How Phygital is Reshaping Museum Engagement in FY 25-26

Museums22
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Dear readers,

A few days ago, I visited the nearest museum and noticed a group of students on a school trip. But instead of engaging with the exhibits, many of them were sitting on benches, looking around aimlessly. It wasn't until I overheard a young girl say, "I wish I could just Google the history behind some of these pieces—I have no idea who's who," that it hit me: there's a growing challenge across the museum world—the lack of context and interactivity.

That moment took me back to the first time technology stepped into museum walls. It was 1952—long before most of us were born.

Willem Sandberg, then director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, decided it was time to try something new: audio guides. The system debuted during the temporary exhibition "Vermeer: Real or Fake," offering foreign-language tours produced by Philips.

Of course, the technology had its limits—each language tour had to be scheduled separately, since simultaneous playback wasn't possible yet.

Fast forward to today, and the core challenge remains: it's not that visitors find museums boring—it's that digital experiences are simply more immersive and entertaining. They offer interaction, immediacy, and personalization.

So, what if we merged the best of both worlds? What if the physical and digital came together to create something entirely new?

That blend is what we now call phygital.

In this newsletter, we'll explore how phygital solutions are quietly transforming museums—from QR-triggered AR to interactive guides and beyond.

Hope you enjoy the read!

Warm regards, Shalini Bansal

First of all, what is "Phygital?"

Before we begin, let's get our fundamentals straight—what exactly is "phygital?" After all, the term does stand out.

We would define *phygital* as the unique use of technology that encourages you to step out of your home and engage more intimately with exhibitions.

Visitors at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam testing out audio guides via Guide ID

If we move beyond museums for a moment, you'll notice phygital experiences being adopted across industries.

Netflix is exploring this concept with '**Netflix Houses**,' which offer merchandise, food, and show-related activities. By merging entertainment and retail, these physical spaces are paving the way for a new type of fan interaction.

In sports, games like FIFA blend real-life scores and goals from actual matches to influence outcomes in the digital world.

Phygital is everywhere. But now, let's bring it back to museums.

Why is phygital important for museums?

Phygital might be the most important discourse in the museum industry right now—mainly because museums are striving to stay relevant.

Think about it: how many times have you seen the Mona Lisa—whether in person or in images?

Now, ask yourself this: After the first couple of times, would you still feel the same level of excitement about visiting the Louvre just to see that iconic smile again?

Right now, museums are relying on a visitor's willingness to repeat the same experience. But that model isn't sustainable in the long run. The Louvre recognized this and introduced an immersive eight-minute VR experience of the Mona Lisa.

The journey starts in the Salle des Etats, where visitors stand face-to-face with the original painting. Then, through VR, they meet the real woman behind the portrait—Lisa Gherardini, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo.

👉 Here's a YouTube link to the experience: Mona Lisa: Beyond the Glass at The Louvre I HTC VIVE ARTS

Other museums, such as **The Met** and the **Salvador Dali Museum**, have adopted similar phygital techniques to engage their audiences. It's becoming a global movement—and we love to see it!

Is digital better than physical?

Not at all. One isn't better than the other. The truth is—we're living in an experience-hungry world. Whether it's solo travel, cultural immersion, or trying something completely new, people crave engaging experiences.

The same goes for museums.

During our work, we noticed a sharp rise in digital-only events during the COVID-19 lockdowns. But once restrictions were lifted, something became clear: people were eager to step outside again.

They want to *feel* the experience—to use their senses, move through spaces, and physically interact with exhibits. That's something digital-only platforms often can't replicate. At the same time, repeatedly viewing the same physical exhibits can lead to visitor fatigue.

The solution? **Go phygital.**

By combining physical visits with layered digital experiences—like AR, QR-triggered guides, or immersive storytelling—museums can keep exhibits fresh, engaging, and endlessly explorable.

How phygital actually makes a difference: A case study

Let's consider an example. During our work with the Aviation Museum of Kentucky (AMK), we identified a consistent pain point—because aviation is such a niche subject, the museum struggled with repeat visitors.

By the end of our collaboration, however, we saw a shift. The museum built a close-knit community of visitors, aviation history enthusiasts, and scholars who remained engaged thanks to three key integrations:

1. **QR codes** – These allowed visitors to interact easily with exhibits, sparking curiosity and deeper connections with the content
2. **Multilingual app options** – The museum app we developed for AMK provided valuable insights into visitor behavior—such as demographics, navigation patterns, and content preferences. Using this data, the museum introduced multilingual tours, offering immersive storytelling for diverse audiences

This is the transformation that phygital experiences bring.

What can your museum adopt?

This question is deeply personal to your collection and what you want to offer your visitors, so the right phygital solution varies from museum to museum.

To give you an idea, here's what we implemented for The Artbeat of New India at Mumbai International Airport Museum:

We maxed out on QR codes—and for good reason.

These simple, one-time scans are the easiest and most convenient way to access tech that truly elevates the art-viewing experience.

For context: Mumbai International Airport is one of the busiest spots in the country. Every day, thousands of travelers were walking past the art collections. With QR codes, our goal was to make those moments memorable. And here's how we did it:

✅ A single QR code transformed exhibitions into interactive 3D experiences

✅ Augmented reality (AR) and virtual games brought the exhibits to life

✅ The codes unlocked virtual games that kept young students engaged, making the topics fun, fresh, and unforgettable

Where to go next?

We've reached the final stretch of our conversation. Now, the decision about the future of your museum rests in your hands.

If you're ready to explore the world of phygital experiences, Museums22 offers an experienced team that begins with a personalized consultation to assess your museum's unique needs.

We've partnered with numerous museums and heritage sites worldwide and, in the process, have figured out the ideal way to navigate storytelling through culture and accessible tech. After all, this is what makes art and history so special—no two pieces are the same, and neither are museums.

Book a demo!

The world is changing this year, and so are museums. To keep up with the changes in visitor preferences, socialization patterns, and genius technological developments across museums—follow our newsletter!