One-block at a time: Overcoming imposter syndrome in a digital museum world

Annelies Van de Ven, UCLouvain (Belgium)

Not all museums are equipped with a full digital team, and when lockdown was announced many of us were confronted with an online working that we were not particularly trained to handle. Between digital image rights, HTML coding, and the great digital prowess of university museums like the MERL many, including myself, felt overwhelmed and unequipped for the challenge.

I, like many around me, was suffering from imposter syndrome. This can be described as an exaggerated sense of perfectionism, the feeling of inadequacy and chronic self-doubt that overrides any track record of success. When faced with the task of turning my exhibition into a digital format, some early setbacks and poor quality footage felt disproportionately demotivating. My thought process was: if I could not achieve the ideal exhibition website that I dreamed of then perhaps I was not the museum professional I thought I was.

However, a conversation with colleagues soon showed me that this feeling was not a unique one. We were so focused on a fear of seeing our digital interactives flop that we had forgotten the amazing assets we had. Rather than building a whole new image for the museum in the space of a week, which seemed daunting, we worked to slowly build up our offering throughout the lockdown period, with each snippet reflecting a deep passion for our collections and their histories.

Rather than trying to compare ourselves on the online successes of our museum peers, we found a new model for our online engagement in our own in house public engagement teams whose success is based not on digital mastery, but on creating real connections with visitors through their passion for museums and lifelong learning.