Sotheby's EST. 1744 Museum Network

A Digital Passport to the Arts

In three months, Sotheby's expanded its online Museum Network site from a video-centric experience to include several content formats such as articles, events, calendars and image galleries.

Sotheby's is a leading broker of art, jewelry, real estate and collectibles, and is known globally for its fine art auctions and private sales. The company has been uniting collectors with works of art for more than 250 years.

Sotheby's desired to offer a digital "passport to the arts" to stakeholders by delivering a rich, online showcase of the world's best exhibitions, collections, videos and stories from hundreds of museums across the globe. Thus, the idea of the Sotheby's Museum Network was born.

Sotheby's launched its second iteration of the Museum Network on Brightspot. This launch was the kick-off to several additional digital initiatives supporting Sotheby's most important revenue streams, as Sotheby's forward-looking team dives into an exciting digital transformation.

Sotheby's Challenge

Sotheby's first launched its Museum Network as a video-centric site via Adobe Experience Manager. Though Sotheby's videos were generating high engagement, its digital team wanted to deliver a richer, more engaging experience for fine art and history enthusiasts by adding articles, still photographs and event calendars.

After struggling to onboard its team and leverage AEM for its non-video content, in addition to the decision to shift its goals, the digital team decided to search for a new CMS that could support additional content types, push content out faster, and engage users on mobile and desktop platforms. Sotheby's evaluated and chose Brightspot as the new CMS for the Museum Network. Sotheby's also contracted Perfect Sense's development and design experts for help with the project.

"We didn't have a fully fleshed-out series of mockups for the site when we started engaging with Perfect Sense," said Jonathan Pytell, Sotheby's Vice President and Director of Digital Product. "We were under time pressure to get something live that represented a high quality user experience, which is often a recipe for trouble. That's one of the reasons why it was very important that we had a to have flexible technical partner and platform to work with."
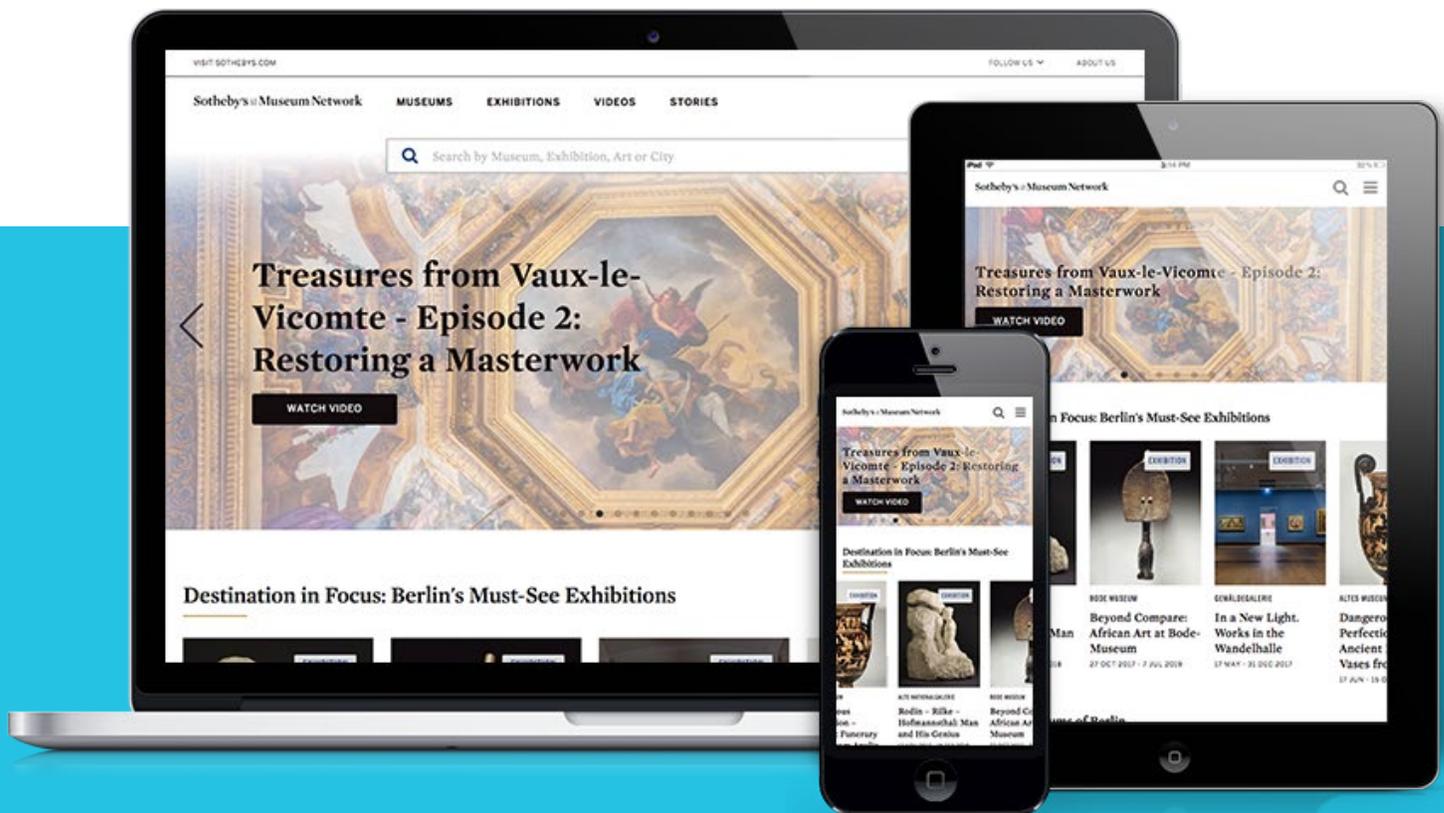
The Brightspot Solution

For Sotheby's, offering a digital "passport to the arts" required a platform that enabled the company to deliver a variety of rich, creative and innovative digital experiences to its audiences. Sotheby's found the platform in Brightspot and has leveraged it to:

- **Create and publish content faster**: Brightspot enables the Museum Network's editors and UX designers to quickly and easily publish articles, images, videos and descriptions of art and antiquities. To optimize the editorial process and publish content for multiple devices, Sotheby's uses Brightspot's editorial workflows and multi-channel distribution capabilities. The digital team also leverages Brightspot's personalization capabilities to tailor visitor experiences based on where they are located, or their personal content preferences.

- **Manage digital assets more efficiently**: Brightspot provides the Museum Network with powerful digital asset management features, which are integrated into the administrative functions of Sotheby's auction application. Sotheby's digital teams can access a broad set of content types, such as articles, video, and images for both desktop and mobile devices. These assets can also be organized by type, group or gallery, or tags (e.g. artist, artistic era, etc.). Brightspot's digital asset classification and metadata management allows for different perspectives on the relationships among the Museum Network's thousands of artifacts.

- **Find and discover digital assets more quickly**: Brightspot's powerful search functionality has a flexible data model, which can accommodate a broad set of content types, and manage taxonomical relationships. Site administrators can easily search for and find art and antiquity content based upon the content's metadata, descriptions and related images. Additionally, related pieces of art can be linked by attributes such as the artists that created them, the museum where they are located and exhibitions where they are featured. These relationships are tracked internally at Sotheby's, and they're well known by museum curators and art lovers.

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Business Impact

Since implementing Brightspot, Pytell noted the Museum Network's increased user engagement. Visitors spend more time on the Museum Network website than the first iteration of the site, and they've found the site through "side door" indexed pages which are rich with text, images and videos. The improved visitor experience and navigation helps to retain visitors on the site longer.

Since Sotheby's had an aggressive timetable to roll out the next iteration of the website, Pytell said they took a "start finished, then customize" strategy. Instead of waiting until all site functionality and content was complete, they relaunched their website with a long-term vision of continuous enhancements over time.

Additionally, Brightspot has enabled Sotheby's product team to improve their existing agile methodologies, and its editorial team can get content approved and published rapidly, when it's relevant and in demand. Similarly to bidding on a piece of art at auction, Sotheby's knows it must stay ahead of the competition and, as Pytell described it, know when to "double down on what's working, and walk away from what's not, as quickly as possible."

Conclusion

The Museum Network website delivers a highly engaging user experience with vivid images, powerful search, compelling stories and engaging videos. Sotheby's has created a digital experience that mimics the finest galleries and museums in the world with beautiful imagery and mesmerizing video that captivates interest to browse longer and return often.

The Museum Network launch is the first in several Brightspot-based initiatives for Sotheby's. Future initiatives will include projects that will increase lead generation, enable single sign-on and offer direct sales of wine, and other retail experiences. Sotheby's head-first dive into digital transformation with the Museum Network will not only offer art and artifact lovers a "passport to the arts," but richer digital experiences for all of Sotheby's audiences in the future.

LACMA Reimagined: Vera Lutter's Transformative Photographs

Earlier this year, LACMA engaged artist Vera Lutter – through a commission sponsored by Sotheby's – to create a series of works using camera obscura, her signature technique. Her large-scale photographs depict two-dimensional works from the permanent collection and memorialize the museum's original buildings, three of which are scheduled to be replaced in the near future.