

Hermitage's Marketing Initiatives

Founded in 1764 by Catherine the Great, the Hermitage is one of a handful of world-class museums—like the Louvre in Paris or the Metropolitan Museum in New York City—and is the main tourist attraction in St. Petersburg, Russia. Today, the Hermitage consists of five buildings of over 1,000 rooms that contain more than 3 million items, only 5 percent ever exhibited at one time.

But since the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the Hermitage has struggled financially. Gone is most of its government funding. As a result, the number of visitors to the Hermitage fell from 3.5 million in 1989 to under 2 million in 2000, far less than the Louvre's 6.2 million.

Dr. Mikhail Piotrovsky, the Hermitage's director since 1992, decided to face this funding crisis head on. By using innovative strategic alliances and marketing initiatives, Piotrovsky has begun to bring in the resources needed to improve and expand the museum.

To take a "virtual tour" of the Hermitage, go to its internet address, www.heritagemuseum.org, and click on the "Virtual Visit" link. This website allows people all over the world to view more Hermitage treasures and consider a personal visit. A \$2 million IBM grant to the Hermitage made possible this state-of-the-art Internet website and a digital library of the Hermitage collection.

The website allows users to "walk through" Hermitage rooms and see its artwork. Users can zoom in to examine the artwork more closely.

Companies can learn from this example, to effectively use information technology as a key differentiator to attract and retain customers. And to address the funding crisis an organization may encounter.

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