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Austins: Memory & Place

Infographic

Austins Department Store in Derry-Londonderry is reputed to be the oldest independent department store in the world. Austins was trading in Derry more than a decade before Harrods of London was built. Its presence in Derry predates the Famine. As a location, Austins has become part of the fabric of Derry-Londonderry. Generations of families have long-term associations with the store and it continues to form a significant part of the Derry-Londonderry experience for many people.

Austins: Memory & Place is a collaborative multifaceted research project that uses performance techniques and strategies, web based tools and graphic visualisation techniques as a way to engage with and explore the relationship between memory and place in this culturally significant, iconic location.

Information gathering and user engagement were central to the project and a participatory approach was widely adopted. An innovative series of live events staged in Austins, conceived and directed by Dr Paul Devlin, and produced by Adrian O'Connell, were developed together with a group of associated artists working in collaboration with students from the Ulster University's School of Creative Arts & Technologies and staff and customers from Austins Department Store. A Writer's Kitchen event with novelist Dave Duggan helped capture stories and memories via conversation and written contributions.

A website (www.austinsmemoryandplace.com) was designed and developed to become a multi-authored memory bank which enables users to share memories remotely via text, image, audio or video. The website was designed to provide a medium to capture multiple and collective narratives, not just a single story or memory.

Over 200 memories were captured via these processes over a short period of time. Rather than inferring meaning from the personal memories submitted, it was decided to analyse sentence patterns, words and word frequency and to categorise words into families in order to simplify the information. This included examining the relationship between words used within each sentence or phrase eg *"At Christmas our family would*

always go for lunch in the café" when words are used within the same sentence or phrase in the context of each other, then these words are identified as being inter connected and could help represent further insights from the data.

Infographic

In order to best visualise these relationships, the infographic format was considered and selected as the most effective medium with which to present the data. As well as being visually interesting they can be effective at enhancing users understanding of complex or large amounts of data. They also enable higher-level patterns to be identified more easily. This was deemed appropriate to achieve the aim of visualising the collective narrative that would otherwise be difficult to see from reading large amounts of text-based information.

The infographic can also reduce cognitive load and enable the audience to digest information more quickly and readily.

Outcomes

An infographic was designed and created with a focus on representing the analysis of data collected and the inter connections identified as a result. A series of inter connecting lines or arcs represent connections between words used within the same sentence or phrase.

Whilst it is challenging, due to the large amounts of connecting lines, to decipher or track individual memories in this format, this visual memory map does effectively present a collective narrative of the data through pattern, shape and colour.

Almost a quarter of words analysed (24.6%) make reference to or relate a memory

