

The High Museum of Art: A Social Network & Web Presence Analysis

By Whitney D. Harris

I. Introduction

Nestled in the heart of Atlanta's Midtown, the High Museum of Art is home to world-class art, architecture, and creativity in the Southeast. The museum grew from the Atlanta Art Association, which was founded in 1905, and derives its name from the house on Peachtree Street that was donated by Harriet Harwell Wilson High in 1926 to display the collection (Thompson, 2006). It has been housed in multiple locations over the years, before its current home was built in 1983 by architect Richard Meier and expanded in 2005 by Renzo Piano (Weathersby, 2005).

In the words of current director of the museum, Rand Suffolk, “when I arrived at the High in 2015, the Museum faced a difficult truth: an exceptional collection and world-class architecture could not exclusively make us essential within the diverse and growing city we call home... We embrace inclusivity as a value and as a measurable objective” Suffolk sought to expand the museum’s appeal outside of being a destination for school trips, retirees, and tourists by championing community engagement and emphasizing collaboration, inclusivity, and access. Strategies employed to attract more non-White attendees included shifting focus to more local artists and artists of color as well as increasing diversity in the High’s volunteer and fulltime staff. The High’s permanent collection contains many works by African American artists like Hale Woodruff, and curating exhibits to feature the permanent collection rather than visiting works gave them increased prominence. Five out of 15 shows in 2017 presented the work of artists of color. The High also reduced fees to make the museum more accessible (Halperin, 2017).

This new strategic approach required a new marketing strategy. Rather than focusing its marketing on promoting a few of its major exhibits in a year, by 2017 the High spent only 60% of its budget promoting a more even cross-section of its temporary exhibits. The remainder of the budget focuses on portraying the High as a repeat destination for families and young professionals (Halperin, 2017) by promoting museum programs such as Toddler Thursday, Family Art Escapes and First Fridays (featuring jazz and drinks) (Wellisch, 2021). New slogans emphasized the High’s ties to the community: “Here for you” and “Come see what makes it yours”.

According to statistics reported by the High, from 2015 to 2020, the High increased its Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) participation from 15% in 2015 to 51% in 2020, a 240% increase (High Museum of Art, 2021). Part of that success can be attributed to deciding inclusivity is measurable but it can also be attributed to consistent cross-platform marketing and branding on the web. The High Museum of today promotes itself as an Atlanta landmark worthy of visit after visit, with a collection and programs that appeal to everyone. It is our hypothesis that there is room for the High Museum of Art to expand its goals of inclusivity and accessibility to its home on the web, <https://high.org>. Our research returned two main results: first, the High

has a strong and consistent social media strategy but lacks verification and full optimization of some platforms' capabilities; second, there is significant room for growth in terms of accessibility in accordance with the four foundational principles of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG).

II. Social Media Analysis

The High Museum of Art in Atlanta has a consistent social media presence across seven platforms. The High creates digital content on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Medium, and Vimeo. On Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, the museum has over 100,000 followers on each platform. On YouTube, there are over 3,000 subscribers to the museum's channel. On LinkedIn, there are over 6,000 followers. Based on these numbers, the High's target audience can easily find the brand on each individual social media platform or with a Google search. A notable factor about the High's social media presence is the consistency in their branding. The High's marketing strategies contain a clear purpose, solid structure, and clean presentation (Horton & Quesenberry, 2013). Across their social media accounts, the High emphasizes the statement that they are the leading art museum in the southeast. As a result, social media users have several options to learn more about the museum and their mission. The High Museum of Art is strategic in branding their content to communicate the same message across various platforms through diverse digital content.

The High is consistent across its social media platforms through their account handles and overall design. The museum's online platforms can be found with the handle @highmuseumofart. On YouTube and Vimeo, the handle is @highmuseum. These handles reflect the brand because there is no obscurity on how to find a social media page for the museum. Next, the High's design is recognized through its logo and color scheme. All platforms include a combination of red, black, and white. For example, on Instagram, a white shopping bag on a red background is the icon for a story highlight that directs users to shop various art pieces. On Facebook, the header reads, "My Place for Reawakening. Come see what makes it yours." The text is simple, bold, and uses the same color combination. Furthermore, the museum's logo offers a simplistic look. The word "High" is in white and all capital letters. A red rectangle is used behind the text. On YouTube, Vimeo, and Medium, this red and white logo is followed by the words "High museum of Art" in small black letters underneath the shape. Essentially, the word High is the largest part of every logo, and this is an identifier to consumers and the museum's target audience. Ultimately, both logos and handles are characteristics of the High Museum of Art that easily helps social media users connect with the business.

Although the High creates similarity on their social media platforms through handles, logos, and design, there are differences in the digital content for each platform. The High reassures that they are the leading museum in the southeast across all platforms. This plain language creates conversation for their readers, so they can understand the information (Horton & Quesenberry, 2013). This plainly written statement is included in the majority of the bios for the museum. However, to serve each audience, the language and content is altered. First, the bio

for Facebook reads, "Official Facebook page for the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA." On Instagram, the bio reads, "Images from the leading art museum in the Southeast. #highmuseum." The inclusion of a hashtag is imperative for Instagram because the platform is driven by photos. As a result, searching #highmuseum is an effective way to find content from the museum. Next, the High's Twitter account states, "News from the Southeast's largest art museum by High Museum tweeple." The bio on YouTube states, "Entertaining & Educational videos from Atlanta's High Museum of Art - the leading art museum in the southeast." Furthermore, on Medium, the museum emphasizes written digital content. The bio reads, "Stories from the High Museum of Art in Atlanta." Furthermore, Vimeo and LinkedIn share the same bio. It states, "Nestled in the heart of Atlanta's Midtown, the High Museum of Art is home to world-class art, architecture, and creativity in the Southeast. With a collection of renowned works, new special exhibitions, and engaging programs, there's always something exciting waiting for you here." This bio is written differently from others and obviously creates a different tone. Versus the other platforms, Vimeo and LinkedIn provide an in depth description of the museum. Despite the High continuing its branded statement through these seven platforms, the business lacks consistency with marketing in the social media site, Tumblr. The site's header reads: "Inspiration and daily happenings at the largest museum in the Southeast." The last post on Tumblr was made four years ago, but this inactivity does not hinder the High's message to be a prominent art museum. The strength of the High's branding its clear purpose. Collectively, the varying bios create an awareness for their brand that appropriately serves each social media account.

With a continuous branded statement, the High museum also establishes their credibility with social media. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are platforms that are eligible for account verification. The High is verified on Twitter and Instagram, but they are not verified on Facebook. Facebook explains the criteria for an account to be verified on the help center page of their website. "In addition to following Facebook's terms of service and community standards, Pages and profiles need to be: authentic, unique, complete, and notable" (Facebook). While reviewing the High's Facebook page, there aren't any factors that display why they are not eligible for a verified badge. For instance, the page has over 140,000 likes and follows each. Despite lacking verification, the High is consistent with creating daily digital content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In contrast, the High does not take advantage of the pinned posts feature on social media to establish credibility. Facebook and Twitter are social media accounts that provide the option for pinned posts. However, neither platform has a pinned post that talks about content from the museum or emphasizes its message of the leading art museum in the southeast. On YouTube, there is an option to have one video play on a channel's landing page. The video on the High's channel is from eleven months ago, so this site is not updated with current information either. Overall, the High uses some social media features to distinguish their brand, but there are opportunities to build more credibility.

Furthermore, there are some differences between the links associated with each social media page. Facebook, Vimeo, Medium, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn provide a direct link to high.org. For example, the website's link is present in the Facebook About Section. Also, in each

Youtube video, there is a description that says learn more about the High with the direct website link. The High's website provides direct links to all social media platforms except for LinkedIn. Apart from LinkedIn, the High's social media accounts are similar because they share digital content that reflect the museum's goal. There are videos, photos, and feature stories, for example, about people, artists, and artworks. However, on LinkedIn, the High focuses mainly on career and professional related content rather than creative digital content. LinkedIn does not necessarily represent the branding goal to share content from the southeast's leading art museum. Instead, this platform gives more attention to the people who are affiliated with helping the museum operate as a business. Next, the High's Instagram page has a different link from the other social media platforms. Instead of directing users to high.org, this link, lnk.bio/highmuseumofart, takes users to another landing page for upcoming events. Although this link is not letting users to the website, it does not hinder consumers from learning more about the High's recent news. Lastly, there are no unaffiliated accounts that might cause confusion for a consumer. Links are used appropriately throughout the High's social media accounts.

Finally, the High Museum of Art is identifiable and credible across its seven active social media platforms. There are not any other affiliated accounts that can be easily confused with the museum. Atlanta is also home of the popular Trap Museum, but the High excels at distinguishing itself from other museums. Through branded colors and logo, the High assures its social media presence through consistent content. Having verified badges on Twitter and Instagram also aids consumers in finding the High's online platforms. Additionally, providing the same social media handle on the majority of platforms creates a simple search to find more about the museum on social media. The High is tactful in reaching its target audience by ensuring different digital content is shared across each social media platform. There is an outlet for every type of consumer. For those who only want news updated can check Twitter, and for consumers who want to see mainly images of art galleries can view that on Instagram. This method is appropriate for the High's audience and it works well to continue serving a large population by providing consistent and diverse digital content.

III. Web Page Analysis

The website of the High Museum of Art (<https://high.org>) leverages breathtaking photos of the High's collection, exhibits, and activities to provide an exciting visual experience. This site reflects many of the same branding elements found across the High's social media: varying shades of slate blue menus and a bold red (#487A99) accent color. The only graphics are small navigation icons, which are line-drawn in white with the bright red as background. Even the High Museum's logo is purely text, with "High" written in wide-spaced, serifed capital letters. All other text on the site is in a minimalist sans-serif font. The sparse use of the red accent and simple layout allow the many images of the museum building and artworks to dominate.

It is very difficult to find a mission statement on the site. The phrase "the leading art museum in the southeastern United States" is the closest thing to a mission statement available. It

is in the html title tag of the main page, so it displays in the browser tab; however, the phrase is so long that it is only visible if a user hovers the cursor over the tab for a pop-up box. Search engines and those using accessibility tools are more likely to notice this phrase on the main page. A search of the site reveals that the phrase is in a number of child pages, including older press releases. It is also featured on several of the museum’s social media platforms, so this does seem to be an important statement of the brand, and it should be more prominent on the website.

The main page has four sliders in rotation to promote active museum programs and events. Directly underneath the museum’s hours of operation on the current day are displayed, with a link to complete information on hours of operation. This makes information about what is currently happening at the museum easy to find.

Navigation is via a menu on the left side of the page. The majority of the main menu items trigger sub-menus, as detailed in Table 1. These nested menus make it easy to find most of the pages hosted on the site. Only “Art Stories” and “Shop” are direct links to other pages. “Art Stories” links to the High’s medium page, filled with articles about specific High exhibits as well as more general art and art history, and “Shop” to the museum shop. Having “Shop” as one of the main menu items makes it very easy to find items for sale.

Finding out who to contact for information is relatively easy; there is a complete list of museum departments and corresponding contact numbers at <https://high.org/contact-us/>. This is an item on the sub-menu under “About”, which is a fairly common place to find contact information on a website. Individual contacts can also be found on relevant pages, such as the information for the press officer on the “Press Room” page, and the email for the special events coordinator on the “Plan Your Event” page.

Main Menu	Visit	Art	Events	Join + Give	Learn	About	Art Stories	Shop
Sub-menus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan your visit • Tickets • Museum Pass • Group Visits • Shop • Plan Your Event • Accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search Collection • Exhibitions • Collection Areas • Art Conservation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calendar • Event Listing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current members • Buy a Membership • Donate online • Volunteer • Parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids and Families • Students and Teachers • Teens and College • Virtual Resources • Talks and tours • Camps • Classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About the High • People • Contact Us • Press Room • Careers • History of the High • Art and Inclusion 	Direct link to High medium page (online publishing platform) with articles	Direct link to museum shop

Table 1. Menu tree. Note that “Art Stories” and “Shop” are direct links, rather than having sub-menus.

Bibliography

(n.d.). <https://www.instagram.com/highmuseumofart/>.

(n.d.). <https://www.facebook.com/HighMuseumofArt/>.

Farrell, B. (2010, May). *Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums*.

Knowledge@UChicago. <https://knowledge.uchicago.edu/record/1272?ln=en>

Halperin, J. (2017, December 22). *How the High Museum in Atlanta Tripled Its Nonwhite Audience in Two Years*. Artnet News.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/high-museum-atlanta-tripled-nonwhite-audience-two-years-1187954>

High Museum of Art. (2021). *Art and Inclusion*. High.

<https://high.org/sites/arts-inclusion/index.html>

Horton, S., & Quesenbery, W. (2013). *A Web For Everyone*. Rosenfield Media.

Jackson, D. (2016, March 9). *The Science Behind a Pinned Tweet: 5 Ways to Get Noticed*. Sprout Social. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/pinned-tweet/>

McClintock, D. (2015, May 28). *Gordon Parks at Atlanta's High Museum of Art*. Southern Spaces. <https://southernspaces.org/2015/gordon-parks-atlantas-high-museum-art/>

Thompson, M. (2006, October 25). *High Museum of Art*. New Georgia Encyclopedia. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/high-museum-art>

Weathersby Jr., W. (2005, November). High Museum. *Architectural Record*, 193(11), 130-135.

Wellisch, A. (2021, February 24). A Memorable Night of Swinging Jazz at the High. *The Emory Wheel*. <https://emorywheel.com/jazz-at-the-high/>

