

## Working with Multimedia

Interpretive multimedia installations can range from a single interactive touch-screen kiosk to a totally integrated information environment with technology at its core. But what are the advantages and pitfalls of using interactive multimedia as part of your interpretive programme?

### Advantages

- Multimedia allows an object to be presented within a much wider context – beyond chronology, function and so on – than is possible with traditional display material.
- Well-designed multimedia encourages learning. It involves and focuses the user, resulting in greater attention and better retention of information.
- Video footage and animated material demonstrate actions and processes far more expressively than static diagrams can.
- Database-driven multimedia can allow access to a whole museum archive, rather than that portion of it on display. And it can dynamically reflect a changing archive.
- 3D representations allow the user unrestricted access to manipulate and examine rare and fragile artefacts in detail, while virtual reconstructions, simulations and fly-throughs can bring historic sites and objects to life, or allow the user access to closed areas.
- Digital multimedia content can be repurposed for use on websites and retail CD-ROMS, producing revenue and creating a wider audience for the material.

### Pitfalls

- Development and hardware costs can be high.
- Once installation is complete, everyday operation will invariably fall to museum or gallery staff, who may not have relevant prior experience.
- Underspecified hardware can make the user experience painfully slow, while poorly designed, difficult to navigate content can lead to user indifference.
- Depending on an application's design, visitor flow problems can arise, with users monopolising kiosks for long periods of time.
- Multimedia kiosks can often attract noisy groups, who can distract from an otherwise calm environment. Inappropriate use of sound within an application can also be intrusive.

- Both content and hardware are likely to require on-going maintenance, while hardware malfunction will render the system useless until an engineer can call or a replacement unit be located.

George Neill, Moriarti Design & Marketing. Tel 0131 620 8040

“I can remember the exact instant when I realised that a large part of my life from then on was going to be spent finding mistakes in my own programmes”

Marurice Wilks discovers de-bugging, 1949