

# MCN Chicago 2007: Museum Directors and IT Professionals – Survey Results

## MCN Chicago 2007: Directors and IT Professionals Wednesday, November 7th – 3:45-5:15

Facilitator: Nik Honeysett Head of Administration, J. Paul Getty Museum

Participants: James Cuno Director, Art Institute of Chicago  
Sam Quigley Vice President for Collections Management, Imaging, & Information Technology/Museum CIO, Art Institute of Chicago  
Janice Klein Director, Mitchell Museum of the American Indian  
John Dodge Project Manager, Mitchell Museum of the American Indian

The crux of this session is how to establish or maintain a healthy, mutually beneficial and productive relationship between Museum Leaders and IT Professionals.

A survey intended to inform the session was sent out to the MCN listserv and AAM's Media & Technology listserv during the month of September - it received a healthy 63 responses. The results of the survey will be available at the Musematic website (<http://musematic.net/?p=279>) after the session, along with notes from the discussion.

The responses to one of the survey questions are particularly revealing: *"Use one word to summarize the relationship that exists between any technology staff and the rest of your institution"*. Depressingly, twice as many negative as positive responses were received:

Positive	Negative	
Supportive	Suspicion	Distant
Team	Needy	Disrespectful
Healthy	Dependent	Reactive
Polite	Dysfunctional	Tense
Respectable	Slave	Wary
Trust	Imbalance	Cautious
Collegial	Fascist	Unease
Respectful	Muddled	Distrustful
Harmonious	Mystified	Miscommunication
Good	Adversarial	Tetchy
Mentoring	Expectant	Overtaxed
Enabling	Wary	Needy
Fledgling	Difficult	Unclear
Amiable	Cautious	Staff?
Cordial	Undefined	High-schooler
	Labored	

The discussion will be informed by the following questions and statements, paraphrased from two survey questions: *"Is there one question or statement that you would like to ask or make to the Museum Director community?"* and *"Is there one question or statement that you would like to ask or make to the Museum Technology community?"*

### Directed to Museum Directors

- What does Technology mean to you?
- What is the role of technology in your institution? Is it a necessary evil, is it integral or is it disparate?
- How does Technology fit into your strategic planning?

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- How do you need technical information presented to you in order to make an informed decision about technology?
- What criteria are you using to make a technology-related decision?
- What do you or should you expect from your IT staff - should they speak when spoken to or push their agenda?

Paraphrasing survey responses finds that IT Professionals are:

- Excluded from planning initiatives
- Concerned that the IT voice in their institution is not represented at the Executive level
- Concerned that IT does not factor into the vision of the institution
- Frustrated that their opinions are sought but then ignored or minimized
- Not trusted by senior management
- Frustrated that they only receive short-term funding so can't make strategic long-term plans for a healthy and sustainable IT environment
- Concerned that the longer Museums ignore technology the less relevant the institution will become
- Concerned that inappropriately skilled personnel in technical positions are making technology decisions
- Concerned that Museums see them only as the helpdesk and not valid partners in strategic thinking

### Directed to Museum IT Professionals

- What processes or methods do you use to get executive support for a Technology project?
- What and how do you need information from senior management in order to present a Technology project?
- How can senior management help you succeed in your job and your program of work?
- How do you successfully build support for technology initiatives?

Paraphrasing the responses finds that IT Professionals:

- Don't understand what Museums are about
- Place too much importance on technology itself rather than thinking of it as an enabler
- Don't recognize what they do is a 'service' to museum professional staff and the institution
- Are too defensive
- Don't do a good enough job of educating non-IT staff about IT
- Assume that non-technical staff have no interest or can't understand technology
- Talk down to non-IT professionals
- Don't present user-friendly solutions
- Don't speak English
- Are constantly performing upgrades

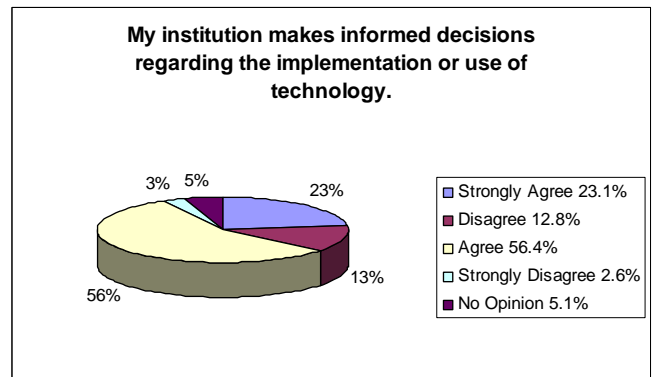
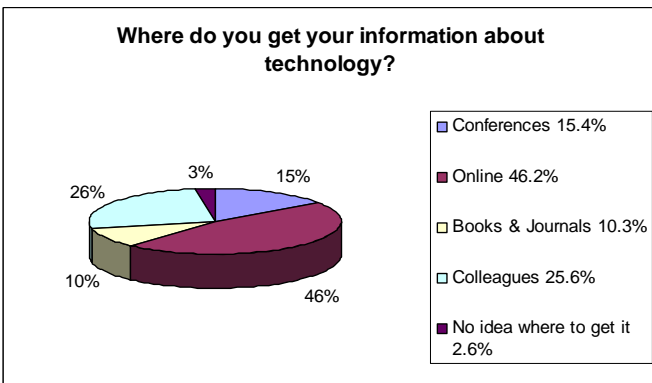
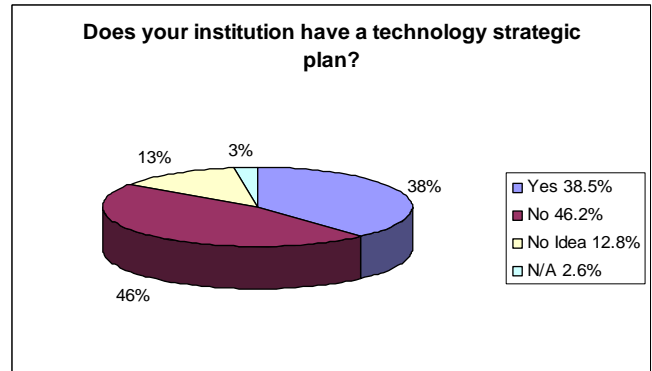
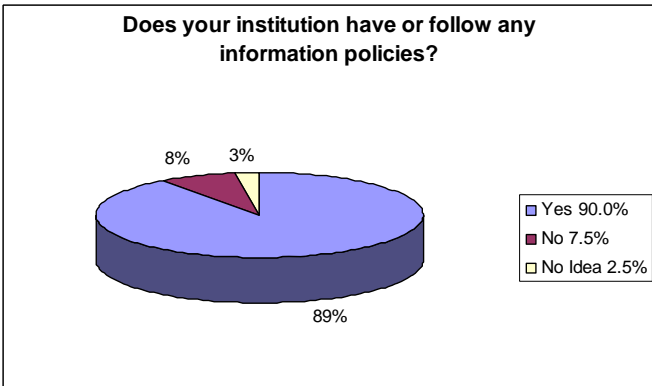
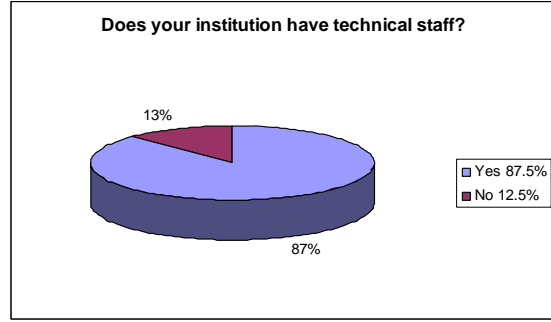
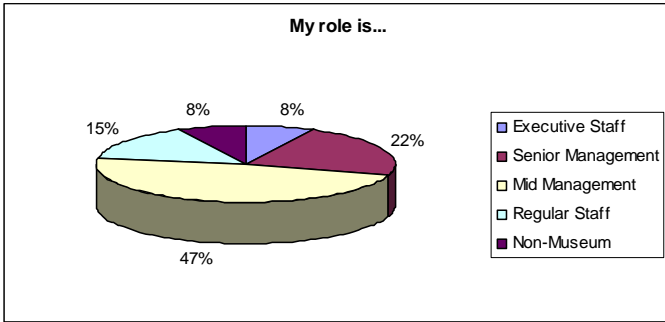
There was one statement from the responses that sums up exactly what we need to address with this session, referring to technology people in this executive's museum...

*"I don't know what they do and they don't know why I make the decisions I make in regards to technology"*

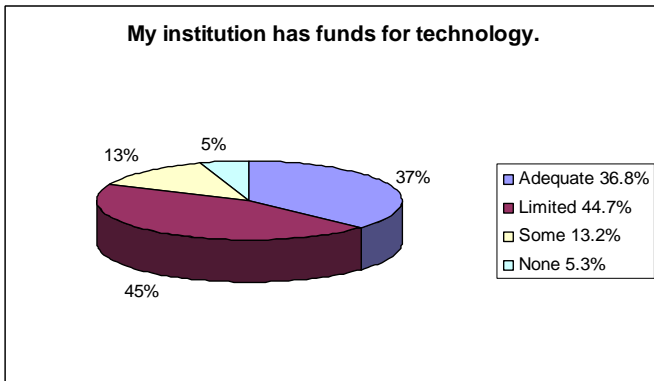
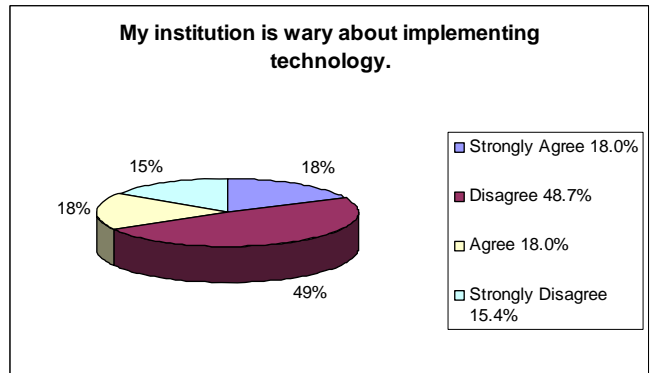
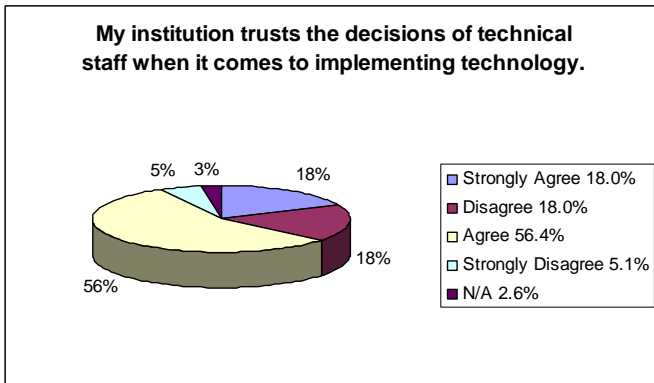
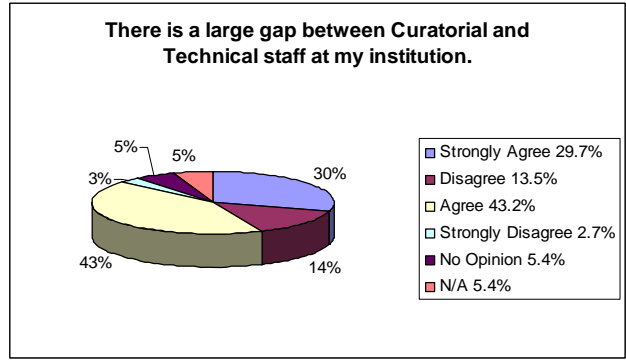
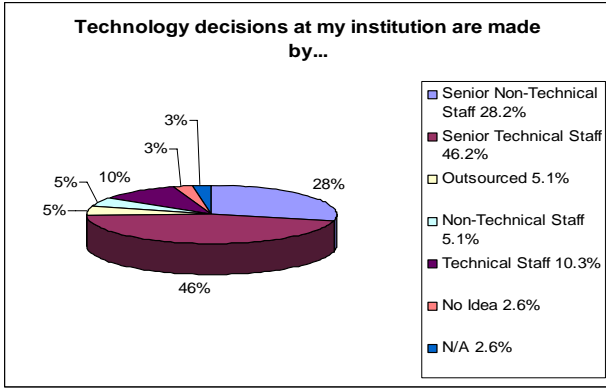
- Museum Executive

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## Survey Responses in Full



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12) Use one word to summarize the relationship that exists between any technology staff and the rest of your institution:

- |                  |                   |                      |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1) Suspicion     | 17) Fledgling     | 33) Unclear          |
| 2) Needy         | 18) Amiable       | 34) Harmonious       |
| 3) Dependent     | 19) Respectable   | 35) Reactive         |
| 4) Dysfunctional | 20) Trust         | 36) Tense            |
| 5) Mentoring     | 21) Adversarial   | 37) Wary             |
| 6) Slave         | 22) Expectant     | 38) Cautious         |
| 7) Supportive    | 23) Wary          | 39) Unease           |
| 8) Imbalance     | 24) Staff?        | 40) Distrustful      |
| 9) Undefined     | 25) Difficult     | 41) Miscommunication |
| 10) Enabling     | 26) Cordial       | 42) Cordial          |
| 11) Fascist      | 27) Cautious      | 43) Tetchy           |
| 12) Muddled      | 28) Labored       | 44) Distance         |
| 13) Mystified    | 29) Distant       | 45) Overtaxed        |
| 14) Team         | 30) Collegial     | 46) Needy            |
| 15) Healthy      | 31) Respectful    | 47) High-schooler    |
| 16) Polite       | 32) Disrespectful | 48) Good             |

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### 13) Is there one question or statement that you would like to ask or make to the Museum Director community?

- 1) Think strategically around technology
- 2) The head of the IT Department should report directly to the Museum Director
- 3) Is collaboration between similar institutions on technology projects a good thing, or should institutions strive to out-do each other technically?
- 4) Why hire experts and then ignore their recommendations?
- 5) Technical staff needs to be integrated into planning at an earlier stage.
- 6) Does your thinking about technology take into account the variety of needs, interests and learning styles of your staff?
- 7) Is “technology” a significant part of the museum vision – and that is to enable collection management, to digitize and enable access to the collection and finally to act as glue in Education to reach the public audience in new ways? If so, support technical planning appropriately (staff, funding, communication), and embrace it appropriately with your support.
- 8) It is important that technology decisions are made consensually in the organization, rather than any one group dictating how IT moves forward.
- 9) There is too much influence and focus on IT issues placed on museum management that core museum processes are being performed inefficiently, just for the sake of IT systems. Museum professionals should be the drivers in policy, with IT providing the support to make that happen.
- 10) In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of having collections information available to digital networks?
- 11) Don't limit your uses of technology to just IT implementations – concentrate on experiences and then build solutions to match.
- 12) How are others using Second Life, (or such digital interactions), to put their museums out there?
- 13) The use of technology will insure museums remain intact.
- 14) What are you doing to ensure that your institution takes advantage of the emerging but high risk opportunities in technology?
- 15) Stay informed and hire someone you trust.
- 16) Please plan technology strategically. Short-funding technology means your technology assets will suffer in the long-run, ensuring that the costs spent today will not give a good ROI.
- 17) Museums that have a strong technology program in support of the collection appear to play a more vital role in the world – using real examples to connect past with present; theories with actions.
- 18) Put your IT Directors on Senior Staff.
- 19) Help us improve Museum technology to enhance the visitor experience.

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- 20) If the IT department and the collections/ curatorial staff were mandated to understand each other's needs and points of view, (as opposed to being solely focused on their respective departmental needs), the potential for strengthening the museum's overall efficiency would be greatly increased. The efficacy of staff who are responding to this need on their own initiative have very limited success in implementing change without buy-in from upper management.
- 21) Get more involved in the strategic planning around technology so as to be aware of its potential impact on core institutional mission aspirations.
- 22) Stop being afraid – it will be okay.
- 23) Make technology planning strategic and represented at the senior management table.
- 24) Technology seems to be moving ever faster, it is too expensive and difficult to keep up
- 25) Curatorial work is important, and requires investment in adequate technology
- 26) Why isn't there a strategic long term plan for technology?
- 27) Don't be afraid to ask someone or look it up, it can be quite helpful to ask questions and receive instruction.
- 28) For most of the staff, IT just means help desk. Our staff is very satisfied with the level of service offered by the IT help desk. At the senior level, technology is less understood. Things like change management, content management, and training need constant championing and explaining.
- 29) A non-technical person oversees the IT staff. Department quality has suffered and there is a lack of trust and sense of unease between the institutional staff and the technology staff.

### **14) Is there one question or statement that you would like to ask or make to the Museum Technology community?**

- 1) What percentage of you are frustrated with vendor support for software products or projects that you use in your institution?
- 2) Does your thinking about technology take into account the variety of needs, interests and learning styles of your staff?
- 3) Do you understand what Museums are about? It is not technology that is important but it is an enabler for what is important.
- 4) What is the role of museum professionals as technology project managers/coordinators/liaisons between outsourced technology consultants and senior museum staff?
- 5) Part of your role is to educate and build bridges with staff who do not have your background or education, not unlike what the curatorial staff may need to do with members of the public or the Board of Directors.

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- 6) More attention should be put on 'service' to museum professionals, providing support for 'their' job to be performed as efficiently as possible.
- 7) How strongly should we be advocating the use of open source tools?
- 8) Think outside of your usual comfort zones. See and do things that push you beyond your limits, even if your resources are incredibly finite.
- 9) Push your agenda
- 10) Don't be defensive
- 11) It's very important to involve the scholars and other staff in technology plans/execution and show ways you have truly heard them when implementing new technology.
- 12) Don't assume that non-technical staff have no interest in or intelligence about technology; treat them as if they were just as smart as you are.
- 13) Help us improve Museum technology to enhance the visitor experience.
- 14) I strongly wish you would designate and train one person on the technology staff to work with day-to-day user needs vs. only servicing the needs of the Network. Outsourcing is not always the best answer.
- 15) Position yourself with respect to non-technical staff as both partners and experts in the process of selecting, developing and implementing technical systems.
- 16) Just because someone doesn't speak your language, doesn't mean they're stupid.
- 17) Why do upgrades have to happen so frequently?
- 18) Small museums with limited funds really need user friendly solutions. I often wonder how to get my IT people to speak English and leave out the jargon, especially since I don't have the time or resources to keep coming back for advice and help.
- 19) With technology always changing how can small or mid -sized under-funded museums develop and implement a intelligent plan rather than the current system of patches and ad hoc growth?
- 20) Speak our language
- 21) Pay attention to each other's needs and work together to find solutions! It can be done!
- 22) Why must you object to anything that isn't made by Microsoft?