

# Speaking volumes

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National Museums NI –  
A Lesson in Online Exhibiting

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4 museums,  
1 bespoke website,  
370,000 online visitors.



## BACKGROUND

With Northern Ireland's new found place at the heart of tourists from all over the globe, the role of the country's national museums has never been more important. Their purpose in the education and representation of the cultural past, present and future is crucial for the people of Northern Ireland but also for the continued attraction of both visitors and businesses.

The importance of a well-designed, easily found, easily navigated website cannot be under-estimated. With the web often being regarded as a virtual shop front, we had to consider the complication of giving equal weight to five principle museums, each with five management teams, all under the umbrella of the new NMNI branding. Both the design and practical management of the site therefore had to be carefully considered. Plus, with a significant target of 2.3million web visits as set by the board of directors, Etain had to develop a web presence that could be every bit as intelligent, flexible and intuitive as NMNI itself.

Like other public bodies, NMNI employs the services of a range of agencies to help complete their marketing objectives. On this project, Etain worked hand-in-hand with branding and design agency AV Browne on the design of the site.

## WHAT WE DID

We had two main objectives: to educate people about NMNI and encourage them to visit the museum and to attract and educate people to each of the NMNI museums. In doing both of these things, the site uses the new NMNI identity to bring strength to the whole group.

With such an expansive organisation, the issue of control was a major concern. Although the information on the site had to be constantly updated and changed in order to continue to attract more visitors, the power of the branding and message would be seriously undermined by too much variation in the content. We solved this by creating a sophisticated yet very practical content management system that gave restricted access to a number of different people spread throughout the five museums, but ultimately controlled by one central web manager. Under the guidance of style templates, individual museums can therefore easily add in details about up and coming events and the Web Manager can see and track any changes, add images, shuffle pages and alter text easily.

The inclusion of tracking technology also allowed the Web Manager to track users' routes through the entire site. By seeing their landing pages, viewing the number of clicks it takes them to get to the information they need and identifying the pages that are not as popular, she has the insights she needs to continually refine the design of the site, using better labelling or more attractive images.

The positioning of the site in Google search ratings has also been of vital importance. Our expertise in continual search engine optimisation has made sure that the NMNI website is consistently at the top of the result page.

Since the website's implementation, we have worked with NMNI on a monthly two day retainer to make further refinements to the site. We have since developed a newsletter facility, enabling potential visitors, schools and organisations to sign up to a series of emailed communications. Their responses to these newsletters are then recorded to allow the Web manager to see the most popular or emotive stories.

Along with the overall NMNI website, we also worked to develop a website for one of Belfast's most infamous creations, the Titanic. With no physical location to direct tourists to, the website had to perform a number of jobs. As well as acting as a museum by conveying the Titanic story through archive imagery and stories, it also had to bring Belfast's ship building heritage to life for young people and act as a selling point for historic prints in order to generate much needed revenue. The result is a simple-to-navigate, but highly animated site, which uses a complex mix of sound, video, imagery and animations to educate and inspire.

Rather than simply acting as a presence on the web, [www.nmni.com](http://www.nmni.com) and [www.titanicinbelfast.com](http://www.titanicinbelfast.com) have become essential tools in the operational structure of NMNI. They play a vital role within the marketing of NMNI and each of the member museums and with impressive online visitor statistics, they are fast becoming a key element in the education of young people and the ongoing success and popularity of Northern Ireland's museum sector.