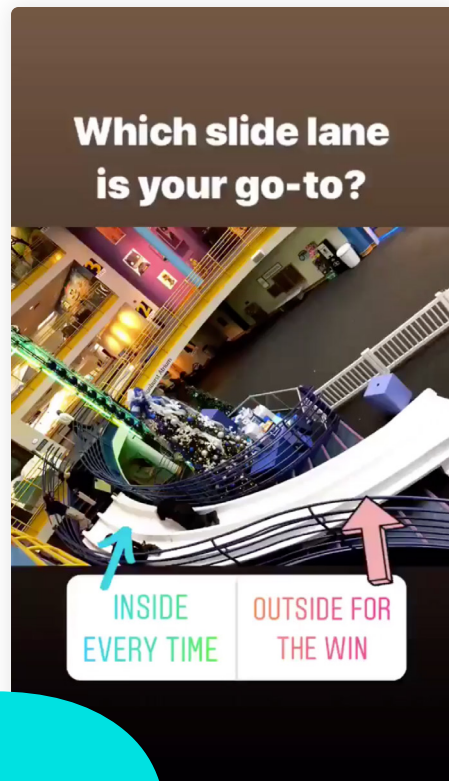
Not only does each UGC image invite visitors to discover the latest exhibits and learn more about planning a trip, but some of the Gallery CTAs on their site also invite visitors to visit the link in bio to learn more and get involved.

Since 85% of consumers find UGC more influential than branded visuals[11], combining authentic images with CTAs can lead to more sales than owned visuals alone. By placing clickable UGC Galleries on your website, you can spark interest and drive action at the same time.

[9] Source: https://stories.photoshelter.com/inside-look-how-the-museum-of-youth-culture-preserves-100-years-of-uk-history/
[10] Source: https://museumofyouthculture.com/grown-up-in-britain/
[11] https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160503005382/en/Offerpop-Survey-Identifies-Gaps-Consumers-Marketers-User-Generated

3 CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF INDIANAPOLIS

The **Children's Museum of Indianapolis** uses UGC for Instagram Stories to engage with and educate their audience. By featuring real people in candid photos and videos, the Children's Museum is able to show off what people are loving during their visits.

Here are a few key lessons from the Children's Museum on how museums can use Instagram Stories:

- Featuring real people in candid photos and videos draws people in more effectively than branded content alone.

- The more often you feature UGC in your Story, the more often you'll get tagged in visitors' Stories.

- UGC isn't just about visuals. You can use polls in your Stories to drive more engagement and spark conversation around specific campaigns and exhibits.

With over 500 million people using Instagram Stories every single day[9], your visitors are creating and sharing a huge amount of interesting content. When visitors tag your museum in their Instagram Stories, you have the option to repost their content to your own Story.
Beyond just keeping people up-to-date on the latest happenings at your museum, pulling UGC into your Stories is a great way to put a human face to the experiences you provide. Featuring UGC in your Instagram Story shows your audience that you're paying attention and appreciate what they're sharing.

Pro Tip

Instagram Stories are impactful but timely – they only stay live for 24 hours (unless you add them to one of your Highlights Reels). This allows you to feature a wide range of UGC without necessarily worrying about the staying power of each piece of content.

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CANADIAN MUSEUM OF NATURE

The **Canadian Museum of Nature** taps into social media trends to attract visitors to their upcoming exhibits. They focus on creating memorable pre-visit experiences that get people talking, filming, and sharing UGC online.

One of their most memorable stunts to date was bringing the concept of 'T-Rex Tuesdays' to life on the streets of Ottawa.

> **"There was a thing already happening on social media called T-Rex Tuesdays, and they were really funny. People were putting up videos of folks in those inflatable dinosaur suits doing just about anything, because anything a dino is trying to do is pretty funny."**

John Swettenham
Chief Marketing Officer for the Canadian Museum of Nature

Image: Youtube, VideoManOttawa

> **"It's fun for people to see them on the street, but let's face it, even if they go to Parliament Hill, that's still just a few thousand people, it's not millions or hundreds of thousands. At the end of the day, the way to leverage it and expand the longevity is through social media."**

Image: Youtube, VideoManOttawa

The Canadian Museum of Nature was able to leverage this trend because they were already in tune with what people were sharing online. So not only did the campaign draw local attention to the temporary exhibit they were promoting, but the UGC created in response to it was also timely and relevant to an audience that already existed on social media. Plus, the stunt led to the creation of tons of new UGC that was shared and viewed online. After all, who could resist snapping a shot of dinosaurs doing yoga on Parliament Hill?

The events were even picked up by media outlets across the country, with the CBC sharing a "T-Rex Yoga" clip that was viewed more than 1.7 million times.[10]

The key takeaway here? Listen to the conversations your audience is having online and look for ways to incorporate those trends and topics into your next marketing campaign.

Get creative in how you think about the pre-visit experience. By creating an experience that your fans and visitors can't help but share, you can reach a larger audience and build awareness through UGC.

5
DENVER ART MUSEUM

UGC allows upcoming visitors to see what people are excited about at that exact moment – and it also allows museums to see how guests are interacting with exhibits. For instance, monitoring UGC on social media gives the **Denver Art Museum** (DAM) a deeper understanding of how visitors respond to art.

Not only does UGC help DAM keep their finger on the pulse of what's happening in their community, but it also gives them the chance to showcase the range of experiences they provide. DAM reflects their guests' experience and stories back to their audience by reposting their favorite UGC. This injects a very human element into the DAM brand and makes it easy for future visitors to envision themselves in those scenarios.

tailor.ko

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As Shannon Robb, the Communications and Public Affairs Coordinator for the Denver Art Museum, puts it:

> **"It can be more intimidating to walk into an art museum than, say, a zoo, because people can explain to their children what a giraffe is, but when they walk into an art museum, they feel like they need to know everything about who Picasso was."**

By embracing the power and potential of UGC for marketing, you can showcase everyday people enjoying your museum – from connoisseurs to casual art fans.

6
THE PRADO MUSEUM

The Museo Nacional del Prado (the Prado Museum) uses social UGC to make their collections more accessible to everyone. By leveraging the power of modern social media platforms like TikTok, the Prado Museum has found a new way to get young people excited about art.

Part of what makes The Prado Museum's social presence so impactful is that they're clearly listening to what their audience is saying and creating content in response. For example, many of their TikTok videos answer questions that people have about exhibitions or particular works of art that often include fun facts and behind-the-scenes tours of various artwork. So far, the museum has more than 400,000 followers on the platform and its TikTok videos typically get hundreds of thousands of views. It's one of the best success stories to date for how museums can effectively use TikTok to tell stories.

@museodelprado

Museums can follow the Prado Museum's lead by embracing social media as a way to connect with a younger audience. By building a presence in the digital spaces where young people communicate and share stories, museum marketers have an opportunity to connect, engage, and educate a whole new audience. Bringing customers into the experience has been proven to make promotions 28% more effective[11], and facilitates almost 7 times[12] more engagement than brand content.

UGC marketing, by definition, invites your audience to be part of your story. Although the Prado Museum isn't using TikTok to share other users' videos, by responding to its audiences' questions and creating content around that, it makes them feel like they belong at the museum and makes the exhibitions more relevant to them. By showcasing exhibits and artwork through a fun, accessible medium like TikTok, you can make your space and exhibits more familiar and approachable to visitors of all ages.

11Source: https://resources.crowdriff.com/blog/ways-museums-use-ugc-promote-exhibits
12Source: https://blog.iconosquare.com/ugc-generates-engagement

7 THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

As the home to thousands of unique artifacts, museums have a unique advantage when it comes to storytelling. Museum curators have tons of interesting tidbits and stories to tell about each collection – and UGC can be used as the starting point.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) does a fantastic job of this. Rather than simply reposting an interesting visitor photo, the Met uses UGC as a springboard for further discussion. The Met highlights UGC as an opportunity to show how visitors experience exhibits and artworks in different ways and from unique perspectives.

Not only does this inspire further conversation around the exhibit on social media, but it also creates a fantastic pre-visit experience. Plus, the hashtag #MetMoment really drives home the narrative that museums are a shared cultural space for their communities.

Pro Tip

The key to driving engagement is to make it simple for your visitors to participate. Be straightforward in telling them exactly how to get featured. For instance, the Met includes clear instructions in their Instagram captions and consistent CTAs with the relevant hashtags asking visitors to share their photos.

If you're holding back to avoid being pushy, consider that 60%[13] of consumers wish that more brands would tell their fans and customers what type of content they want them to create.

13Source: https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160503005382/en/Offerpop-Survey-Identifies-Gaps-Consumers-Marketers-User-Generated

8

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

According to the Pew Research Center, 48 percent of GenZ-ers born between 1997 and 2012 belong to a racial or ethnic minority, compared to 39% of millennials.[14] Considering these groups are museums' future – and present – audiences, it's high time to ensure that your content represents the growing diversity of your visitors and this can be addressed by sharing photos of and from the people actually visiting your exhibits.

The Studio Museum in Harlem is the perfect example of how it's done. In alignment with their mission to act as a "nexus for artists of African descent," the Studio Museum embraces UGC as a means to showcase diversity and promote inclusiveness. Sharing UGC photos and videos of their visitors, artists, and guests allows them to paint a more realistic picture of the people who make up their communities.

Their Instagram feed features candid UGC of visitors, which invites anyone to explore the museum, capture their experiences, and share them online. This drives the creation of even more UGC and highlights the fact that the Studio Museum is just as much about its people as its art.

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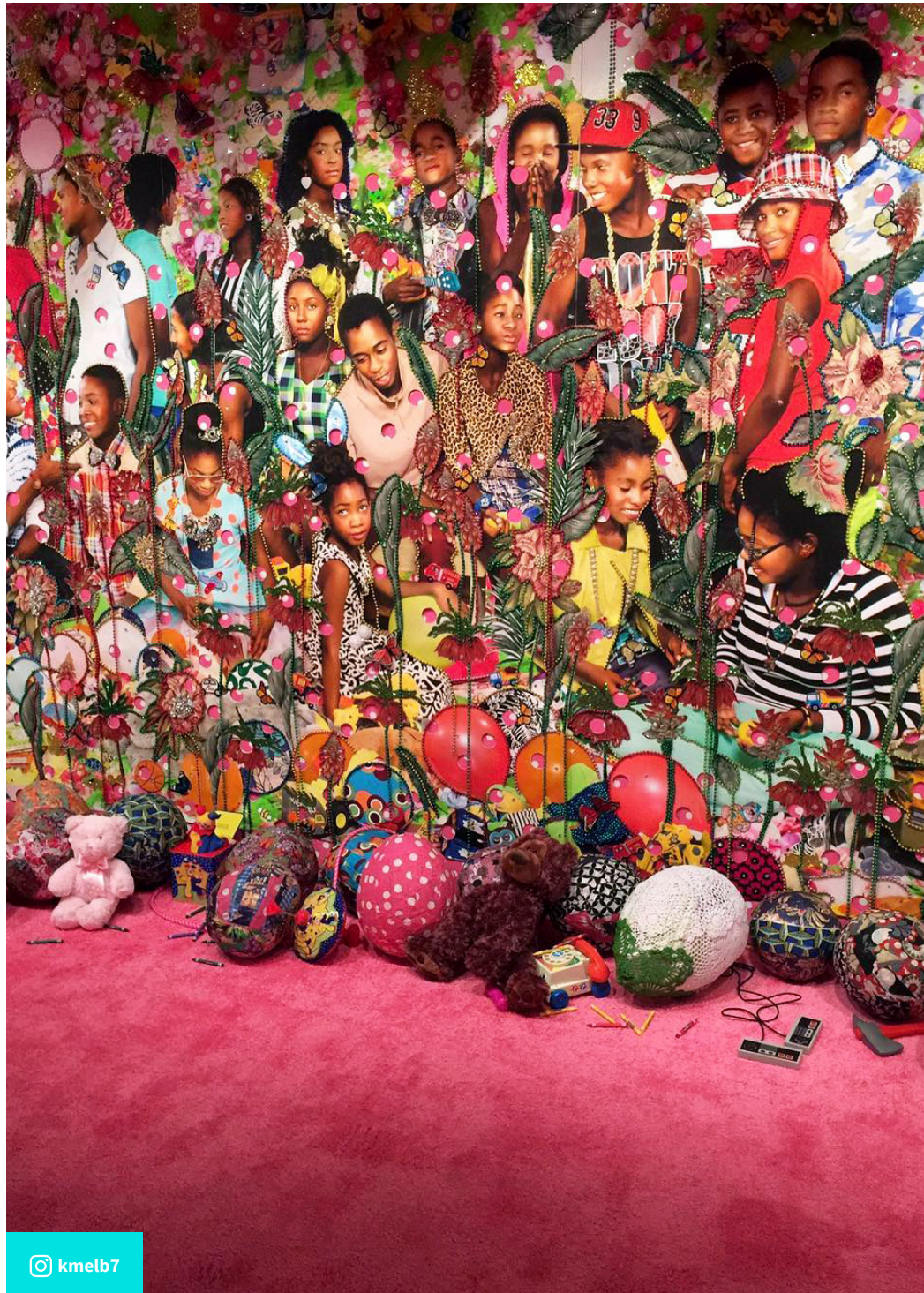
Promoting UGC allows museums to address any misconceptions potential visitors might have about how art should be celebrated and who can participate in museum culture. Because cultural spaces like museums haven't always celebrated or existed for women and people of color, this message of diversity is just as important to the Studio Museum experience as the exhibits and art itself.

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When Do You Need Content Rights?

When it comes to using photos and videos from social media in your marketing, it can be tricky to figure out what you're allowed to do, and what you aren't. Follow these guidelines to learn more about user-generated content rights.

Best practises for sourcing UGC

You don't need rights to share your owned content, but getting expressed permission to use someone else's content is important. We recommend requesting rights to ensure you have that permission on record.

When it comes to content like Reels and TikToks, where music licensing needs to be considered, you also need to follow guidelines in your country regarding copyright laws. The recommended approach is to request the original video file from the creator and post it on your channel, attributing the creator, and using music that you have permission to use.

This includes:

• Embedding a Tweet or Instagram photo onto your website or blog. If you use the embed code provided by the social network, you don't need to request the rights to the photo.

• Displaying content through an API partner, like with CrowdRiff galleries. Since CrowdRiff uses Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook's API to display photos, and abides by all of their separate Terms & Conditions, you do not need explicit permission to display photos.

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You need to request rights if you are:

- Reposting a photo or video to your own social media accounts.

- Using the photo in digital or print ads.

- Displaying the photo or video on your website without a link back to the original photo.

- Displaying a modified version of a photo or video.

Best Practices for Getting Rights to UGC

Asking for permission in a comment is the easiest way to request rights to a photo or video. Generally, people are quite flattered when they're asked to share their photo or video, and are usually happy to say yes when asked nicely.

When crafting a comment, follow this checklist:

1. Leave a nice comment that shows appreciation for their work.
2. Tell them how you want to use their photo.
3. Give them a way to explicitly say "yes". Let them know what hashtag they can use when they respond back to you.

If privacy laws in your country or region require additional permissions to use someone's photo or video, you may prefer to use a form to capture all of the information you need.
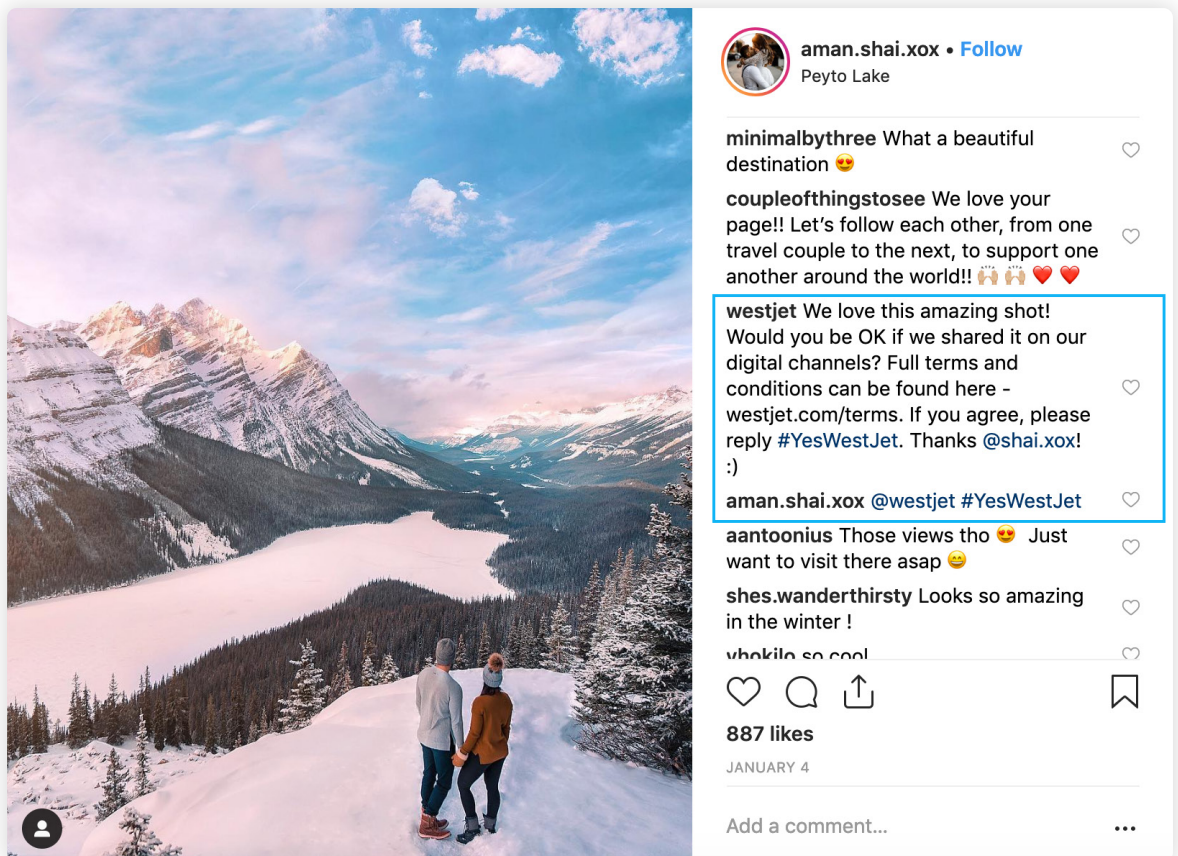
How CrowdRiff Manages UGC Rights

Over 800+ travel and tourism brands use CrowdRiff to automate the rights request process, shaving hours of manual searching off the work week.

We keep track of your requests. When you're manually requesting rights to UGC, it's extraordinarily hard to keep a record of which photos you've requested and who has responded. CrowdRiff automates all of that.

We retrieve the high resolution version of any photo immediately after someone gives you rights. No more emailing back and forth - when they approve, you get the photo instantly.

We take a screenshot each time someone responds with "yes", and archive it so that you can have a record of every interaction.

We offer an advanced rights management form to easily capture and store all rights information, so you can focus on using images and videos, not managing rights.

kat_leah_

About CrowdRiff

CrowdRiff is an AI-powered visual content marketing platform that enables marketers to discover, collaborate on, and deliver top-performing visuals across every channel. We work with 800+ leading travel and tourism brands worldwide.

Museums use CrowdRiff to:

- Automatically source new guest photos in real-time from social channels
- Expand their image libraries by getting rights to UGC
- Deliver impactful imagery across their website, social channels, print materials, digital ads, and more

Discover the most engaging social media photos from your museum visitors. Let us show you what CrowdRiff can do for you.

Get a free demo