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The AIDS Quilt Touch Mobile Web App

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/kelly_thompson/3/
The AIDS Memorial Quilt
curated by the NAMES Project, is the largest living monument in the world.
Composed of individual panels each 3 ft by 6 ft -- the approximate size of a coffin -- it pays tribute to the lives of nearly 100,000 individuals who have died in the AIDS pandemic.
The physical quilt dates from 1987 when the first panel was created. Hopefully, the last panel will be added to it soon.
Each panel has been painstakingly hand-crafted by those who knew and loved these individuals. Each panel carries the emotional weight of a life lived, of loving relationships, and of heartfelt loss.

The Mobile App
The Digital Studio for Public Humanities was approached in the spring of 2012 with the proposal to make a digital version of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in conjunction with the Quilt 2012 celebration.

Use Case Scenarios:
1. A visitor to the physical quilt can search the name of their loved one and discover when and where they can find their quilt panel.
2. A person unable to visit the quilt or while the quilt is not on display can search and find a digital image of their quilt panel.
3. The visitor in either scenario can leave a digital remembrance statement on their panel.

Drupal was chosen as a framework to support the app due to its power and versatility.
The legacy database consists of a single table, with records separated by names. Custom PHP scripts were written to migrate records to a relational model that connected names, panels, and blocks of 8 panels.
Private data such as personal contact information and fields that were semantically inconsistent were excluded from import.

Intersections of digital and physical memorials
- Digital monuments mimicking physical monuments but with no actual physical component (Second Life Digital AIDS Quilts)
- Digital interfaces corresponding/adding additional facets to permanent physical memorial (Digital Vietnam Wall)
- Digital monuments with temporary physical installations (The Vienna Project sidewalk memorials)
- Digital interfaces to permanent but intermittently available physical memorials (AIDS Quilt Touch)

30,500 visits
21,940 unique visitors
220 comments and celebrations

Rather than seeking/creating a new audience, AQT provided a platform of search and expression for an existing community. We like to refer to this phenomenon as “community sourcing”: providing a place where people with membership in a particular community, with unique memories, stories, and perspectives, can contribute that information for posterity. This differentiates our project from crowd-sourcing in that we are not seeking labor, but instead stories and time-sensitive information sharing.