

InterActivity 2010: Developing the modern children's museum

BY THOMAS Q. JOHNSON, [TC DAILY PLANET](#)
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A hushed crowd of museum staff from across the world filled the Great River Ballrooms in downtown St. Paul's Crowne Plaza hotel May 8. They were there to hear Dr. Peter L. Benson, CEO of the Search Institute, describe how adults can find and nourish the curious spirit of children, the "spark" as he calls it. Dr. Benson's talk was one of many presentations during InterActivity 2010, the Association of Children's Museums annual meeting, hosted this year by the [Minnesota Children's Museum](#).

InterActivity 2010 drew hundreds of people from across the children's museum industry, including exhibit fabricators, membership directors, outreach coordinators and early childhood development researchers, to share and collect ideas on how to develop that spark in youth. The three day conference covered many aspects of running a children's museum from the more nuts and bolts aspect all the way up to addressing trends facing the industry.

"This room contains some of the most powerful innovators I've ever seen," said attendee Keith Ostfeld as he tweeted about the conference from his iPad. Ostfeld, otherwise known as "Mr. O" to the patrons of the Children's Museum of Houston where he is the Director of Exhibit and Program Development, is the star of the [O Wow Moments](#) video series the museum website. He believes that through using social media and technological tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, museums are able to reach out further than they ever have before to engage children even outside of the museum. "We are trying to have the digital and real experiences blend together. Even if you can't come to the museum, you should still be able to go," he explained.

The theme of technological innovation was apparent throughout the conference. Blogs, photo albums and even tweets generated by InterActivity attendees could be found via [links through the ACM's website](#).

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of social media's importance, many attendees still needed some coaching when it came to applying this new method. At the breakout session "Social Media 201," attendees learned how to make effective use of a variety of social media tools and have their questions answered by a panel of experts. One of the panel members, Kylee Breems, the Public Relations Manager for the Minnesota Children's Museum, said that MCM had been using social media for about two and a half years after hearing about it at another conference. Breems, along with other panel members, stressed how important it has become to manage a museum's brand on the internet and have a clear goal in mind when using social media. "We aren't targeting kids at all," Breems explained. "We put play tips on our blogs and other resources for parents to use."

[Cheryl Kessler](#), an independent consultant from Minnetonka, agreed that technology was changing the way that museums interacted with their visitors. Using social media, she said, "You don't always have to be a big museum to make an impact. Smaller museums are now able to make better connections with the community."

Though the ACM's meeting is by no means small, its website has made it possible to reach out on a larger scale than before.

Kook Sung Ha, a curator at [Korea's National Folk Museum in Seoul](#) and attendee of InterActivity 2010, said that he had heard about the conference on the internet. Mr. Kook believed that he would try to apply what he learned at the conference to his own museum in Korea. "In Korea, our museums are very small and we only show our children our own culture," he said, "but here, you show other's cultures." It was something he said he was excited to bring back to his own museum in Seoul.

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