



# Digital Strategies for Heritage (DISH) 2013

2 & 3 December 2013, De Doelen, Rotterdam

## Workshop report

**Hosts:** Aaron Straup Cope & Lotte Meijer

**Title:** Lessons Learned from the in-house Lab

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### Introduction

Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution (New York, U.S.A.)

The Cooper-Hewitt has an in-house lab that experiments with linking the museum's collection to audiences, both online and offline. What can we learn from their success, and adapt this to the reality of smaller heritage organisations to encourage experimentation, new thoughts and iterative development?

With Aaron Straup Cope (Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum), and Lotte Meijer (interactive producer and interaction designer, Boijmans van Beunigen, MoMa, Exploratorium).

### Discussion

What is an In-house Lab & what does it mean for your organization?

We are going to find out over the next 2 hours.

What kinda people work there, what do they do & what will the audiences see of LABS?

The audience is a mix of people from libraries, archives, museums & software companies

Aaron starts, you can connect with

<https://pinboard.in>

/u:straup

/t:museums-and-the-network/

@lottemeijer

@thisaaronland

Labs in museumsetting are .... at least 3 things

R&D, experimenting,

But connected to long-term and implementing it in the organization.

Labs vs Projects (more short-term)

Beeld&Geluid en Naturalis have Labs.

This means also the code is now made in-house & is owned by the organization (Naturalis)

Cost-effective, rapid prototyping, code is owned by organization are considered a PRO.

KB also has a lab, is used to convince the operational people that new services are an improvement.

### Kinds of Labs

- Labs of the Indianapolis Museum of Art Client-services model  
they provide services to other museums, like Artbabble.  
Businessmodel & technological development.

- Lab as a wedge/dodge  
Special secret lab more or less outside the organization.  
NYPL Lab, eg. [buildinginspector.nypl.org](http://buildinginspector.nypl.org)  
Large digital collections & crowdsourcing. But how to transition the lab into the organization?  
Lab as a wedge has a setback that it is somewhat disconnected of the organization.

### Running a Labs

The question is: Do you talk for the museum or the Labs. Aaron answers: I work for the Museum.

The journey vs the destination. The destination is the more important, says Aaron as he gives away the punchline.

Labs is giving freedom to manoeuvre, but it is not a free ride!!!!  
Things can fail, but learn from it and document it.

[curatorialpoetry.tumblr.com](http://curatorialpoetry.tumblr.com) is presented  
The metadata at Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum is terribly, so they turned it into a  
"Curatorial Poetry" Tumblr & twitterfeed.

[collection.cooperhewitt.org](http://collection.cooperhewitt.org) - the collection database.

figure out way to make the collection approachable, the metadata is not helping.  
But how can the audience help/interact??

Inhouse labs vs cross-institutional labs. Question from the audience.  
If you share resources, from different organizations & discipline this would be more powerful is the remark.  
In the UK this is a more common model, but the setback is that the organizations do not have inhouse knowledge & the distance between the Labs & organizations.

### How to make a Labs Thrive?

A question of money. Museums & the LABS are always chronically understaffed. How to bind IT-staff?

Aaron doesn't believe in cross-institutional, every museum is a "special flower".  
Think in small projects instead of cross-institutional large projects.

Audience asks what is the purpose?

Preservation without access is not preservation anymore, internet has changed this.  
First the collections online & then build services on top of the collections.

NYPL Labs Building Inspector - 6 months shapedetection (rectangular shapedetection).

Selling Labs internally in the organization: short timespan & cool code & atomizing the problem & cool public presentation "kill time, make history"

NYPL Labs has a luxury of a large staff & public loves maps, many labsproject focus on Maps.

The advice for LABS is always think about how to make people in- & outside your organization fall in love with your collections.

The question how to incorporate LABS & projects into the Organization is again put on the table.

How to guarantee online presentation & URL's for the longterm

collection.cooperhewitt.org/concordances, is building authority files.

LABS should recognize the hard problems, but also avoid the quicksand and don't get STUCK!!!!  
Microsites no problem if they link back to the page of the object. You can never imagine all the scenarios an object will be used. Canonical pages for objects.

API is a serviceslayer on top of the museum. TMS is a major quicksand environment.  
The collection management system is "the source of truth", but inflexible. Many museums, export from CMS into web-friendly environment & when it is good, also import. Museum need to know what systems does what & where data lives. Blackbox-systems are a threat. CHIM-services will become big, says Aaron. "Here is how you get a title get back into the CMS" just a simple webservice.

Prototyping is a great feature of LABS. Trust & cooperation between staff is key for success.  
No third-party services have been build on top of the CooperHewitt-API.

Lotte shows the app of Berber de Vries. Ipad app for museumtours. Not many open API have thirdparty services/apps build on top of the API.  
Hackathons do not land into the organization, is the experience of B&G.

How to get tech people interactive with the API's? How to bind hackers to collections.  
How can museums make it easy for thirdparty persons?

Check out MicahWalter's talk at MCN.  
Check out the blog: Labs.cooperhewitt.org

Lotte shows the Boijmans Tour [tour.boijmans.nl](http://tour.boijmans.nl).  
A lot of feedback came from the audience, the curators are surprised and are taking the feedback into the way they present information for the public.  
Curators are very responsive.

Are you in the business of making institutions more human? You can make mistakes & be playful?

Why are we keeping all these collections if we do not relate with it?

The LABS are not a wedge but are making tools to make collections accessible & make people relate.  
The infrastructure & services are there.

Let go out & make great stuff.

And for more info Check out [Muse-Tech-central](#)