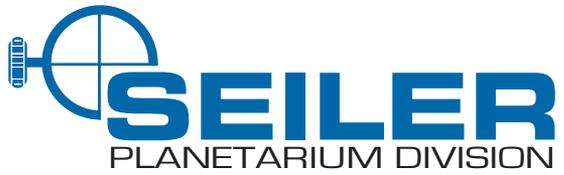


# Projections

WINTER 2015

Planetarium Newsletter



## IN THIS ISSUE:

Render It Again, Sam

Social Media: Why They Aren't Following You

A First and Lasting Impression



## “Raising Thoughts” by Chuck Rau



The year is 2015, the same year that Doc Brown and Marty McFly visited in Back to the Future 2. We don't all have flying cars, but apparently someone has finally built a working hover board. There are many different technologies being used in planetariums. While some original equipment is still tasked with educating students and bringing wonder to audiences, others have employed newer hardware with displaying more contemporary content. The range of quality of presentations, tools and administrative support varies greatly from one location to the next.

In this issue of Projections, we continue the discussion on “Fixing the Planetarium” with an article exploring a common mistake being made with social media. I hope you will find value in the ideas that I'm sharing. I've heard of some struggles and frequently hear the same story again and again.

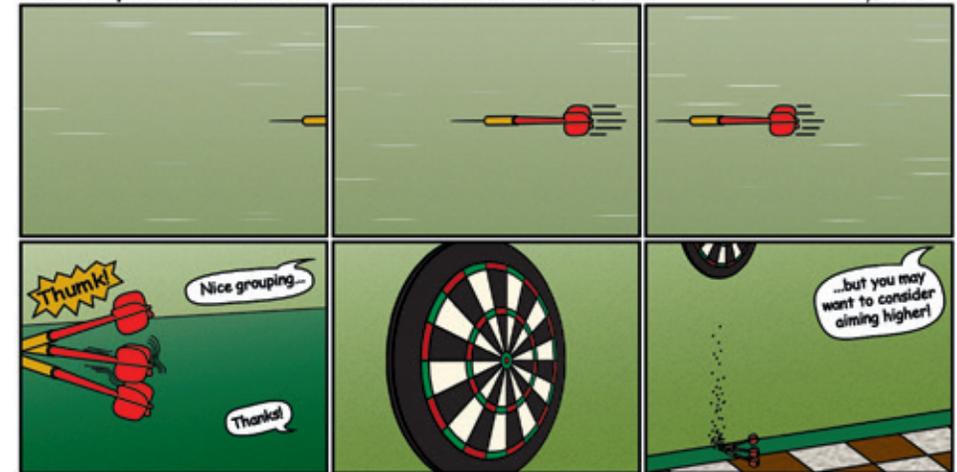
I myself have had the chance to see some projection systems from a variety of sources, and I've seen a huge difference in quality between the ZEISS products and others. Some have embraced a “good enough” mentality, but if you put in a minimal effort, you can only get minimal results. In other words, if you aim for good enough, you'll never hit excellent. This realization has inspired the included comic strip that I have begun.

Whether it is technology, advertisements or efforts to keep up with the latest tools or techniques, success is difficult. Having a partner with nearly 170 years of fine optics experience makes a world of

difference. This fall, Seiler Instrument will celebrate 70 years of excellence as an optical manufacturing company. The strength of this relationship is growing, with renewed focus and some exciting announcements in the coming year.

I encourage you all to aim higher. There's nothing wrong with insisting on a ZEISS projection system or investing more time to raise the funds for it. Sure, it may take some extra effort, anything worthwhile does, but the results may be more in line with what your donors, administration and guests are hoping for.

### Bard Spiral Tales of life, the universe and a few other things. By Chuck Rau



## Render It Again, Sam

By: Brian Wirthlin

In 1998 the American Film Institute polled 1500 artists and leaders in the film industry to compile the list of the 100 best American movies of all time. *Casablanca* came in second. Sam's rendition of “As Time Goes By” is a watershed moment in the film. Complete disclosure requires that we reveal that “Sam” couldn't play the piano. Dooley Wilson may have been a good singer and actor but was actually a drummer, not a pianist. It didn't prevent *Casablanca* from winning



**Projections Staff**  
Planetarium Sales Director  
Chuck Rau  
Planetarium Division Director  
Louise Schaper  
Technical Administration  
Craig Morris  
Brian Wirthlin



Best Picture in 1944. Sam's hands weren't in the frame. It didn't matter if Wilson, as Sam, could play or not or that the iconic piano was a prop and never used to play the famous song for the film.

The fulldome planetarium community might want to consider the implications. You don't need to model the entire universe to get a shot of a galaxy. You don't have to accurately model  $10^7$  asteroids or particles or snowflakes to get those shots either. It's not about how much time, how much computer power or how much money you spend. It's about the effect it has on the audience. There are efficient ways of telling the story without getting lost in the details. Connecting with the audience and conveying the emotion and essential elements of the story is far more important than maintaining the highest possible level of scientific accuracy for every atom in the cosmos. Take a cue from Hollywood and show what needs to be seen.

## Social Media: Why They Aren't Following You

*By: Chuck Rau*

The growing popularity of social media with the proliferation of Internet access and smartphone applications is undeniable. The Internet has become a part of our daily lives. For many people, connectivity isn't even a conscious thought, so long as it is present. Smart devices with access to online applications and services such as Facebook and Twitter have reduced the effort required to be connected to the world around us, reducing the gap between real-world and online experiences.

This unprecedented level of connectivity means that a solid online presence is essential in a modern business. With a few gestures and a free thumb, your guests will look at what you are offering, find the schedule and try to get to you with a map that connects to their phone's built-in GPS. Once on-site, they will likely share their experiences as they are happening with friends by posting pictures and videos on their favorite photo-sharing sites or live-tweeting

the visit. When your customer likes something you are doing, they tell their friends. When they have an unpleasant experience, they tell the world.

Businesses frequently use social media to promote their products and services, provide access to up-to-date information, announce special deals, and share interesting content that is parallel to both their mission and the interests of their followers. Whether the business is a bar, nail salon, retailer or a planetarium, social media is one more point of connection between you and your customer. How strong that connection is depends greatly on two main points: How personal the interaction is; and how relevant your posts are to your customers and followers.

Used correctly, these posts can be a great way to remind your visitors of your existence and become a valuable part of their lives. Used incorrectly, your posts may drive people away...not only online, but from your doors. Certainly this is true if you started posting rude, judgmental or even inappropriate content, but that's obvious, as are the many other results to follow. It is the more innocent actions you take that we need to explore...ones that either drive your followers away or help you to build an online following with a more qualified audience interested in what you have to offer.

While many facilities engage in social media, there is a growing number of these that are unwittingly undermining their own efforts. Whether it is from a perception of "keeping it simple" or more often the illusion of "maintaining brand identity," if you are like many others, someone in your organization decided that all of the social media efforts should be gathered under one global and all-encompassing account. Perhaps you were even screamed at when you tried to have your own Facebook page dedicated to your planetarium..."THIS IS US! WE WANT THEM FOLLOWING US!" exclaimed the Marketing Director, upset that you were trying to hijack their followers.

It seems logical at first...you would think the customers should all follow one account. Unfortunately, this is not how the Internet works, especially when it comes to social media. What's worse is that the results of trying to have just one account may be devastating to

your marketing and community relations efforts, and you may never know it.

Why is this damaging? People come to your facilities for various reasons. You need to identify these groups and work with them separately and directly wherever possible. Failure to do so alienates those groups until your message is lost in a sea of spam, ignored, blocked or unfollowed. With the social media tools available, these people may technically still be listed as followers, but only as a number. Your message will never get through if you have annoyed them, and you may never know it.

**Example:** Let's say your planetarium is part of a larger organization, like a science center. You offer public shows as well as school and other group bookings. In addition to the exhibits, the science center offers programs for children and occasional evenings for adults. To keep this very simple, let's say my wife and I like science and astronomy. We don't have or want kids, so an evening of science without screaming children appealed to us (this is not a stretch.) Somehow we found out about the event and came to your adult event at the planetarium. We liked what we saw and enjoyed the evening, so we wanted to follow the planetarium to keep up with events, but couldn't because it didn't have its own page, so we followed the science center instead.

But rather than getting the occasional astronomy update, news about new shows, interesting NASA accomplishments or other planetarium related events, if your marketing team fills my feed with kids, kids, kids, stuff for kids, your facility will be unfollowed or more likely just unsubscribed from faster than you can possibly imagine. Even if you think I'm following you, I may have set my account to ignore yours, so I'm not even seeing your announcements. I may look occasionally if I am really interested

and want to see what is happening, but frankly, I doubt it. You have lost any value of gaining my following. Your info will never get to me. You have alienated me, and for no better reason than someone wanted to have one single account and blast it with everything there is to offer, even if it doesn't apply.

Does this sound harsh or unreasonable? At first it may seem a bit extreme, but it's not unrealistic. Not only does this hypothetical situation actually apply to my own experiences, I've heard the same message from several friends and others discussing their experience with various facilities. You may not be aware that this is even happening, or that you have this problem, but if you are grouping all social media together, it is time to change your practices right now. The good news is that it is really simple to fix, and other than making sure you are on the right account when you write a post or leave a comment, it doesn't take much more effort.

Here are three specific steps to help you do this better:

1) The planetarium should have its own Facebook page and Twitter feed separate from the parent facility. Our goal is to help planetariums, but this is applicable to other attractions as well...attract the sports fans to the athletics exhibition and the astronomy fans and future astronauts to the planetarium. Do not assume these are the same groups. There is no such thing as a "General Audience." Some of these people are coming to you for one main interest. Don't try to make them conform to one visitor type or expect them to enjoy all of your offerings.

2) Adult and children programs should have their own Facebook page and Twitter feed. Someone that wants to come for a wine and cheese event may not want to come to a wine and mac-n-cheese event. Similarly, the laser show crowd will have its own following, as would the robotics camp and star parties. Having this information

### 5 QUICK TIPS FOR BETTER SOCIAL MEDIA:

1. The planetarium needs its own account/page/followers.
2. Adult and Children events should have their own also.
3. Do not cross-promote between accounts often.
4. Stay relevant and interesting to each group.
5. Be responsive to customer complaints and inquiries.

available to them more directly also has the added benefit of easier access to information about their specific interest with less searching. If it is a program worthy of offering more than once, it is a program worthy of building on the followers from the previous similar event.

3) Do not frequently cross-promote between these groups. An occasional reminder that there is another page or account to follow can be good, but don't constantly send the same message across five different accounts, as this completely defeats the purpose of having these separate accounts. Keeping general news on the main account is fine, this is where things like closings due to inclement weather and an announcement of a new exhibit or program can help inform or attract visitors without blasting them with every little item.

4) Offer relevant and interesting material to each group as it relates to their specific interests. By allowing your followers to self-select into interest groups as they choose to follow the portion of your operation that applies to them, you gain the ability to grow each group by catering to their unique needs. This will allow you to attract different audiences for different reasons and not chase them away with topics that some groups of guests may find uninteresting. As in the earlier example, do not assume that everyone loves kids or that it is the only audience to attract. If it is all you are advertising, this will be a self-fulfilling prophecy, as you will alienate other possible audiences. If you aren't attracting adults without kids, here's a great place to start.

5) Be responsive to customer complaints and inquiries. Your online presence, whether you planned it or not, is an important part of your customer service. More often people are choosing to take their complaints to social media than to handle the issue in person. Whether they didn't get the attention they wanted while at your facility, or they see it as a way to escalate the issue, some people will complain online. You will be judged by others on how quickly and effectively you respond to complaints and questions. You may never be able to stop the complaints, but if you are doing

well with other aspects of your operation and online presence, it will be ok.

Still twitching about needing brand identity? Let me ask you this... what good is brand identity if your followers identify your brand with something that doesn't interest them? It is far better to have 2,000 different people following each of your five separate accounts than it is to have 10,000 people not really paying attention to your one account. You are more likely to attract more active followers if you are providing them with content that they are interested in.

This entire concept shouldn't be difficult to grasp. You probably do this with print materials already. A brochure for a classy evening event and a flyer for birthday parties should look completely different, each promoting what is important and included with such an event, and in a style appropriate to their respective audience. Why would this be any different online? You need to be approachable in the way that each group sees value in your presence, whether in person or online. Just as you have different interactions with donors than you do with scout groups, your online offerings, programs and other marketing materials should also adapt to your audience.

Sometimes these types of changes, account access and other marketing efforts are completely out of the control of the planetarium staff. If this is the case, I would strongly encourage you to share this article with your administration and marketing department. Hopefully, we can all work together to overcome these simple challenges and increase attendance and revenue for your facility.

**ATTENTION:**

**Help us keep our mailing list up-to-date. Please contact [projections@seilerinst.com](mailto:projections@seilerinst.com) to update your contact information, to suggest another recipient, or to switch to a digital version.**

**Like the publication? Let us know and we will make sure you continue receiving Projections each quarter.**

## A First and Lasting Impression

By: Brian Wirthlin

In the beginning...well, right after the beginning, there was the Zeiss Mark II, and it was good. And it was BIG. This was an imposing machine that dominated everything around it.

"I'll never forget the first time I saw the Zeiss," said the late and former City Councilman Stanley E. Michels of Manhattan, who was 5 at the time. "I thought it was a monster, a giant praying mantis. Forget about the stars in the dome -- I could have looked forever at the projector."

A friend recently discovered in an old copy of *A Satchel Guide to Europe* which included a note about "The New Planetariums" in the introduction to Germany: "The summer of 1925 saw the opening at Jena of a huge dome, built of concrete, in which ingenious optical devices are used to show the motions of the stars and other heavenly bodies. The invention, which is doubtless the most successful device yet fashioned for revealing the secrets of the motions of the stars, is as instructive as it is novel and fascinating." (Rolfe – Crockett, Houghton Mifflin Co, 1933)

Many of today's planetariums have eliminated that dominating presence in the center of the room, tilted their domes, added stairs and a host of unique and not-so-unique touches here and there. The effect upon a visitor who walks into today's planetariums has changed. In the past, visitors were confronted with this huge, intricate and intriguing machine that engaged their imaginations. Think about that for a moment. The visitor walked in, and their imaginations were engaged. The lecturer didn't have to figure out a way to capture the audience's attention; he just needed to keep it. And even if the lecturer failed to ignite the audience's imaginations, the audiences of old were left with a life-long memory of the first time they saw the planetarium projector and imagined where it could take them.

You may have an environment that sparks the audience's imagination, or a theater that looks as bare and utilitarian as a modern train station. You may have tiny brilliant stars or pixilated approximations. You may have lasers and state-of-the-art audio systems. You may have a cove lighting system that allows limitless permutations of colors. You may have motion platforms under your seats. You may have 3D glasses (and manage not to hurt my brain). You may have the largest render farm on your block and ties to the supercomputer center down the street...none of it matters unless you have a budget and staff and ideas and talent and the impassioned drive to do something memorable.



Your audience  
will see the difference.



With crisp stars from a ZEISS projector and deep black as only VELVET can deliver, your audiences will be treated to the finest planetarium experience possible.

There's nothing wrong with showing what light pollution looks like...we just think it should be optional.



The sole distributor of ZEISS Planetariums  
in the United States and Canada

For a personal demonstration, contact:  
Chuck Rau, Planetarium Sales Director  
Direct: 314-218-6393  
Email: [crau@seilerinst.com](mailto:crau@seilerinst.com)  
Toll Free: 1-800-489-2282



Exclusive Partner