

LET'S GO TO THE MUSEUM!

Growing up, Jade Koekoe loved going to the museum. Over the years she has watched museums join the digital world, gradually making more of their collections available online. In this month's EEI column, Jade reveals how museums and online collections inspired her to become an information professional.

Do you remember that tingly feeling of wonder you would get as a kid walking through the rooms of a museum? As an adult, I still experience that sensation. Like libraries, museums introduce people to parts of the world they might not otherwise see in their lifetime. In this column, I want to walk you through how and why museums started creating online collections, and the job of the teams that work on them behind the scenes.

Museums have gone from just artefact-filled buildings to places that can be explored in anyone's home through the power of the internet. Most modern museums have an online presence – some offer virtual exhibition tours, and others allow open access to online collections. Museum online collections typically provide images of items in their collection along with a summary or description and invaluable information about the item's provenance, date of creation, dimensions and an accession or registration number.

Museums have been making a concentrated effort in the last 15 years to get their collections online. Many have been given Community Heritage Grants to digitise and curate their collections. There are a few reasons why museums create online collections, including allowing access to objects that may not otherwise be on display, enabling access for people who may not be able to visit the collections in person, promoting a museum's collections and research activities and facilitating engagement with people who may be able to improve the museum's information about their collections.

But how does all this tie into my desire to become an information professional?

Since volunteering at Museum Victoria, I have found it is the responsibility of the collections department to assess and acquire items that fit their institution. But, more importantly to me, they also put together pictures and item information to be displayed online.

Once the museum has identified items for the online collection, the description and item information is double-checked. Online-compatible collection management software, such as Collections Mosaic, is then used to transform item information for online use.

The work does not stop there though. Online collections require continual technical maintenance to ensure museum



Jade Koekoe: Inspired by museums and busy being awesome.

information is always online. Then, if you are like Museum Victoria, there is the job of answering public inquires on collection items, which can be both fun and rewarding.

The people who put together the information we see online when we visit an online collection have knowledge and skills familiar to those of us studying librarianship or information management. They are involved in creating policies, record keeping of item information, fact checking, they display competence with web-based tools and understand the importance of making collections accessible to a wide audience.

An incredible process goes on behind the scenes to create and maintain a detailed online collection; it is this process and the end result that really inspires me.

Museums allow us to preserve some of our most significant cultural and historic stories and share them with the world, at least to anyone with an internet connection! Like IFLA and ALIA, I believe everyone should have access to information for personal development, education, cultural enrichment and leisure. This is why I adore the process of digitising collections, as they are a means of sharing valuable historical information with as wide a group as possible.

So next time you plan to visit a museum, don't forget to see what they have available online as well!

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Jade is a first time Mum who dreams of making her contribution to the world through historical information and archaeological finds. She lives by the adage of DFTBA (Don't Forget to be Awesome). You can find her online at misskothelibrarian.com and on Twitter @misskokolib.