

Apollo 50: How one museum celebrated the first Moon landing

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Abstract The 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing in July 2019 was an opportunity for the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum to position itself not just as an inspiring and exciting institution but also a leading resource for aerospace knowledge. This article describes the museum's Apollo 50 social media campaign, which saw engagement and follower numbers grow at a rate more ten times the museum's average. It explores the strategies driving the campaign, how the museum wrangled a vast amount of content, activities and information into a strategic and cohesive campaign, and the role of social media in sharing the museum's site-specific Apollo 50 activities with a global audience.

KEYWORDS: museum, social media, content marketing, digital campaign, case study

INTRODUCTION

For the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing in July 2019 felt like a moment the museum had been working towards for decades. It was clear that it needed a celebration to befit the groundbreaking achievement being commemorated.

Although not quite John F. Kennedy declaring 'before this decade is out', in 2018, the museum accepted a moonshot of its own: to lead the nation in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Apollo programme. This was both an opportunity and a responsibility.

This article will explain the strategy of the museum's Apollo 50 campaign, review

the different stages of the campaign as the big anniversary neared, and look critically at what was successful and what could have been executed better. URLs will be provided throughout so that interested readers can view parts of the campaign in more depth.

THE MISSION

The museum's goal of leading the nation in the Apollo 50th anniversary celebration manifested in two objectives:

- to educate people around the world about the Apollo missions and increase their knowledge of this important part of US history; and

- to ensure that the museum was part of the conversation, at the same time as increasing the museum's brand as an institution that takes on creative and innovative projects.

The mission would be tackled in a variety of ways, including through in-person events, academic conversations and digital content. The museum's digital celebration existed hand-in-hand with its onsite, experience-driven celebration, but was not bound to it. While the museum's digital channels naturally supported and amplified the on-site events, the digital component was focused primarily on taking the celebration outside the museum walls and allowing the country and the world to join the celebration and conversation wherever they were.

The museum had a number of value propositions in this campaign: an Apollo collection second to none that tells the story of humanity's quest for the Moon in a tangible way; a museum filled with experts on the Apollo programme, the Moon, spacesuits and general human spaceflight; and a reputation and responsibility as an organisation whose priority is preserving and celebrating aerospace history.

The content opportunities surrounding an event as iconic as the first Moon landing are seemingly endless. To create continuity and guidelines for posts in this campaign, three messaging goals were created:

- share excitement about Apollo and space in general to inspire the public to dream big and think about what else people might achieve;
- provide those who were not alive in 1969 a look at what it was like to experience the Moon landing; and
- establish the museum as the caretaker of Apollo history, emphasising its vast Apollo collection.

One challenge was that the Apollo 11 command module *Columbia*, which was

previously on display at the museum, was on tour elsewhere, and the 'Apollo to the Moon' exhibition, which housed most of the Apollo artefacts, closed in December 2018 due to the museum's renovation. Thus, digital efforts played an important role in sharing the collection with visitors.

READYING THE LAUNCH PAD: THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS

The Apollo 50 campaign began in autumn 2018, to include the 50th anniversaries of the first flown Apollo missions in October and December. The museum's Apollo 50 celebrations were announced in September 2018 through a press event and digital media outreach. The centrepiece of the online announcement was the 'Together We Choose' video, which brought together past and present members of the aerospace community to recite lines from John F. Kennedy's iconic 'We Choose to Go to the Moon' speech (see s.si.edu/TogetherWeChoose).

This video demonstrates how content does not need to be flashy to be effective. Indeed, it was produced by working with industry contacts to encourage participants to submit videos and then finished in-house using basic video-editing tools. Although it was simple in concept and execution, it helped to capture the spirit of the celebration by recreating a piece of history, capturing the inspiration and excitement of the country's quest for the Moon, and looking forward to what would come next.

In the first eight months of the campaign (September 2018 to April 2019), the museum posted approximately 200 pieces of Apollo 50 content across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, focusing on celebrating key anniversaries and connecting Apollo 50 to existing conversations. The 50th anniversaries of Apollo 7, Apollo 8 and Apollo 9 were marked with more fanfare than in previous years, and other date-specific content was pushed out, such as the premiere of the Neil

Armstrong biopic ‘First Man’, which was held at the museum in October. During the first eight months, the Apollo 50 campaign was at its most active in December, surrounding the anniversary of Apollo 8, the first human mission to the Moon, streaming and live-tweeting the sold-out ‘Spirit of Apollo’ event in early December to expand its reach (Figure 1). Having advance access to the written remarks of some of the speakers made it possible to execute the live-tweet more smoothly.

The museum also repurposed content from the ‘Spirit of Apollo’ event during the actual Apollo 8 anniversary a few weeks later (21st–27th December). The Apollo 8 essay from the printed programme and Jim Lovell’s remarks from the event became

blog posts, and sections of the event became short standalone videos. The museum sent 50 social posts about Apollo 8 during the anniversary week, receiving 1.7 million impressions, over 50,000 engagements, and nearly 4,000 link clicks.

Outside of anniversaries, the strategy for the first eight months was to apply Apollo to conversations or moments already occurring online. Examples of this included sharing at Christmas content about a fruitcake that flew on Apollo 11, comparing the height of the Saturn V rocket to the length of a football field during the Super Bowl, sharing a video with the production designer for ‘First Man’ during the Oscars, and posting stories of women involved in the Apollo programme during Women’s History Month. Throughout



Figure 1: Post from the museum’s live-tweet of the ‘Spirit of Apollo’ event, featuring a quote from Apollo 8 astronaut Jim Lovell

this campaign, Apollo became a lens with which to view other things occurring in the world or on social media and served as a way to come up with new content ideas to join into online conversations.

The overarching goal of the first eight months of the campaign was to socialise the idea of the upcoming anniversary, so that when the busy, high-Apollo-content times arrived, no one would be surprised that it was an anniversary year. While this was certainly achieved on Twitter, more time could have been devoted to consistently posting Apollo content to Facebook, and to a lesser extent Instagram, outside of major anniversary moments in the lead-up to July.

In April, as the first eight months of the campaign were wrapped up, the focus shifted to building excitement and anticipation about not just the Apollo 11 anniversary but also the activities surrounding it that summer. This example of an anticipation-building tweet (Figure 2) received the following comment from a follower: 'I remember the excitement building.... and the PRIDE we felt when we actually DID IT!'

In May 2019, Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins joined Twitter and Instagram. Collins,

who was the director of the National Air and Space Museum when it opened in 1976 and continues to be a great friend of the museum, engaged frequently with the museum's content during the campaign. His account quickly grew in followers, all of whom were actively interested in Apollo content. His engagement with the museum's posts put the museum's content in front of an audience that was excited about the anniversary and looking for information about it — some of whom the museum previously might not have reached.

T-50 DAYS: COUNTDOWN TO LAUNCH

The Apollo 11 content posts started ramping up in earnest in May 2019, with 440 posts sent from May through July. The centrepiece of the countdown was a Twitter thread that counted down 50 days until the launch anniversary using Apollo-related artefacts from the museum's collection. The content for the thread was based on a new book by museum curator Teasel Muir-Harmony called 'Apollo to the Moon: A History in 50 Objects', which provided a clear framework for the thread.



#Apollo50

Figure 2: Anticipation-building tweet from 20th April

The book intentionally includes objects that tell the broad story of Apollo, from the first days of the space programme through to Apollo 17, which was an opportunity to highlight unusual or unexpected artefacts, but also a challenge because with only 280 characters, some artefacts were harder to contextualise in a way that made sense or was interesting.

The countdown thread ensured that the museum was tweeting about Apollo at least once a day in the lead-up to the anniversary. Although maintaining a 50-day tweet thread can be difficult, using a thread for the countdown meant that every day when a new tweet was added, the whole thread was bumped back into followers' feeds. The first tweet in the thread received over 1,800 likes and nearly 500 retweets, as well as over 50 quote tweets, many of which encouraged others to read the full thread. In total, tweets in the thread received 1.3 million impressions, about 11,000 engagements and 3,000 link clicks (see s.si.edu/countdownthread).

GO FLIGHT: MISSION MILESTONES

By summer 2019, the National Air and Space Museum was busy with in-person and digital initiatives to mark the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing. The next few pages will detail how the in-person events were conveyed through social media and the web, and will describe the strategies behind the born-digital content.

Apollo at the Park

In the Apollo at the Park programme, the museum used three-dimensional scan data of Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 spacesuit to create extremely realistic and detailed statues of the spacesuit, which were placed in 15 Major League Baseball ballparks around the country. This provided unique opportunities to reach new audiences both in person and online by combining space with an iconic summer activity to celebrate the energy

Americans felt when Apollo 11 landed on the Moon.

The announcement strategy for the programme leaned into the fact that a collaboration between the National Air and Space Museum and Major League Baseball is unexpected. On 14th May, a teaser image (Figure 3) calling out the collaboration and announcing that more details would come the next day was posted to the social accounts of the museum as well as partners at Major League Baseball and the participating ballparks. Eleven teams participated in the teaser strategy through native posts or retweets and shares, and the involvement of the ballparks in the teaser generated conversation and excitement among not just the museum's followers but the fans of the participating teams, who were curious to learn more about the collaboration. Comments included 'Idk what's happening but I'm STOKED' and 'I'm already obsessed with whatever is happening here'. A number of comments called upon existing connections between baseball and space, especially the practice of referring to long home-runs as 'moonshots' or on the way to the Moon. The museum responded to comments with hints and encouragement to check back the next day for all of the details.

On 15th May, the museum shared full details to a positive response. A risk of a teaser strategy like this is the actual announcement being underwhelming. While social media users had great guesses on what it could be, there were only a few people who expressed disappointment about the scale of the announcement. Most negative reactions came from disappointed fans of baseball teams who were unable to participate in the programme, as only 15 of Major League Baseball's 30 teams would host statues.

One challenge of the programme was that due to shipping schedules, the statues would not all go on display on the same day. Using social media, this was turned this into an advantage, with photos of the statues tweeted



Figure 3: Facebook post from 14th May teasing the upcoming Apollo at the Park announcement

as they were installed in each park. The museum also encouraged fans at games to take photos with the statues and share using #SnapTheSuit.

While Apollo at the Park was a success, certain opportunities could not be leveraged due to limitations in staff time and room in the content calendar. Because the programme was taking place during one of the busiest summers in museum history, it was not possible to spend as much time as

would have been ideal developing content with the teams surrounding the statues and engaging with the fans who encountered them. One social media strategy that did not come to fruition was the utilisation of user-generated content (UGC) from fans using #SnapTheSuit. The plan was to feature the UGC in organic social media posts, Facebook advertisements and on the museum website, to encourage fans to visit the statues and post their own photos. Due

to other time constraints and procurement issues for a tool to help execute the strategy, it was not possible to take full advantage of UGC during the programme.

The Armstrong suit

Because many of the museum's Apollo artefacts were off-display during the anniversary, the conservation and display of Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 spacesuit was especially important to the museum and its visitors. Digital efforts surrounding the spacesuit began years earlier with Reboot the Suit, the Smithsonian's first Kickstarter campaign, which raised US\$500,000 to conserve, digitise and display Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 spacesuit in time for the anniversary.

The strategy for the Armstrong spacesuit was to consistently provide new information or updates to build excitement and awareness of the project:

- *Announcing display date:* In mid-April, the museum announced through a press release and social media that the suit would go back on display 16th July, 2019. The social media announcement featured two close-up photos, promising new photography of the suit soon.
- *Sharing new photos:* On 1st May, 2019, the museum released new photos, using threaded tweets to build anticipation. At 10.06 am, the museum tweeted 'Who wants to see brand-new photos of Neil Armstrong's spacesuit? We'll be releasing them right here at 11 am'. At 10.59, a second tweet was threaded, calling for a drum roll. Then at 11 as promised, the museum released the new photos in a threaded tweet as well as on Facebook and Instagram, emphasising that following extensive conservation, the suit would be on display for the first time in over a decade on 16th July. This tactic of unveiling the photos made it possible to create a moment to excite people about the spacesuit going back on display. The posts had high engagement, especially the 10.06 am tweet and the 11.00 am tweet. The success of the 10.06 am tweet was notable because, historically, posts without photos had not performed well for the museum. Throughout the Apollo 50 campaign, this 'rule' was broken multiple times, primarily with posts in certain circumstances that used the right tone of voice — usually conversational or self-referential posts. Using what was learned about text-only posts from Apollo 50, the museum has started incorporating them, when appropriate, into its overall social media strategy.
- *Spacesuit content:* The museum continued to share photos and new information about the spacesuit and its conservation in the weeks leading up to the anniversary. During the anniversary week, once it was back on display, the museum blitzed its channels with content, including photos of the new display, a video about the conservation, blogs about the project, and an Instagram Stories question-and-answer (Q&A) session with the spacesuit curator and conservator on the @Smithsonian Instagram profile.
- *3D scan data and digital model:* The museum shared an annotated digital 3D model of the spacesuit created by the Smithsonian's Digitization Program Office (DPO), along with the data so that people could 3D print their own. The 3D scan of the spacesuit was also featured on Google. When 'Neil Armstrong' or other Apollo 11-related keywords were Google searched on mobile, users could explore the spacesuit in 3D and place it in their surroundings using augmented reality (AR). On 19th July, an idea from DPO, facilitated by the Smithsonian's central social media team, saw other museum accounts around the country posting photos of the AR Armstrong spacesuit exploring their museums. This was a great way for museums without an Apollo connection to get involved in the Apollo

50 celebration. The museum encouraged its followers to do the same, and after seeing the fun that museums were having with it, many did so and shared their photos. This helped raise awareness that people could experience Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 spacesuit from anywhere, even if they could not visit in person (see s.si.edu/ArmstrongAR).

One challenge that should have been anticipated was that the photo of the spacesuit case (Figure 4) led to many comments that there was a typo on the case and that the iconic 'That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind' quote was wrong. The museum's position, however, is that the quotation must be presented as spoken (without the 'a' before 'man') regardless of Armstrong's intentions. While it was possible to work quickly with the curator to publish a blog post explaining this position, had this reaction been properly

anticipated, the museum could have taken control of the narrative and led a discussion on the differing opinions regarding the quotation instead of simply reacting to negative feedback.

Relive Apollo 11

The Apollo 50 campaign also saw the return of the museum's @ReliveApollo11 Twitter account, which live-tweets the Apollo 11 mission in real time every year. From 16th July to 24th July, nearly 700 tweets are posted to the account, from exciting moments in the mission to mundane status updates. Knowing that this year the account would be of particular interest, the museum made a few adjustments to boost engagement. Promotion of @ReliveApollo11 from @airandspace was increased, both before and during the anniversary, identifying a handful of tweets each day that were particularly interesting and adding the #Apollo50 hashtag and a photo to make those tweets



Figure 4: Instagram post from 16th July highlighting the new display of Neil Armstrong's spacesuit

stand out. This provided an entry point for the casual observer of the account, and made those tweets stand out in feeds when retweeted.

The live-tweet was extremely successful, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In July 2019, the account went from 7,500 followers to 12,300 followers. In comparison to the previous year, organic impressions increased by 300 per cent to nearly 4 million, and engagements increased by 400 per cent to 1.4 million. Replies increased by 400 per cent, a valuable metric because the aim was to start and engage in conversations. Historically, one of the biggest challenges of the account is that it posts so often and not every tweet is action-packed. For this reason, the museum was especially pleased that the average engagements per tweet increased from 55 to 215. In 2018, over half (384) of the @ReliveApollo11 tweets received fewer than 20 likes, while in 2019, only 40 received under 20 likes. Similarly, in 2018, only seven @ReliveApollo11 tweets received over 100 likes, while in 2019, 53 tweets received over 100 likes.

Many of the people reached by the @ReliveApollo11 account were positively impacted by it. Comments received indicated that the @ReliveApollo11 live-tweet aligned with and helped accomplish the Apollo 50 goals:

- Best twitter follow ever!!! My whole family was following at every moment. Thank you.
- Thank you, I thoroughly enjoyed this feed. I was born a decade later, this brought that excitement to my generation.
- Thank you SO much for the wild ride back in time, @ReliveApollo11. It was fantastic!
- The coolest thing on Twitter right now has to be @ReliveApollo11. I keep having to remind myself that it doesn't make much sense to get this excited anticipating something that happened 50 years ago.

Anniversary week

During the anniversary week, from the 50th anniversary of launch on 16th July to the 50th anniversary of splashdown on 24th July, the museum's social media accounts only posted about the Apollo 11 mission. This decision was made not simply because followers were interested in hearing about the mission, but also to recreate — especially for those who were not alive during the Moon landing — just how much the achievement captured the attention of the nation and the world. Posts to the museum's social media channels featured archival photos from the mission, artefacts in the museum's collection, blog posts, videos created by the museum, and photos from in-person events.

In developing content, considerable focus was placed on helping people who were not alive at the time of the Moon landing to understand what it was like to be an observer. Archival photos timed to moments in the mission played an important role in this, recreating the way Apollo 11 was all over the television and newspapers during the mission, and offering a closer look at what happened between launch and landing. The museum also shared @ReliveApollo11 tweets to reflect on what was happening in the mission and put the @airandspace audience in the moment (Figure 5). This strategy performed well because it gave those under 50 a new perspective and allowed those over 50 to reminisce about what the experience was like for them. The key to the voice and tone of these posts was to replicate the sense of amazement from 1969, rather than to seem too academic or removed from it.

During the anniversary week, the museum also reached wider audiences by taking over the Smithsonian Instagram account with Apollo content, doing a Smithsonian Instagram Stories Q&A session about the conservation of the Armstrong spacesuit, and hosting an #Apollo11at50 'hashtag party' with museums and cultural organisations



Figure 5: Tweet from 18th July amplifying @ReliveApollo11 content through the @airandspace account

around the world that encouraged them to post Apollo or Moon related content on 19th July and to engage with one another about it. Hashtag parties are popular with museums and cultural organisations, and are a great way to create or harness a moment on social media.

At the evening celebration the day of Moon landing (20th July) the museum hosted a social media screening of the Apollo 11 episode of HBO's miniseries 'From the Earth to the Moon'. Starting at 9 pm ET, visitors in the museum theatre, as well as people around the country, watched the episode and tweeted along. The strategy of this part of the campaign was to create a way for people anywhere to join the celebration

from their own homes and to provide an avenue for conversation so that the museum was not simply talking *at* its audience about the Moon landing, but talking *with* them. The museum collaborated with Jason Herbert's Historians at the Movies (#HATM) community, which live-tweets movies every week, making it possible to reach a new audience that is enthusiastic about this kind of online event. Although the live-tweet's association with a hot topic at the time helped build interest, it also took place among a lot of other events and social media discussion about Apollo 11, from other organisations as well as the museum itself. It may have been bigger if it had taken place during a less busy night or week.

One of the biggest challenges of the Apollo 11 anniversary week was the number of messages (defined here as comments, mentions, replies, retweets with comment, and direct messages) that were coming into the museum's social media accounts. The museum received over 22,000 messages on social media during the eight-day mission anniversary, which is 22 times more than it would normally get in an eight-day period. It is the museum's policy to read every message that comes in, and in this case it was important not to miss any questions about the events that required response. It was difficult to keep up with this engagement while also posting new content and completing other anniversary-related communications responsibilities. During the week, the museum replied to over 400 comments and tweets, some of which required tracking down answers before replying.

Go for the Moon

The centrepiece of the Apollo 50 celebration was 'Apollo 50: Go for the Moon', a projection of a Saturn V rocket on the Washington Monument. From 16th to 18th July, the rocket was projected on the Monument, and on 19th and 20th July, the 17-minute 'Go for the Moon' show unfolded on the face of the Monument and accompanying screens. The museum announced the event a little over a week before the first night of projection, sharing a rendering of the rocket projection on all three primary social media platforms and in Facebook Ads. Reaction to the announcement was immediate and positive, but there was confusion about what was happening when with respect to the projection versus the show, especially with regard to whether the rocket would be projected on the nights when the show was happening. This was a result of having different offerings on different nights and a lack of precise language, especially when there were character or word limits. The museum spent a lot of time answering

questions, and based on the questions received, continued to adapt phrasing when posting about the event.

The first night of the projection was 16th July. Despite having early photographs of the projection on the Monument, it was decided not to share a photo during the day for a number of reasons. The museum's channels were very busy that day with the unveiling of Neil Armstrong's spacesuit and the launch anniversary, so the post could have been lost in the noise had it been posted earlier. The museum also knew that the first sight of the rocket on the monument would be powerful for those attending in person, so did not want to post too far in advance of that moment. The photo was posted at 9.00 pm with a caption beginning 'We are GO for the Moon' (Figure 6).

The museum kept the momentum going by posting a new photo of the projection to Twitter each night to remind people that it was happening, and posting a teaser clip of the full show across all platforms on 19th July. The hashtag for the programme, #GoForTheMoon, was displayed on large digital screens at the event site and a lot of people shared their photos and comments on Instagram and Twitter. The strategy for 'Go for the Moon' was to reply to as many people who posted about the show as possible, especially if they did not tag the museum's account. Because 'Go for the Moon' took place on the National Mall and not on Smithsonian property, there was confusion about who was responsible for it. By thanking people for coming and celebrating Apollo 50, the museum was able to take ownership without looking possessive or territorial. For this particular event, 'normal business hours' for social media could not apply, because it was important to interact with people in the moment. The projection and shows ran from 9.30 to 11.30 pm each night, so a number of late nights monitoring social accounts was required, and this did not go unnoticed by social media followers. An account with over 100,000



Figure 6: This Instagram post from 16th July featuring the first photo of the ‘Go for the Moon’ projection is the most liked @airandspacemuseum post ever

followers quote-tweeted the museum’s response to him with a positive message, pleased to have received a response so quickly. Another person replied to his tweet, ‘Yes, we stan the @airandspace social media guru for tweeting nice things at 12.30am. Well done’.

Even after ‘Go for the Moon’ was over, it was possible to continue its momentum by sharing a behind-the-scenes video later that week, and a beautifully produced video of the full show at the beginning of August. Although it would have been nice to live-stream the show, the final video and

its multiple angles and stunning crowd shots captured ‘Go for the Moon’ exactly how the museum wanted it to be remembered. Across all platforms, the final video has over 250,000 views. ‘Apollo 50: Go for the Moon’ was one of the most ambitious things the museum has ever done, and social media played an important part in amplifying that message and providing a way for people all over the world to experience it, even if they could not be there in person.

Digital content

In addition to social media efforts, it was important to create new digital content to mark the milestone anniversary. With a lot of existing Apollo content on the website, including artefact collection records, blogs from previous anniversaries, and an exhibition microsite with information on each mission, it was important to think about the anniversary in new ways. This helped to create entry points into the celebration of Apollo 11 for people of all expertise or interest levels. As a way to ensure the creation of new content and to incentivise the museum to think about Apollo in a fresh way, it was decided that a new blog post would be published every weekday in July until the end of the anniversary. Those blogs covered a range of topics, from lesser-known figures to the 3D scanning and printing of artefacts to the art and music of Apollo. The new Apollo blogs received over 20,000 web visits.

The museum also collaborated with Google to feature National Air and Space Museum content in Google search. Neil Armstrong’s Apollo 11 spacesuit and command module *Columbia* were available to explore in 3D and AR through Google search. The museum worked with Google Arts & Culture and creative agency R/GA to produce STAMPs, Google’s story version of Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMPs), which are fast-loading pages for mobile. STAMPs are visual, vertical stories that are swiped through with user functionality similar to Instagram Stories, but in this case, with much

more advanced animation. R/GA created 20 STAMP stories featuring museum expertise and content, ranging from profiles of the Apollo astronauts and other key members of the mission to the technology behind the mission (see s.si.edu/STAMP).

The STAMPs appeared in mobile search when a user Google searched a related topic, making it possible to reach people where they were. Three of the STAMP stories, about software engineer Margaret Hamilton, food scientist Rita Rapp, and the mission overall, were featured on Google’s Discover page, and during the month of July received about 150,000, 100,000 and 80,000 page views, respectively. The other stories were successful as well, and saw a comparatively high average time on page and a low bounce rate. The stories were still being discovered through Google search months after the peak of interest. The STAMP project was a successful experiment and the museum is currently exploring additional content areas to create new STAMPs for future projects.

MISSION DEBRIEF: CAMPAIGN SUCCESS AND METRICS

Throughout the entire campaign, the museum sent 626 Apollo 50 posts across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, receiving about 27 million impressions, 800,000 engagements and 45,000 clicks. These kinds of metrics can be difficult to understand without context, but anecdotally, it was observed that Apollo 50 content tended to perform better than other content.

To better understand the numbers from the eight-day anniversary period, a baseline was established by averaging an eight-day timeframe from each of the previous 12 months. Table 1 compares this baseline average with the museum’s social media metrics from 16th to 24th July, 2019 (these numbers only include the main National Air and Space Museum accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and do not include @ReliveApollo11).

Table 1: Campaign metrics

Metric	Baseline average	July 16-24, 2019	Increase (%)
Total impressions	2,321,556	17,030,810	734
Total engagements	47,743	581,845	1,219
Engagements per Facebook post	663	5,453	822
Engagements per Tweet	456	710	156
Engagements per Instagram post	1,261	1,829	383
Total follower growth	1,431	19,325	1,350
Facebook follower growth	400	6,083	1,521
Twitter follower growth	416	5,463	1,313
Instagram follower growth	615	7,779	1,264
Actions to learn more			
Twitter link clicks	1,746	16,159	925
Facebook link clicks	2,327	20,124	865
Instagram profile visits	25	697	2,788

Given such a steep increase in followers, it was expected that numbers would decrease or stagnate after the anniversary passed and the museum went back to posting more varied content. The museum, however, has continued to gain followers at a similar or higher rate than before. Additionally, while no one expects engagement on all posts to match what was experienced during the Apollo 50 campaign, engagement has increased compared with before Apollo 50, suggesting that existing followers continue to enjoy the museum's content and new followers are interested in engaging with the museum beyond Apollo.

The goal of this campaign was to lead the nation in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Apollo and the objectives were to increase people's knowledge of the Apollo missions, to insert the museum into the conversation and to establish the museum as an institution that is creative and innovative — all of which were achieved.

The engagement numbers in Table 1 show that the museum reached an unprecedented number of people, helping it to achieve its objective of educating the public about the Apollo missions. The campaign posts with the most engagement show that the museum was successful in making itself part of the

conversation and being seen as creative and innovative.

According to engagement numbers, the top three posts on each platform were:

- *Facebook:*
 - the first photo of the 'Go for the Moon' projection;
 - an archival photo of the three Apollo 11 astronauts; and
 - the video of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon.
- *Twitter:*
 - Buzz Aldrin, Michael Collins and Neil Armstrong's spacesuits together;
 - the first 'Go for the Moon' photo; and
 - the Armstrong spacesuit in its display case.
- *Instagram:*
 - the first 'Go for the Moon' photo;
 - the LEGO Buzz Aldrin from the Apollo 50 Festival; and
 - the Armstrong spacesuit in its display case.

The top three posts on Twitter and Instagram were all of museum artefacts or photos from the museum's celebration, and the most popular post on Facebook was from the museum's celebration. More than just sharing history, the museum was making history.



Figure 7: This tweet from 18th July is the most liked and retweeted @airandspace tweet ever

The ‘Go for the Moon’ photo on Instagram was the museum’s most successful Instagram post of all time, while the same photo on Facebook was the museum’s most successful Facebook post of all time, receiving over 60,000 reactions, 4,800 comments and 9,300 shares. The tweet with the photo of the three spacesuits, which was taken for the purpose of sharing on social during the anniversary, was the museum’s most successful tweet of all time (Figure 7). Another interesting metric is that after the Apollo 50 campaign, the museum’s Twitter follower demographics began to skew slightly younger than before. While this was not a major shift, it does mean that many new followers are younger.

The campaign also hit the three messaging goals. The museum shared the excitement of the Apollo missions and inspired its

audience with archival posts, spotlights on the groundbreaking men and women who worked on Apollo, and through the ‘Go for the Moon’ activation. The museum used the @ReliveApollo11 account and other real-time posts to recreate for those not alive in 1969 the excitement of experiencing the Moon landing. It also shared its collection through social media posts, 3D models, blogs, STAMPs and more.

The Apollo 50 social and digital media campaign played a key part in establishing the National Air and Space Museum as a leader of the Apollo 11 50th anniversary celebration. It taught people about Apollo; it put the museum in the centre of the conversation; it helped strengthen the museum’s social media presence; and it shared the messages the museum wanted emphasised. Mission accomplished.