

# Dos and don'ts on Facebook across museums

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<https://www.facebook.com/smk>  
<https://www.facebook.com/nationalmuseet>  
<https://www.facebook.com/experimentarium>

*Abstract: Few museums on Facebook succeed in generating engaging content that creates awareness. We often choose to promote events and exhibitions rather than engage in conversations. However, success on Facebook is not achieved using the social medium as just another marketing platform.*

*Based on a comparative analysis of three very different museums, all with different audiences and communicative purposes, we present a best practice for museums on Facebook.*

*Analysing the Facebook pages of an art museum (SMK – the National Gallery of Denmark), a history museum (the National Museum of Denmark) and a scientific museum (Experimentarium), it becomes possible to sum up dos and don'ts for museums in general on Facebook. The paper will provide useful advice for the everyday work with Facebook, such as when to post an update, how to make an engaging post and how to acquire the attention of an ever more demanding audience.*

*For all three museums, being on Facebook is about engaging the audience around quality content, that interests them – and in the end let the audience themselves communicate our culture, heritage and the knowledge generated by museums, out to an even larger audience.*

Keywords: Facebook, engaging content, dos and don'ts, comparing museum types, social media

## Defining Facebook

There are different opinions and definitions on what constitutes a social network site. In this paper, Facebook is understood as a social network site such as described by boyd and Ellison in their newly revised definition:

A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site. (boyd & Ellison 2013)

According to danah boyd, we primarily use the internet as a mean of obtaining information and as a way of communicating (2008, 1). As Bjarki Valtýsson concluded after interviewing young Danes on their use of Facebook, the social network site is particularly used as a mean of communication: "*All of them mention communication as being the prime reason for being on Facebook, particularly maintaining friendships (none of them mention acquiring friendships), organising practical matters, networking, and to look at pictures*" (2012, 86). In accordance with Valtýsson, Jakob Linde Jensen emphasizes the use of Facebook as a platform for social network creation (sociality), but also underscores how Facebook is used for personal presentation (identity) (2009, 98). Hence, getting a Facebook page as a museum means entering a social space used mainly for communication and the creation of identity.

## The three museums and their Facebook presences

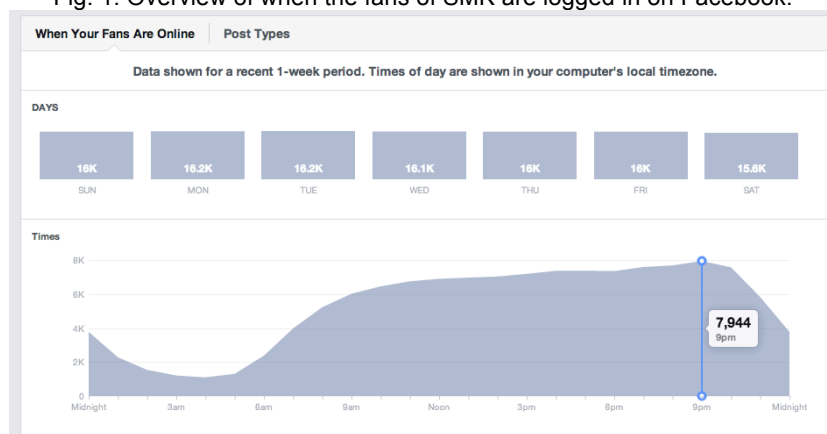
SMK is the National Gallery of Art in Denmark, the National Museum of Denmark is Denmark's biggest cultural history museum (a conglomerate of several museums and ships) and Experimentarium is a scientific museum known for its interactive exhibitions.

SMK has 18,573 fans, the National Museum has 11,081 and Experimentarium 7,712 (based on 9 October 2013).

The three museums have different traditions, target groups and business models, but all three joined Facebook in 2008 and have since experimented with their presence on this social network site.

When comparing the three Facebook pages, one of the common traits is that all fans of the pages check their Facebook profiles fairly regularly, distributed throughout the day. However, most fans are logged in on Facebook at 9 p.m., thereby becoming the best time to schedule posts.

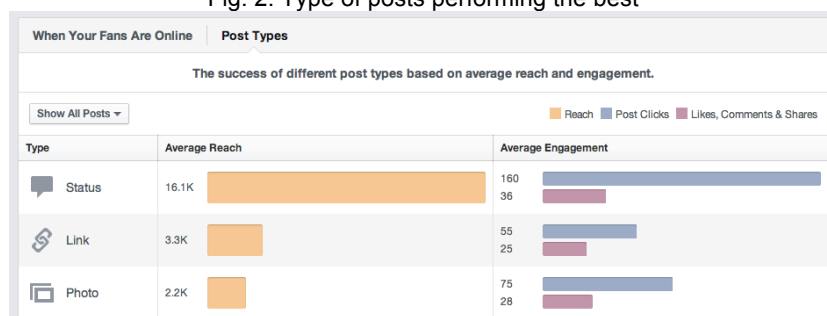
Fig. 1. Overview of when the fans of SMK are logged in on Facebook.



*Facebook Insights. The graph is the exact same shape as for the National Museum and Experimentarium, even though the fans do not share demographics such as age.*

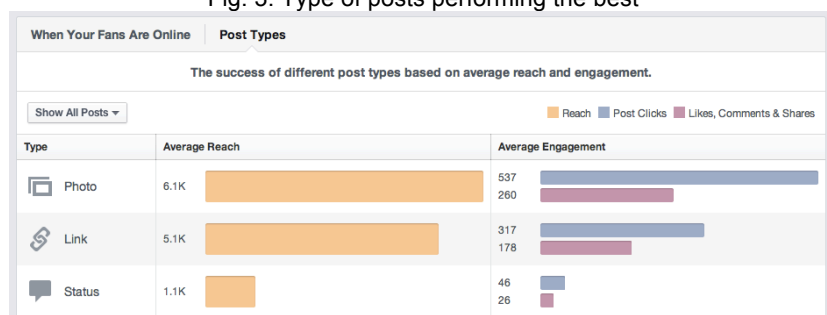
While the three museums are comparatively even in this aspect, they differ considerably when it comes to which type of updates work best for them. For Experimentarium, text-updates perform better than updates that include images and links. In contrast to this, both the National Museum of Denmark and SMK perform best with updates with images followed by links.

Fig. 2. Type of posts performing the best



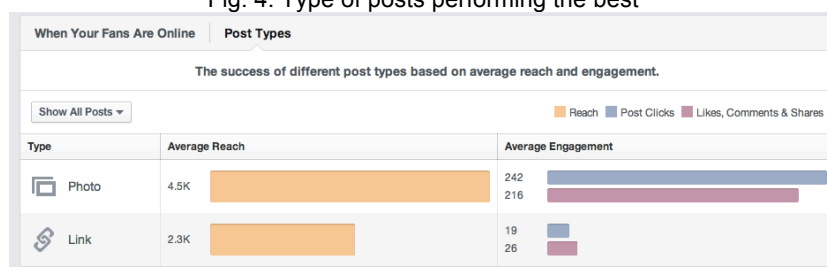
*Facebook Insights: Status updates is the type of post performing the best at Experimentarium's page.*

Fig. 3. Type of posts performing the best



*Facebook Insights: Photo and link posts are performing the best at the National Museum's page.*

Fig. 4. Type of posts performing the best



*Facebook Insights: Photos is the type of post performing the best at SMK's page.*

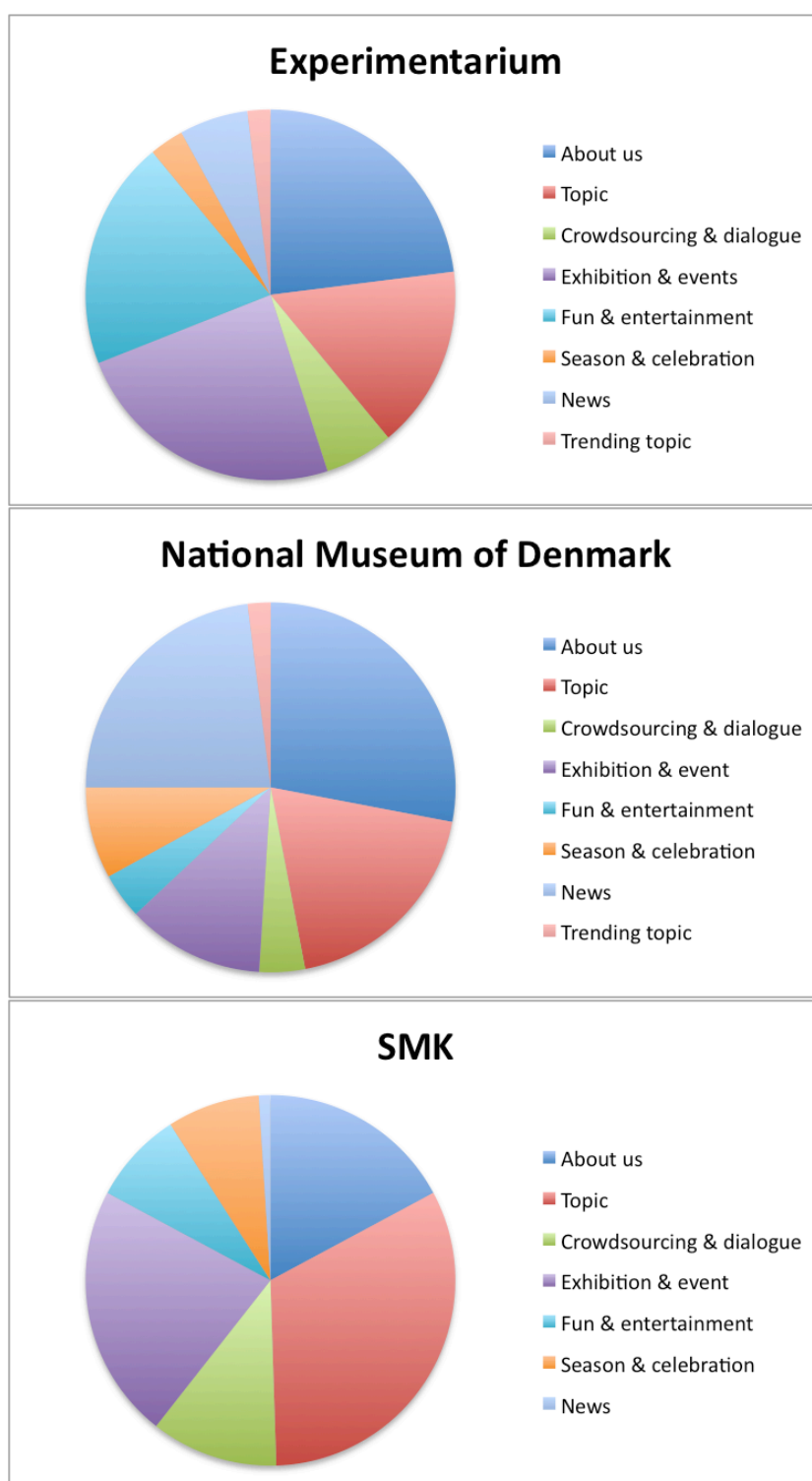
However it is not enough simply to say “just make a text-update or use a picture, then you will have a great status update!”, especially not, when what works best for the three museums is so different. We have therefore analysed more deeply, what content works on Facebook across the three museums.

### How did we compare presences on Facebook?

To analyse the three Facebook pages we gathered all the updates from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013 through Facebook Insights. With Facebook Insights we pulled a list from each museum with the posts throughout the year, which showed the content of every update. After this we systematically went through all the posts and gathered them in overall categories ending up with the following categories:

- **About us** (news about the museum or employees)
- **Topic** (a relevant topic for the museum)
- **Crowdsourcing and dialogue** (questions, ideas to an exhibition etc. )
- **Exhibition and event** (experiences taking place at the museum)
- **Fun and entertainment** (humour)
- **Season and celebration** (can be planned ahead, e.g. celebrating Christmas)
- **News** (real news, discoveries, findings)
- **Trending topics** (unpredictable, can't be scheduled, what the world outside the museum is talking about)

Fig. 5. An overview showing which categories each museum has posted in the last year.



*All three museums use the categories “About us”, “Topic” and “Exhibition & Event” a lot.*

To compare which categories perform the best, we compared them on three parameters from Facebook Insights:

1. **Reach** (how many people have seen this post)
2. **Click on posts** (invisible interaction)
3. **Like/comment/share** (visible interaction)

The average reach, clicks and likes/comments/shares are shown in the table below. This has been calculated based on the pages' current number of fans (9 October 2013), even though the fan bases for all three museums have increased during the last year. Reach is the amount of people seeing your post in their newsfeed. Updates by Facebook-pages in average reach 16 percent of the fan base (Lemberg 2013). One's average can be increased by either getting the fans to interact with the updates (whether that be visible or invisible interaction), or by advertising. The average reach is affected by the amount of advertisement bought on Facebook. Both Experimentarium and the National Museum bought Facebook advertisement throughout the year, while SMK started advertising on Facebook only in September 2013.

Table 1. Average reach in percent within each category

Category	Experimentarium	National Museum of Denmark	SMK
About us	32,00%	32%	19%
Topic	31%	33%	25%
Crowdsourcing & dialogue	39%	29%	17%
Exhibition & event	33%	40%	22%
Fun & entertainment	30%	45%	31%
Season & celebration	47%	58%	32%
News	42%	60%	0,2%
Trending topic	44%	30%	0

Table 2. Average click on post in percent within each category

Category	Experimentarium	National Museum of Denmark	SMK
About us	5%	6%	14%
Topic	3%	8%	7%

Crowdsourcing & dialogue	4%	20%	7%
Exhibition & event	5%	5%	7%
Fun & entertainment	4%	10%	6%
Season & celebration	1%	6%	7%
News	2%	8%	185%
Trending topic	2%	8%	0

Table 3. Average like/share/comment in percent within each category

Category	Experimentarium	National Museum of Denmark	SMK
About us	1%	10%	4%
Topic	1%	3%	21%
Crowdsourcing & dialogue	1%	5%	4%
Exhibition & event	1%	4%	13%
Fun & entertainment	2%	3%	19%
Season & celebration	1%	5%	19%
News	1%	5%	109%
Trending topic	1%	4%	0

When comparing how well updates in the different categories do, it particularly jumps off the pages that updates in the category 'Season & celebration' get the highest average reach for all three museums. Experimentarium and the National Museum also have a common high average reach in the category 'News'. In the parameters 'Click on post' and 'Like/Comment/Share', we cannot draw a common line between the categories.

We then have to look at the specific content of the updates for each museum. To compare posts across museum types, we have chosen the three posts with the best and the worst performance from all three museums on the three parameters above. That gave us 18 posts for each parameter, 9 that performed extraordinarily well and 9 that performed unusually badly.

## Comparing posts: likes, comments & shares

### Let's celebrate and have fun!

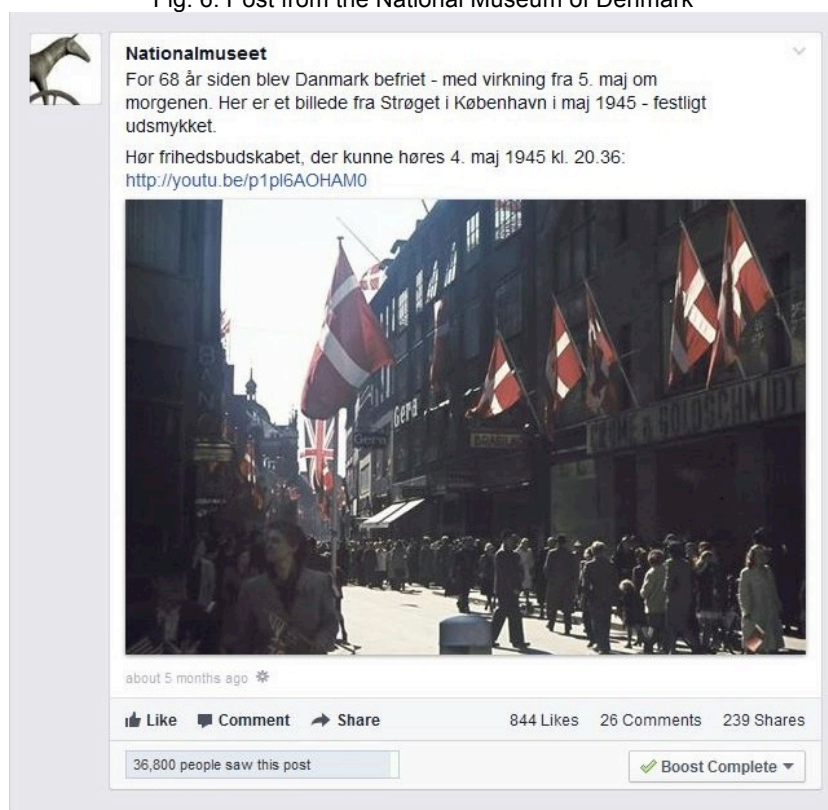
When we compare which three posts have the biggest engagement in likes, shares and comments, the posts with pictures without a link are the most popular. Furthermore, photo albums on Facebook have a high engagement. The more pictures in the album, the more content is there to engage with. Photo albums give each fan the possibility to like, share or comment more than one time in a single status update, and therefore photo albums are represented a couple of times in the nine compared posts.

It is often advised to keep updates short (between 100 and 250 characters) (Claveria, 2012; Cormier, 2013). We were therefore surprised to see that most of the updates are followed with a section of long text.

Three of the updates are in the category 'About us', which indicates that as long as the internal news is strong enough, the fans will interact. We will later return to updates about internal news. But the biggest trend we see for getting engagement is when there is some good news to share. It can be a celebration or a new finding for the museum. For example, Experimentarium had many likes and comments with congratulations when they celebrated the anniversary of the Director Asger Høeg, and the National Museum gets great response when they celebrate a National Day such as the annual celebration of the liberation of the country from German forces on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 (Fig. 6).

Hence, one of the updates with most likes, comments and shares was made by the National Museum on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2013 commemorating the celebration. It should be mentioned, that the Museum of Danish Resistance 1940-1945 (which is a part of the National Museum of Denmark) had burnt down a week before this day, so that the topic and the Facebook page already had great awareness. We can therefore conclude, that fans will interact if they feel empathy with great news, or we share a celebration nationally – especially if it is written in a happy tone.

Fig. 6. Post from the National Museum of Denmark



*Here the National Museum made an update about the liberation of Denmark after World War II in 1945, which was 68 years ago on 5th May 2013. The picture is the main message here. The photo is unusual because most of the images from World War II are in black and white.*

In addition, we see that pictures with humans have an impact. When talking about likes, comments and shares, humour and entertainment have high ratings. When something is fun, you don't have to take it seriously, which can make it easier to like or share it with your friends.

So if you hit the right kind of humour in your fan base, you can get far, because fans generally want to share the fun. We can also see that when you do not hit the humour, the post really performs badly.

Fig. 7. Post from Experimentarium



*Here Experimentarium has shared a video, where two young boys agree to be part of an experiment to feel the pain of giving birth on their own bodies. That produced a lot of reaction.*

Compared to Mark Hughes' 'six buttons of buzz' (2005, 29) the update in Fig. 7 hits the buttons 'taboo', 'unusual' and 'hilarious', because giving birth is not an everyday topic and is normally a personal subject, but also something most people recognize as painful. Furthermore, such experiments are not seen on an everyday basis, which makes it unusual.

#### How to make an engaging status update:

- Use pictures without a link
- Make an album of pictures which get fans to engage further
- Deliver some great news that fans feel empathic with or celebrate themselves
- Use humour in a relevant context

#### Why so serious?

When we look at the updates with the lowest engagement in likes, shares and comments, there are usually no pictures, but only a link. The fan has to click on the link to find out if he or she is interested in the content.

The status updates in this parameter have in common that the content is about heavy topics. Experimentarium writes about a lecture on alcohol and a live phone call between two astronauts, SMK writes about a new contemporary art exhibition consisting of a film full of decay and attacks on nature and an article about the Minister of Culture.



Fig. 8. Post from the National Museum of Denmark



*Here the National Museum links to a TV debate concerning a teacher lockout in a historical perspective. The post demands too much of the fans (watching a long TV show). It may have been better to write some of the points from the TV show and then add an image.*

The status update has to be informative and relevant on its own, so the fan gets value without having to go to another website. The rule is to explain the link's content without just linking to it. Some of the updates mostly belong on the intranet of the museum, because it is more an in-house news. If it reminds us of a press release about a cooperation of some sort, it is too boring to post on Facebook.

### How not to make an engaging status update

- Never write a post, which can't stand alone e.g. requires additional information
- Avoid heavy topics

### Comparing posts: clicks on post

#### Click to see all the details

Clicks on a post can occur for different reasons: There can be clicks on an image, a link, a 'read more' link, or to go back to the museum's Facebook page.

But what do our most clicked posts have in common? Most of the posts that perform well are posts with images. The images are the main message in the posts, and the posts are often about details in the images, that implicitly encourage people to click on the image to see the details closer. It can be SMK's image with details of small naked men in flowers, National Museum's ask for help with unknown churches or Experimentarium's image of the Crown Prince of Denmark.

Fig. 9. Post from the National Museum of Denmark



*Here the National Museum asks the fans to help solve a problem: Which church is this? The fans will have to look closer on the image to see the details and maybe solve a real problem for the National Museum.*

It is also noteworthy that some of the posts are photo albums, which easily get more clicks, as one person can click several times on the same post.

### How to get more clicks

- Post images (or albums) with interesting details
- Get people to solve a problem using the image

### Facebook or the intranet?

Again and again we forget, that we (as excited employees) are not the Facebook page's target group. We are so thrilled about good reviews of our exhibitions, or curators getting headhunted to bigger museums, but our fans do not care. And we keep forgetting that.

The thing our posts have in common are the messages about something that we really care about, but which should have been posted on the intranet, for example about one of our special exhibitions travelling to another museum. Yes, that is big, but why should people care, when most of them live just around the corner from our museum. They, of course, want to see the exhibition, while it is at our museum. It is the same problem when we forget who the fans are and post something we do not know where else to post: we need volunteers, we have a new Facebook page for one of our other museums etc.. The problem here is that we irritate our fans by posting irrelevant content, and we never get the message through to the target group. That is a lose-lose-situation. What could have helped reaching the target group was using advertising on Facebook thereby targeting only the people who might be interested in just this.

The posts people do not click on also have something in common: They do not have an image in the link. They are just plain links, so they visually do not take up much space in the feed, and they are not visually appealing. That does not work.

The last thing that will stop people from clicking is a post that demands too much of the fans. For example, asking difficult questions or writing about subjects that are too heavy. We have to remember, that people are also on Facebook to spend some time while travelling on the bus, waiting in line etc., they will not start watching a one hour TV program in a supermarket.

Fig. 10. Post from SMK



*Here SMK posts the message about one of their exhibitions moving to Metropolitan Museum of Art. An example of a post that makes employees proud, but does not interest the fans. It should maybe just have been posted on the intranet, where colleagues would have been thrilled.*

### How not to get people to click

- Posts that should have been posted on our intranet and which are written from the point of view of the sender rather than the receiver
- Posts that demands too much of the fans
- Posts with links, but no image

### Comparing posts: Reach

#### I will never leave Facebook

When we compared posts on *Reach* it was quite significant, that the category 'Topic' performed better than the other category. Four out of nine posts are categorized in 'Topic', and relate to the different museums' subjects: art, science or history. But they do not relate to our museums, or museums in general at all.

We suggest that this is because very few people are dedicated to a physical building, but a lot of people are dedicated to subjects related to history, science and art. Our fans associate us with those subjects in a serious way. So when you post something related to their interest in a subject where you are considered a reliable source, they are likely to either click on it, share, like or comment on it. And by that, they share it with their network, giving the post a broader reach. People associate National Museum with Danish Prehistory and archaeology, SMK with Danish Golden Age and Experimentarium with hands-on experiments and everyday science. Therefore when posting not only something regarding history, but more specifically Danish Prehistory and archaeology, it reach the fans of the National Museum the best.

It is worth noting that even though we have many posts in the categories 'About us' and 'Exhibitions & events', none of them get into the top 3 of the best performances. In a few cases posts in these

categories work but else such posts ought to be avoided. Having a keen eye for when posts in these two categories will work and having the courage not to post the rest is an important lesson that your fans are the best to teach you: Do they like the post? Or click on the link? If not, then don't post it. Posts that don't get the fans to interact will damage your average reach meaning that it'll be harder for your great posts to achieve a high reach.

As for the other parameters, posts with images perform better than other types of posts. The thing that these posts have in common is, that what is written on Facebook is enough for the fan to interact with. There is no need to click outside Facebook to 'get more information', see a video, hear a podcast, read an article etc.. The fan can decide whether or not to interact just from seeing the post. The post is enough in itself. That is an important factor related to Facebook. We keep on posting things with links to other websites and more content, but we do get the message across to more people when we choose to go all in on our Facebook presence and avoid trying to drag people away from what they were doing (probably browsing through their news feed, where most posts are seen). So when we accept that people want to stay within Facebook, and adjust our posts to that reality, we get a better reach.

Fig. 11. A post from SMK



*SMK posts an image related to their subject and close to the time period that people associate with SMK. The picture is painted by a famous Danish painter, and the message is about his birthday. A happy message, with a painting that a lot of people love. That works.*

### How to get great reach

- Post an image related to your subject, not your museum building
- Write a text that is good enough, so people get all the information they need on Facebook

## We heard it the first time!

If we look at the parameter 'Reach', the worst status updates have the most consistent type of updates. 7 out of 9 of our update under this parameter is an update, where we have shared others' or our own former update, so it has two updates in one.

Fig. 12. A post from Experimentarium



*As you see here from Experimentarium, it is a double update about the same thing giving too much information. Some fans have probably already seen the post the first time. Other times for instance the National Museum has decided to share another museum's update with the same confusing result as the above.*

'Behind the scene'-pictures (for instance showing how an exhibition is built from the ground) does not work. Within the museums we tend to think that the public must be interested in following our work and in some cases it definitely works, e.g. open conservation studios within the museum, but this is not the case on Facebook. Only when the post could both fit within the category 'behind the scenes' **and** 'fun' **or** 'news', is it relevant on Facebook.

The topic also has to be relevant to the museum. For instance, a post on the Eurovision Contest didn't work for the National Museum, because it was out of their topic area. Furthermore, fun content is not always fun for everyone, so you have to make your own judgement about what kind of humour your fans have.

## How not to get great reach

- Share a former post or another Facebook page's post
- Post an update with an irrelevant topic for your museum



## Conclusion

After comparing these very different museums, we can now say that we actually have something in common. Not so much as physical museums, but in our Facebook presences and in our communication with our fans.

Compared to Mark Huges' 'six buttons of buzz' (Hughes 2005, 29), we now have more concrete advice regarding what makes a good update on Facebook across museum types:

- Always use images
- Engage your fans (ask them a meaningful question, solve a problem etc.)
- Make sure your update has enough information, so you do not have to send your fans away from Facebook to understand the content
- Update about a relevant topic for the specific museum (it does not have to be news or a trendy topic, but this can be helpful)
- A funny or entertaining update about a relevant topic for the specific museum
- Avoid reposting other Facebook posts, so you get a two-in-one update

As a final example we will show an update from Experimentarium, which contains most of the things that work.

Fig. 13. A post from Experimentarium



*A post from Experimentarium with a lot of the factors that make a good post. It is funny and extraordinary, it is related to the museum's topic (and as a bonus also to the exhibition 'Inventions') and it is real news.*

The update has a picture and you understand the content without having to click on the link and read further. It is a relevant topic for Experimentarium, because they have an exhibition about inventions, which this is. And it is definitely a fun update, which 88 people were willing to share. That is so far the most engaging update Experimentarium have ever had.

So good luck with the posting, we still try to make the updates containing everything on the list. And we have not succeeded yet.

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