

## Park-produced Media Types – Strengths and Limitations

*Common types of site-produced delivery methods used to present interpretive messages include publications, audiovisual products, temporary exhibits, wayside exhibits, web-based media, social media and other electronic media. Each has qualities which make it more or less suitable for a given purpose or audience. Some of the recognized strengths and limitations of each medium are listed below. Note that these are generalizations; exceptions can usually be found.*

<b>Publications</b>	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are portable</li> <li>• Can treat a subject in-depth</li> <li>• Provide a source of detailed reference information</li> <li>• Can be produced in different languages</li> <li>• Can present sequential or complex material</li> <li>• Can be read at visitors' own pace</li> <li>• Can produce income</li> <li>• Can often be revised at a reasonable cost</li> <li>• Can be produced at various levels of detail</li> <li>• Have value as a souvenir, something to take home</li> <li>• Can be produced to treat the same subject for different audiences</li> <li>• May be appropriate for stories lacking in artifacts or photographs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can discourage potential readers with lengthy and/or complex texts</li> <li>• Can be a source of litter</li> <li>• Require periodic revision to remain current and accurate</li> <li>• May require facilities and maintenance (such as brochure dispensers and storage space)</li> <li>• Require additional options for visitors with visual impairments such as large print, Braille, 508-compliant PDF version, or other method.</li> </ul>

## Audio/Visual Media

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Well suited to the presentation of chronological and sequential material</li><li>• Can capture realism and provide emotional impact</li><li>• Provide opportunities for dramatization</li><li>• Can be portable for off-site use</li><li>• Provide views of places, animals, plants, and seasons otherwise unavailable or inaccessible</li><li>• Can create a mood or atmosphere</li><li>• Can reach many visitors at one time</li><li>• Can be adapted to serve physically impaired visitors</li><li>• Can illustrate before and after effects</li><li>• Can be produced in different languages</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cannot be used everywhere</li><li>• Require back-up equipment, periodic maintenance, and regular monitoring</li><li>• May be perceived as sterile or impersonal</li><li>• May offer little opportunity for visitors to browse or study an item in depth or at their own pace</li><li>• Repetitious sound tracks can annoy visitor center staff</li><li>• May be a visual or auditory intrusion</li><li>• Production and maintenance costs can be expensive</li><li>• People usually have high expectations of audiovisual media; low-budget products can fall short of expectations</li><li>• Require audio description for visitors with visual impairments</li></ul>

## Wayside Exhibits

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be available 24 hours a day</li> <li>• Use real objects and features in their own setting as objects of interpretation</li> <li>• Are relatively inexpensive</li> <li>• Can be designed to blend with site environment</li> <li>• Provide onsite interpretation of specific sites and stories</li> <li>• Can depict a place as it appeared many years before</li> <li>• Can show a feature from a view unattainable by visitors</li> <li>• Can illustrate phenomena that are invisibly affecting a resource</li> <li>• Establish a park identity at remote, unstaffed locations</li> <li>• Alert visitors to safety or resource management issues at the point of danger, decision, or environmental impact</li> <li>• Can be replaced relatively quickly and inexpensively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited amount of text and graphics per panel</li> <li>• Don't work well for complicated subject matter</li> <li>• Focus attention on tangible resources; less effective with intangibles and universal concepts</li> <li>• May intrude on a park's visual landscape</li> <li>• May not be practical at sites with climatic or environmental extremes</li> <li>• Susceptible to vandalism</li> <li>• Require maintenance and/or rehabilitation</li> <li>• Require audio description, tactile elements, or another method to provide full access for visitors with visual impairments,</li> <li>• If they are located outside of physically accessible areas, alternative access to the interpretive content is needed for visitors who cannot physically access the site.</li> </ul>

## Temporary Exhibits

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be developed in-house by interpretive staff</li> <li>• Can easily be replaced when worn or outdated or to meet changing conditions</li> <li>• Can take a variety of different forms, including wall-mounted panels, bulletin boards, temporary cases, etc.</li> <li>• Can be interactive</li> <li>• Can be especially effective with use of reproduction artifacts</li> <li>• Tap diverse skills of interpreters</li> <li>• Versatile, effective, and relatively easy to implement</li> <li>• Can be cost-effective, especially in the short term</li> <li>• Works best to convey simple messages and help visitors connect tangibles and intangibles to universal concepts</li> <li>• Are an effective way to interpret special or seasonal events or quickly address emerging resource protection or safety issues</li> <li>• Can be portable for off-site use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can look unprofessional if interpreters don't have design skills</li> <li>• Require the park to invest in proper design software and provide software training for interpreters</li> <li>• Require the park to purchase or acquire access to quality printing and mounting equipment</li> <li>• Don't work well for complicated subject matter</li> <li>• May be more susceptible to vandalism than permanent exhibits</li> <li>• Materials may be very susceptible to daily wear and tear and damage from temperature/humidity changes</li> </ul>

<b>Websites</b>	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, anytime</li> <li>• The information within a site can be quickly accessed -- no need to sift through several pages</li> <li>• Can provide links to other sites on the same topic or interest</li> <li>• Can be searched and indexed by search engines and others</li> <li>• Can be used for pre-visit planning, during the visit, and post-visit information</li> <li>• Can be updated on the fly to always provide the latest information</li> <li>• Author can usually be contacted through an email address or social media site</li> <li>• Information is easy to gather and print selectively</li> <li>• Easy to use the information to create your own resource</li> <li>• Can be produced in multiple languages or translated by user using third party tools</li> <li>• You can peruse the information at leisure, taking as much time as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may be difficult for users to locate, especially if there are many similar sites</li> <li>• The information on the site may not be current or reliable</li> <li>• Information may be interpreted incorrectly or used inappropriately</li> <li>• A connection to the web is needed to access the information, which will be impossible if a computer/mobile device and connection is not available</li> <li>• Because the author is not present when others are retrieving information there is no opportunity to ask questions or have things explained in greater detail, etc.</li> <li>• The site may go down or the computer may crash, requiring IT support and backup</li> <li>• A site may be difficult to use if experience with the internet is limited or the interface is cumbersome</li> </ul>

## Social Media Sites

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, anytime</li> <li>• Can start a conversation about a topic or update with interested users</li> <li>• Can be subscribed to and updates can be added live to users' ongoing conversations</li> <li>• Can provide links to other sites on the same topic or interest</li> <li>• Can be searched and indexed by search engines and others</li> <li>• Can be used for pre-visit planning, during the visit, and post-visit information</li> <li>• Can be updated on the fly to always provide the latest information</li> <li>• Creator/author doesn't need to be present when someone is retrieving information</li> <li>• Author can usually be responsive to comments and wall postings</li> <li>• Can be redistributed by users to others quickly, go viral</li> <li>• You can peruse the information at leisure, taking as much time as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The information on the site may not be current or reliable</li> <li>• Relies on third-party servers and technologies beyond government control</li> <li>• Site's features may only be available to registered users</li> <li>• Public comments may need to be controlled on sensitive and difficult issues</li> <li>• Information may be interpreted incorrectly or used inappropriately</li> <li>• A connection to the web is needed to access the information, which will be impossible if a computer/mobile device and connection is not available</li> <li>• It may be difficult for users to locate, especially if there are many similar pages</li> <li>• Because the author is not present when others are retrieving information there is no opportunity to ask questions or have things explained in greater detail, etc.</li> <li>• The site may go down or the computer may crash, requiring IT support and backup</li> </ul>