The Digital Launch of the Nimitz Graybook:
An After-Event Survey

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The Digital Launch of the Nimitz Graybook

Introduction

The Naval Historical Collection (NHC) extended its global reach with the launch of a new website on 24 February 2014. This was a natural step for the NHC since most of the institutional records it collects from departments within the Naval War College are now born digital. The new website provides a platform for sharing not only institutional records, but also significant naval cultural heritage objects, including historical manuscripts, photographs, audio files and film clips.

February 24th was a particularly exciting time to be launching the new website because it coincided with Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz's birthday and the digital launch of *The CINCPAC-CINCPOA Running Estimate of the Situation, 1941-1945*, nicknamed "The Nimitz Graybook." The Nimitz Graybook, consisting of eight large volumes with over 4,000 pages of text, is the daily record of the combat situation that Fleet Admiral Nimitz faced every day of the war. It was been described by one historian as, "the most authoritative source on the Pacific war available anywhere."

The Survey

Because of a successful public relations effort, the event achieved worldwide recognition and played a significant part in broadening the reach of the Naval War College and its role in creating and sharing knowledge. The primary objective of this study was to assess what worked, what did not work, and where improvements could be made for similar events in the future.

During March 2014, a survey questionnaire was sent to a convenience sample of twenty individuals drawn from a diverse group who attended planning meetings or participated in support activities. The response rate was disappointing with only eleven usable replies. This may be the result of limited involvement by some participants in the overall planning of the event. Survey questions focused on participants' concerns about how successful the event was compared to its intended outcomes. The results of this survey can add to our understanding of this largely unstudied issue at the Naval War College.

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An important characteristic common to all event planning is determining the purpose of the event. To discover whether the event's objectives were understood, respondents were asked relative agreement on this statement:

Objectives were clearly defined for the Digital Launch of the Nimitz Graybook.

Ninety percent (90%) agreed or strongly agreed. The responses showed that participants' understanding of the objectives was surprisingly high. Ten percent (10%) were neutral.
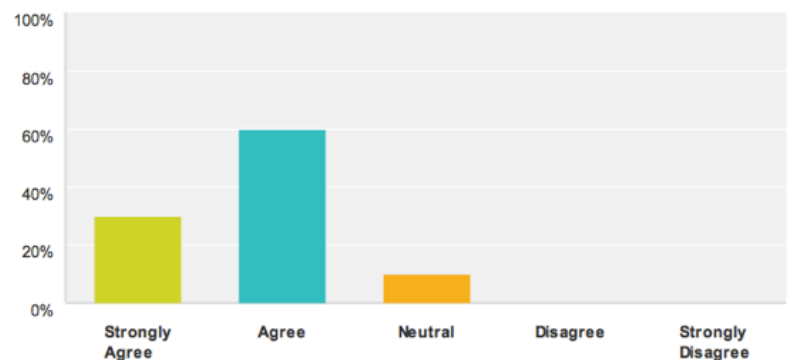
Setting clear personal objectives (especially measurable ones) is the necessary step that directs individuals in the planning process. To discover whether individuals understood their objectives, respondents were asked relative agreement on this statement:

The objectives for my work were clearly defined.

One of the more challenging issues for participants was determining exactly what their role would be in this project and where they fit in with other departments. "I knew the individuals at planning meetings," one respondent observed, "but didn't understand their department's role." Still, by the time the post-event survey was administered, one hundred percent (100%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their objectives were clearly defined, but this came at a cost. As one respondent described it, "[…] tasks foundered around before settling with the correct department."
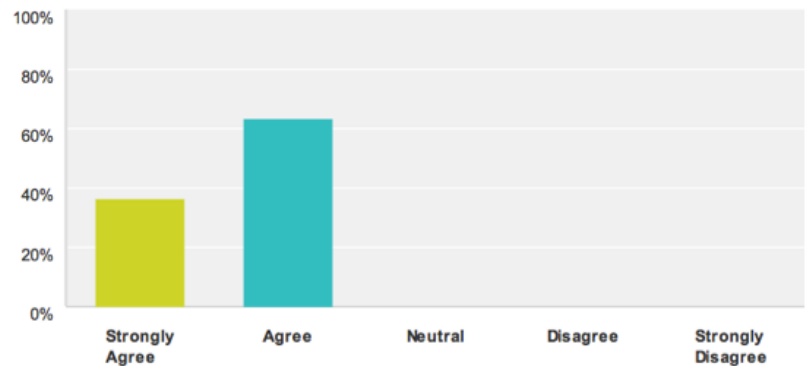
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A significant association between participants and their involvement in event planning supports the notion that event planning with timely and effective communications makes the highest and best use of resources. To discover whether individuals thought they were adequately involved, respondents were asked relative agreement on this statement

I was adequately involved in the project.

The graph at the right shows twenty-seven percent (27%) strongly agreed, fifty-five percent (55%) agreed, and eighteen percent (18%) disagreed they were adequately involved in the project. A "write-in" provision allowed the respondents who did not feel they were involved to describe the decisions that were made where they felt left out.
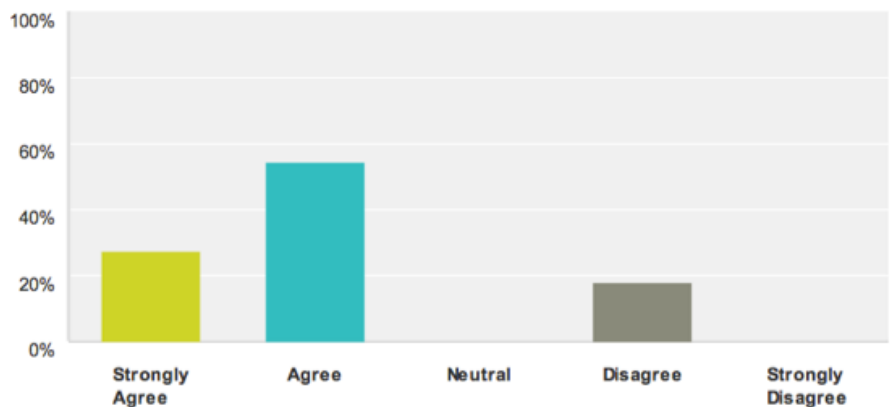
One respondent expressed an interest in participating in, "what URL to use in the press release."

"I think we as a department could've been helpful in the planning process. The event was two years in the making but we were used in the final days for the event."

"I think VISCOMM's experience with handling of images and authoring PDFs would've been helpful in planning the delivery/launch of trhe Graybook digitally."

One contributing factor to successful event planning lies in the effectiveness of communications between departments. To discover how effective inter-departmental communications were, respondents were asked relative agreement on this statement

Interactions between departments were effective.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their respective departments interacted with other departments effectively. The responses tell us there is no shortage of efforts to communicate once the channels are opened. There was moderate variation in responses with eighty-two percent (82%) agreeing or strongly agreeing and eighteen percent (18%) who remained neutral or disagreed.
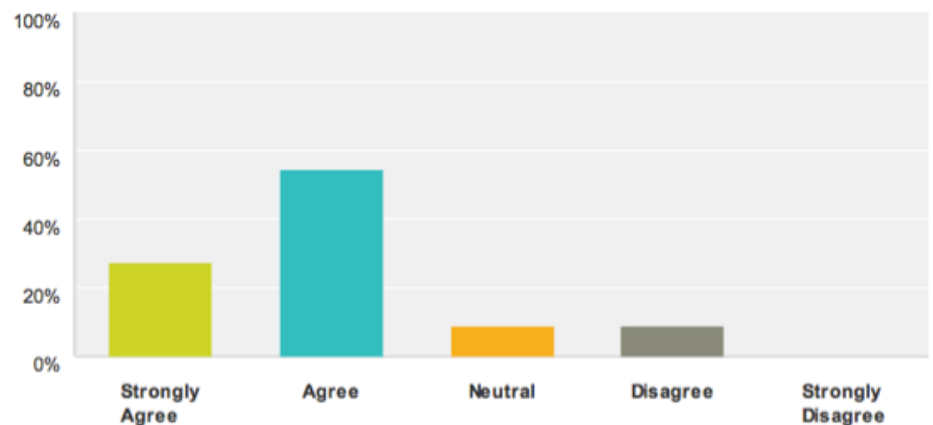
Respondents were given an opportunity to provide written comments stating what they would change if given the opportunity.

"Once we were involved in the process, things went very smooth between A/V, VISCOM, and the Library."

"Present a clear model of all the departments and their functions at the outset of the planning sessions."

An event's success typically depends on support from leadership. To discover, from the perspective of the participants, how important this event was to NWC leadership, respondents were asked:

How important do you think this event was to the NWC leadership?

This question is an important one for respondents to answer. Events of this scale cannot be developed and launched successfully without the support of the NWC leadership. In sum, the graph on the right shows that one hundred percent (100%) of respondents agreed that the digital launch of the Graybook and rollout of the new Naval Historical Collection website were important or very important to the institution's leadership.
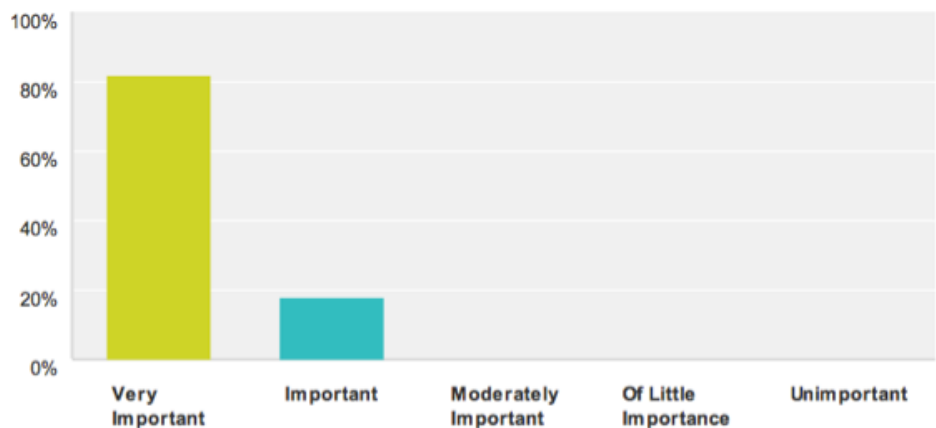
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One goal of this post-event survey is to evaluate what contributed to the success of the event. Respondents were asked four questions:

1. What communications, organization, structural problems in general were encountered and how could we have done better in these areas?

The survey findings indicate that not everyone fully understood what NWC resources were available for supporting an online digital launch event. It was suggested that the pre-planning phase could have been improved by polling resources to help predict issues that arose late in the preparations. In contrast, one respondent said, "The digital launch event has to be [one of] the best executed events I have witnessed since I have been here at the War College."

Two particularly important components of event planning that surfaced were coordination and communication among departments. As one respondent observed, there was a strong relationship between PAO, Graphics and Events departments, but that they were separated organizationally. Communication and coordination were also listed as concerns between the NWC and outside entities. The major reasons for not immediately meeting user demand for the Graybook, for instance, was attributed to a need for greater communication between the site hosting the digital online resource—The Digital Ark Corporation (TDAC)— and the NWC Public Affairs Office.

> "TDAC needs to have a clearer understanding of the scope and estimated reach of a PR/marketing campaign, i.e., what type of traffic is anticipated, how far and international is the reach, what articles were published, etc."

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## 2. If you had 25 words (or less!) to characterize the events on 24 February 2014, what would you say?

"Successful, exilerating, excited by the response, overwhelmed by the number of downloads."

"First class event."

"Ground breaking."

"Best program I had the pleasure of participating in at the NWC in several years."

"The events of the 24th were the product of a cohesive and concerted effort whose impact exceeded expecations."
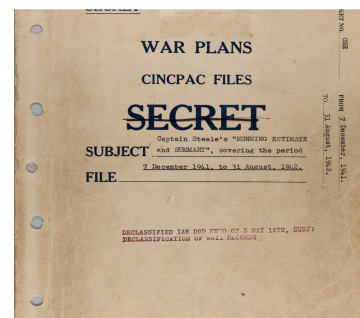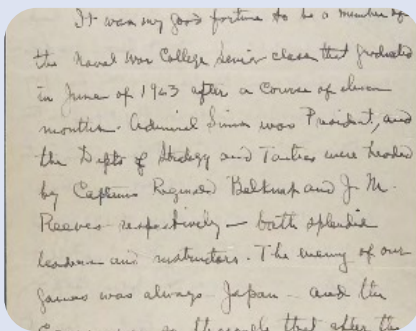

"Memorable event--well-received worldwide."

"Very effective outreach for the College and Naval Historical Collection."

"Informative."

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3. What were the main things that contributed to this event's success that you would want to see applied to future events?

"An excellent press release and marketing effort by NWC's PAO with international outreach resulting in an immensely succesful launch!"

"Each department was given the opportunity to congtribute their AOE, and everyone brought their best to bear."

"Solid collaboration and planning."

"Excellent support from Public Affairs, Graphics, PNWC's office, Protocol."

"Communiction and cooperation among various departments."

"Cross departmental coordination."

"Cooperation and communication between departments."

"The PNWC and COS embraced the idea immediately...they gave it the backing it needed to evolve into a world-class event."

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4. What were the main sources of frustration in The Digital Launch of the Nimitz Graybook that you would want to see done differently in the future?

"TDAC needs to be a part of the discussion about which URL's are used in press releases in order to evaluate the ramifications. In particular, the URL used in the press release was a direct link to the record for the Nimitz Graybook—thereby sending all traffic to a web page which prominently displayed a download link to a 659MB PDF file. At the height of the traffic surge on February 24th, there were over 400 simultaneous users trying to download a 659MB PDF file which overloaded the computer server hosting the files. Great news is the website never went down!"

"The amount of deliverables that developed during the process. The target was ever evolving almost until the last day of the event."

"Not a frustration but observation that no one person could take ownership of this amazing project since it requires several areas to contribute for success"

"...see more risk management, brainstorming ahead of time [to determine] where systems might fail."

"Technical website issues arising due to overload."

"Some times it seemed like too many hands in the jar."

The last section of the survey asked respondents to provide any other comments they felt should be considered as lessons learned. It is evident in the following comments that a digital launch marks the beginning of an ongoing process that requires certain post-event activities to continue indefinitely.

> "It's important to be able to track website analytics and in particular, the referral pages to understand where visitors are coming from and thereby evaluate the most effective sources for driving traffic. Since the website works within an iFrame and a shortened URL wasn't used in the press release (i.e. bitly), TDAC doesn't have access to this important data in order to determine which pages/websites were the most successful for driving traffic."

Another respondent commented:

> "The project is not yet complete and needs additional work to be 100% searchable online."

Reflecting further on the pre-event planning, one respondent draws attention to the fluid nature of the planning process:

> "My only sources of frustration were when we were involved in the process and amount of deliverables that developed during the process. The target (types and amount of deliverables) was ever evolving almost until the last day of the event. This I think could've been alleviated with coordination between the departments involved. We made products not only for the library but also the event, the CD, the PAO shop and Leadership. These products and the brainstorming that developed them could've been done earlier in the planning process, which would've gave more time for the execution phase."

Observations

The primary objective of this event was to unveil the Graybook as part of a new online exhibition featuring Chester W. Nimitz's correspondence, speeches, essays, and career photographs. The event included the broader objective of promoting the Naval War College as a leading professional military institute of higher education engaged in outreach and in creating and sharing new knowledge.

Achieving a clear understanding of digital launch events requires careful pre-event planning. Lessons learned from this survey and activities to consider in the future are listed below.

(1) Digital launches require predicting and anticipating the effects of market penetration and how that might place increased demands not only on people, but computer systems and networks.

(2) Identify potential post-event activities, including radio interviews, articles, surveys, DVD editions of online resources, promotional videos, and the ongoing collection and analysis of usage statistics.

(3) Construct a time line showing what tasks stakeholders must accomplish, time allotted, and resources required.

(4) Consider the relationships and dependencies between departments and individuals and where clear channels of communication are needed most.