Call for contributions

'Interpreting the Information Age': new avenues for research and display

**November 3rd – 5th 2014
Science Museum, London**

In autumn 2014, the Science Museum will open a new permanent gallery, *Information Age*. The gallery will expose, examine and celebrate how information and communication technologies have transformed our lives over the last 200 years. To mark this launch, the Museum is hosting a three day conference which will discuss how the history and material culture of information can be made relevant for today's audiences.

From the development of global telegraph and computer networks, the creation of constellations of satellites that silently orbit our earth, and the growth of radio, telephony and cellular networks; each technology can be understood through a network of people, practices, devices and infrastructure. Approaches which focus on overly technical histories, individual innovation or inevitable progress fail to acknowledge the role of users in the history of technologies and marginalise a majority of readers or visitors who are engaged by human stories and social history. By contrast, *Information Age* has taken a user-centric approach, not only in the stories and objects selected for display, but in the way the gallery has been designed and developed. Participation with a diverse range of audiences has been at the heart of the process, providing new avenues for research, fresh perspectives on our collections and original ways to interpret the information networks of which we are all part. We invite papers that include insights from researchers, academics, museum professionals, community partners and participants.

The conference structure is proposed to include:

Day 1: New avenues in the history of information and communication technologies

Day 2: Interpreting and displaying the history of information and communication technologies

Day 3: Reflections on the process and practicalities of participatory practice

We are especially interested in papers that address the following themes, but are happy to consider other proposals. Please contact the organisers for guidance.

New avenues in the history of information and communication technologies

- From devices to networks: taking a broader approach to the history of information and communication. How has historical analysis expanded our understanding of information networks as inherently social-cultural phenomena? How can museums move beyond displays of devices, to reveal how networks unite people, places and ideas?

- User-driven innovation: technological change does not only occur at the moment of invention, but in the hands of users, who adapt and appropriate new technologies. What tools and techniques can we use to reveal previously hidden user stories?
- Spaces and places of information: How are institutions celebrating the local and global stories in the history of information and communication technology? What partnerships are being formed to support this?

Interpreting and displaying the history of information and communication technologies

- Collecting information: what are the challenges of collecting the material culture of information and communication? How can opening collecting processes to wider audiences enhance understanding, and what are the benefits for both researchers and the wider public?
- Displaying information: innovative approaches to the history, present or future of information and communication technologies.
- Preserving information: the challenges for museums, libraries and archives in preserving our increasingly digital lives.
- Whose story? As institutions strive to tell the story of information and communication technologies from the perspective of users and co-producers, how can we ensure that we are representing a diverse range of voices?

Reflections on the process and practicalities of participatory practice

- Breaking down barriers: what approaches are being taken to ensure museum collections are accessible to wider audiences? What interpretation approaches can be adopted?
- Collaborative interpretation and design: how are institutions and audiences working together in exhibition development? What are the benefits to the museum, participant and ultimately the gallery visitor? What are the perceived risks to the museum's authority?
- Ensuring legacy: how do museums capture the process of participatory practice in a meaningful way? What evaluation methodologies can be adopted? How can museums support partners and participants in the longer-term?

How to contribute

To submit a proposal, please send a 250 abstract outlining the topic of your paper, along with a 100 word biography, to research@sciencemuseum.ac.uk by Friday 28th March 2014.

We welcome proposals which could be delivered either as paper presentations or for consideration as panel discussions with other contributors, along with proposals for workshops which practically address the conference themes.