

ASM / Museums Alaska Chat #56

February 28, 2018

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| Amy Carney | Welcome, Jan! Welcome, Jodi! |
| Jan | Thanks! First time I've been able to join in awhile; we usually have staff meeting at this same time. |
| Jodi | Thanks Amy! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Hey Scott! |
| Scott Bartlett | Good morning! |
| Amy Carney | Glad to have you, Scott. |
| Scott Bartlett | Thanks for coordinating, Amy |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Hey Sue! |
| Sue Deyoe | Hi there! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Welcome Amanda! |
| Amanda Lancaster | Hi! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Hi everybody. Thanks for coming today! Scott Bartlett is at the Pratt Museum, and I'll let him introduce himself. As for me, my name is Sarah Asper-Smith. I have a small business called ExhibitAK, where I do exhibition planning and design for museums and cultural institutions. I get to travel all over the state and meet interesting people and listen to their stories. It's a pretty fabulous job. I spent years as a graphic designer, and went on to get an MFA in museum exhibition planning and design from the University of the Arts in |

Philadelphia. While there, I really became focused on coming back to Alaska and helping Alaskans tell Alaskan stories. So please consider me a resource, today and in the future. I'm happy to share what I know to help AK museums thrive. My email is sarah@exhibitak.co.

Scott Bartlett Thanks, Sarah.

Scott Bartlett I'm the curator of exhibits at the Pratt Museum, where I've been for 5 years

Scott Bartlett after a couple years' work down in Washington state in exhibits and collections

Scott Bartlett I actually come from a music background rather than design and visual art, so my experience and design ideas I think are pretty fluidly evolving!

Sarah Asper-Smith We also have Amy Carney here, who does web work for the State Libraries, Archives and Museums, so maybe she'll chime in if there are any questions that she has the answer to.

Scott Bartlett You can reach me at sbartlett@prattmuseum.org

Sarah Asper-Smith We're here to answer questions, so hopefully you have some. Bring 'em on.

Scott Bartlett I know that one of Scott Carrlee's emails about this chat mentioned exhibit labels, but we're here for anything exhibit-related!

Sarah Asper-Smith In the meantime, here's a quick tip: To stick something to the wall for a temporary show without removing paint when you remove the label, use blue painter's tape on the wall, and stick your foam tape to that. It will come off of the wall without removing paint.

Erin Kirchner Hello,

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| Jan | So that raises a question - I use a lot of Uhu to stick labels up. Any red flags with that? |
| Sue Deyoe | So as someone with a journalism background, (one who has to have complete sentences and correct punctuation) can I get some advice on shortening and making snappy, short interesting labels... |
| Scott Bartlett | In my experience, if you leave uhu or blue tack on a paper label too long, it will soak an oil through the label |
| Scott Bartlett | --for a month or two you're probably okay |
| Jan | My paper labels are mounted on foamcore. |
| Scott Bartlett | No oil problem with foam core, as long as you can get good adhesion w/o denting your foam core (it takes some pressure). |
| Jan | Ok - thanks, Scott! |
| Scott Bartlett | I also use a pressing board (like a wide plastic ruler) to press paper labels with uhu on a wall; the flat surface helps avoid "molding" the paper around your lumps of uhu |
| Jan | Excellent idea! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Sue, your question is great and so difficult to answer. Active verbs. Short sentences. Avoid words that are too big and fancy. I love big words, but sometimes make worse is better than ameliorate, if you know what I mean |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | The Smithsonian has a guide to accessible design which might be useful. It's a little stringent, but here are some of the better points: |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | https://www.si.edu/accessibility/sgaed |
| Sue Deyoe | I DO have Serrells "Exhibit Labels, Interpretive Approach |

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| Sarah Asper-Smith | I'd say that my favorite way to write labels is in layers. Provide a couple of sentences at the beginning that summarize--most people will read that. Then go deeper. Some visitors will read everything, some will just check out the image captions. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Beverly Serrell is the bomb. |
| Sue Deyoe | Good points...We are working on a special exhibit to celebrate our community radio stations 25th year...it not only needs to speak to locals but thousands of visitors (we'll have it up for 6 months) |
| Scott Bartlett | Good points Sarah. The Pratt did a big visitor survey a few years ago, and heard resoundingly that people enjoyed all of the text we had... having information tiered like you describe is a good way to offer the content for deep readers but let it hit home with the skimmers as well |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | When I make labels, I often highlight the first couple of sentences or paragraph, like I mentioned. So that signals the reader that if they're only going to read one thing, make it be this paragraph. Then the rest of the text is slightly smaller. |
| Sue Deyoe | Concerning 'timelines'...more photos rather than text? 25 years of events and trying to figure out just how much to put on there. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Pay attention to your photo captions, too. Without making it too long, that can be a good place to get some info. Some readers will go: headline, photo, caption, next label. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Good question, Sue. How big is the timeline? I'd emphasize the visual, if possible. That said, it's probably hard to find a photo for every event in a timeline |

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| Scott Bartlett | The other aspect of labels and overall exhibit work is graphic design. One of my handy go-to books is "Interpretation by Design: Graphic Design Basics for Heritage Interpreters." It's short and sweet with tons of examples. Everthing from text layout to colors, fonts, and technical requirements. |
| Scott Bartlett | --and more! |
| Sue Deyoe | Well, haven't developed the entire timeline...but we are covering 1993-2018...events throughout those years and things that shaped the village into today. That's too much really, trying to figure out what we really want to cover |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Absolutely, Scott. You can use the tenets of graphic design can help how you arrange something on a wall, too. It applies to all 2-d spaces. And thinking into the 3rd dimension too... |
| Sue Deyoe | I'll put that book on the list! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | There's always too much. That's the hardest thing about working in exhibits--there's always more to say than is reasonable for a person to comprehend! |
| Erin Kirchner | Does anyone have any suggestions for low-cost, but decent looking, exhibit labels for very low budget museums? While travelling I have seen some museums use plastic slant-back frames with card stock, for example. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Part of your job is editing. Maybe the most important job. |
| Scott Bartlett | If you have a label or text that you're concerned about for length, actually print it out and put it on a wall, then stand there and read it. Especially if you're collaborating with a specialist (I love scientists, but they can be data-heavy), make THEM read it too. |

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| Sarah Asper-Smith | Great idea, Scott. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Good question, Erin. Card stock in plastic frames works. Of course the standby of paper adhered to foam core is just fine and cheap and easy. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Erin, do you have anything specific you're thinking about, label-wise? |
| Sue Deyoe | Do you have any favorite adhesives for paper to foam core? (spray/glue/etc) |
| Jan | Elmer's makes a foam core that already has adhesive on it. I think I bought it through Dick Blick online. It's great stuff and saves dealing with some nasty aerosols. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | 3m super 77 is an adhesive spray that I use |
| Scott Bartlett | Erin, sometime for short exhibits I use Avery's full sheet clear adhesive labels. Run through an inkjet and then crop to size. Your wall finish will show through, which can be a concern for font color, but they make a nice "subtle" label. The only concern is your wall finish. Flat paints, which don't reflect light so are nice in exhibit spaces, also don't hold the sticky as well. Semi- and higher gloss paints hold sticky better. Be sure to test! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | I do like the self-adhesive foam core as well. I've found that the edges will peel over time, but if you trim them, they stay better |
| Scott Bartlett | Jan, I love the pre-adhesive foam core! |
| Jan | Jill Lipka recommended it to me. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Good one, Scott. |
| Sue Deyoe | Nice!! |

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| Scott Bartlett | The concern with foam core is that once your panel is too large, it will curve. Sometimes they come out of the box with a curve to them... |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | They have foam core with adhesive on both sides that comes in a variety of thicknesses (1", 2"...) These can be great for providing some dimension in an exhibit. For example, put one photo up at the 1" level and another one slightly overlapping at the 2" level. If that makes sense... |
| Scott Bartlett | Another word about paint finishes: higher gloss are also easier to clean. If you have an area frequent by young ones (we have a small aquaria, for example), the semi-gloss is something to consider. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Gator board is a little sturdier than foam core for those larger labels. It should resist the curve |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Oh, yes on the paint. They are making a dry erase paint now, if you have a smooth wall and want a cool interactive space in your exhibit that people can color/respond to exhibits/ask questions with dry erase markers. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | One thing that is often pushed to the very last minute, and often makes the biggest difference in how things look--lighting. If you can move and aim your lights, try to plan for time to do that. Scott and I are on the conference planning committee and are hoping to get a lighting designer to do a workshop or session for us |
| Scott Bartlett | Good call, Sarah. I was at an exhibit workshop out of state once, and the presenter had a pretty succinct guide for label material vs. size. I didn't write it down! Basically ramp up from tagboard to matboard, foam core, gator... all based on what size label you're printing. |

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| Sue Deyoe | I would love to take a class on lighting...for those of us stuck with crappy lighting it would be interesting to hear if there is such a thing as quick fixes to that! |
| Scott Bartlett | Lighting can also add drama and finesse! In both immersive and more temporary gallery exhibits |
| Erin Kirchner | For the larger size panels, are you still adhering card stock? Or printing directly onto the material? |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Adhering the material to the panels, but if you have a direct to substrate printer hook up, that's awesome! |
| Scott Bartlett | I print to cardstock and adhere up to 13" x 19", which is the largest my printer will run |
| Sue Deyoe | Added to Erin's question, is there a favorite software to design...I don't have a ton of experience with any but if I could find one that works well... |
| Erin Kirchner | Okay, great to know! We have worked with a local printing shop to print directly to material since we do not have the ability to print in the museum. But I am looking to reduce costs with the adhering for larger panels. |
| Scott Bartlett | I use Adobe InDesign for almost everything layout related |
| Jan | I use Photoshop Elements... as far as I know it can still be purchased outright for about \$80 and isn't subject to the annual fees (i.e. ransom) of some of the more powerful Adobe products. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Sue, I use the Adobe products as well. InDesign and Illustrator and Photoshop. They are incredibly powerful, but fairly easy to learn (I think! It's been a long time) They have educational copies at a discount, but they are expensive for the full suite |

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| Sue Deyoe | I wondered about InDesign..I've heard great things, but just trying to do sleuthing before I commit. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Good call on Photoshop Elements. Photoshop is harder for text design, but you can make it work |
| Jan | I used to love the other Adobe products but the new fee structure where you have to keep paying if you want to access your files has completely turned me off. |
| Scott Bartlett | Exactly. We have a Creative Cloud suite, but for text and panel layout, InD is where it's at. I think it's fairly intuitive, but there's always new techniques to discover and make your workflow more efficient and your design more elegant. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | I agree with you, Jan. I haven't upgraded to the CC version yet, but I know I will have to someday. |
| Sue Deyoe | good thoughts on all, thanks so much!! |
| Scott Bartlett | We got our CC a couple years ago (with an annual fee), but our files are stored locally... I also have a (legacy) Creative Suite 6, which I usually work on and, if needed on the other computer, I can open files with the newer Cloud version. |
| Scott Bartlett | For space planning, I also use Sketchup. |
| Sue Deyoe | I've used Sketchup a little... |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Sketchup is great, and they have a free version to play around with |
| Scott Bartlett | ... it looks like they still have the free version of Sketchup Make 2017 available |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | For more permanent or outdoor exhibits, I have been using Dibond lately. It's a lightweight aluminum material with a plastic core. You can wrap adhesive vinyl around it, or if you have a printer who can |

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| | do it, they can print directly to it. It comes in different colors, but I've mostly used white so far. They have metallics as well. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | We're almost done here, folks. Any last questions? Favorite exhibit tool, Scott? I love VHB tape. And French cleats. |
| Jan | VHB tape??? |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | very high bond tape. it's super sticky. don't use it on any objects! :) |
| Sue Deyoe | I am a gigantic fan of french cleats...thank god for a husband that is a woodworker! I am going to do more with them in the future. |
| Scott Bartlett | Hmm. I do love my gaffer's tape. Mostly for hiding things in the rafters and the white stuff can hide cords on walls. Peels off easy with no residue |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Good one. I'll add that to my exhibit toolbox. |
| Jan | I used to love my gaffer's tape but now my boyfriend always steals it to use on his gillnetter! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Ha! |
| Scott Bartlett | D'oh! |
| Jan | Note: gaffer's tape + contact cement = great fix for leaky waders |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Great tip, Jan! |
| Sue Deyoe | Thanks for the awesome idea Jan! small holes in xtra tuffs...arggh. |
| Scott Bartlett | Oh, I also love a laser level! Really great when you have a series of same-sized pieces to hang, or a "tiled" installation |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Yes! |
| Jan | For Xtratufs I use contact cement plus the cuff of an old orange fishing glove. Watertight and eye-catching. |

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| Scott Bartlett | I recently hung 49 individual 16" square cast paper pieces in a grid, 7 x 7. Never would've tried without a laser level, but it's easy-peasy with one. |
| Jan | I have a metal yard stick with sliding "levels" and gradations that start at the middle. It is fabulous for finding centers, hanging things evenly at regular intervals, etc. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | I love it. I want to do an exhibit about all the creative ways Alaskans have to fix things. We'll call it "Jerry Rigged" |
| Sue Deyoe | You beat me to it Sarah. New museum exhibit...cars, boats, bunny boots, xtratuffs... |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Great one, Jan. |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Let's do it, Sue! We can travel it around the state and people can add to it as it goes from museum to museum (to mall to library to community center...) |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | OK, I've got a lunch date. Gotta run. Thanks for all the good questions everyone! |
| Scott Bartlett | That could be a big exhibit by the end! |
| Jan | Thanks, everyone! |
| Scott Bartlett | Thanks all for the good questions and chat! |
| Sarah Asper-Smith | Thanks for hosting, Amy. |
| Amy Carney | No problem! Thanks for chatting! |
| Scott Bartlett | Thanks, Amy! |
