User Needs-II

Review of Existing On-Line Museums

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The table on page 5 is a summary of a review of 8 museums, mostly of computers. The table shows whether each museum has a specific feature or not, and additional details follow the table.

It seems that pictures are inevitable. They are supposed to provide visual information that cannot be stated using natural language, and therefore, tend to comprise an inevitable part of museums. Some museums even had links to view larger pictures of the same item and some had links to specific variations of a certain computer, and sometimes pictures that focus on parts of an item such as cables, tape and other peripheral devices of a computer.

Almost half of the museums had a search feature, and they involved at least site search. Some provided more general searches, too, such as search on several domains, or search over the Internet. Search feature usually involved going to another page via a relatively out-of-sight link, either at the bottom of the page or at the very top.
By browsing, we mean some kind of traveling within the site, within the computers, for instance, as these are computer museums. The ones that had only one page full of links and nothing else combining pages have been considered to have no browsing facility. Some of them were annoying as they had only “previous” and “next” links and didn’t provide direct access in a fast way. One has to click several times to “next” in order to get to an item one wants to review. One of them seemed to have relied on the “Back” button of the browser as it didn’t have “previous” link.

In general, there was a prominent tendency to use time (or years and periods of years) as a grouping strategy and there would be links allowing one to jump to a specific time period. These museums usually didn’t group according other factors, except that some of them would provide links of people either alphabetically ordered or according to their appearance order.

By background information, we mean that they would provide some kind of introductory information to a novice user that doesn’t have the knowledge to benefit from the museum such as not knowing what a floppy disk or keyboard is, or what exactly is meant by the term “internet”. None of them appeared to provide such information.

Very few museums provided out-site links, and even so they were rare and seem to be spread or embedded to be used at need. On the other hand, in-site links were used commonly to facilitate the user access directly to a related computer rather than letting
him/her trying to find by a cumbersome and disruptive method, such as going back to the main page of index or search backwards (or forwards) one by one between items.

In this context, product origination information means when the product was first built and by whom (and/or in what company) and several museums mentioned only specifications and other details, but not information about their origin.

“Examples of use of X” feature, to our surprise, wasn’t used so much, maybe because it was hard to do so with computers. Not surprisingly, the only museum that provided with explanations of usage provides information about calculators. (And it doesn’t provide usage information for other things it exhibits, e.g. computers.) This seems to depend, therefore, on the content of the museum.

Since many museums used time as an ordering strategy, they failed to group the items that were related. Only two museums grouped them according to vendor name, such as grouping all Apple computers together.

Grouping of relevant personalities was never done. Museums either spread them over time or presented them in alphabetical order (according to their last name).

No museum made explicit and organized comparisons among exhibited items. In fact, some of them made so whenever necessary, which tend to be rare, however, important.
Important people were ordered according to their appearance order in time automatically by those museums that spread them over time.

Categorization of exhibited items according to tasks was almost never done, as this wasn’t required most of the time. The items usually had similar general purposes (e.g. computing). Nevertheless, one museum did categorize into tasks such as calculators, paper tapes, and analog computer systems.

Interestingly, not all museums categorized exhibited items according to date. The ones that didn’t tended to have a page full of direct links to items which were categorized by Vendor name or not categorized at all.

Many museums didn’t even mention about important people. Some museums that did still didn’t relate them, and prefer them to have separately from the exhibited items leading to two kinds of information track: items and people. Two museums did relate them.

Finally, categorization of people according to products was never the case in these museums.
Numbers from 1 to 8 denote the 8 museums reviewed. The web address of each museum corresponding to its number is available in the references section of this document.

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**Additional details:**

1.  
   - Browse feature by year or decade  
   - Search by “site search” link  
   - People and events mixed because sort is by date  

2.  
   - A page of direct links to computers on exhibit (2 column)  
   - “Previous” and “Next” links as well as link to the main page  
   - People on a different page, no relation or links between people and computers  

3.  
   - A main page full of direct links to computers  
   - Links to specific pictures embedded in text  

4.  
   - Browse feature very annoying. There is only Start, End, Previous and Next.  

5.  
   - There is an introduction page that provides 11 links for localizing content in terms of time period.  

7.  
   - Annoying browsing. Only next and nothing else.  
   - Important people’s names are only mentioned.
REFERENCES