



EDUCATION · TECHNOLOGY · ART
SANDBOX
STUDIOS

For Immediate Release

Scott Sayre
Sandbox Studios Inc.
612-423-9691
scott@sandboxstudios.org

Innovative Cell Phone-based Audio Tour/Information System Engages Visitors at the Newly Expanded Walker Art Center

Minneapolis, MN - April, 16 2005 - Visitors to the newly expanded Walker Art Center are excited to find that they can use their personal cell phones to access information about the museum's works of art, events, exhibitions and more. The Walker is the first major museum in the US to adopt this "bring your own hardware" alternative to traditional audio tour systems. *Art On Call* incorporates prerecorded interviews with artists and curators and computer-spoken text using state-of-the-art text to speech technology to create a flexible, dynamic and entertaining resource for a wide range of museum visitors.

Designed and developed in collaboration with Minneapolis-based Sandbox Studios Inc., this globally accessible information system is available to visitors within the museum, outside in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, and at any offsite venue. "This is an information on-demand approach letting visitors choose when and where, and in some ways how, to access information before, during and after a visit," said Robin Dowden, Director of the Walker's New Media Initiatives department. Similar to the museum's award-winning Web site, visitors can choose to use *Art On Call* to get one quick answer, or use it as a content-rich foundation for repeat visits.

From a behind the scenes perspective, the system offers a whole new level of flexibility. Integrated with the museum's Web server and custom content management system, the program allows staff to quickly add or delete media content in the form of common MP3 audio files through any standard Web browser. Text driven information such as exhibition and events information is also dynamically pulled from the content management system, which is simultaneously feeding the Walker's Web site. Sandbox Principal, Scott Sayre explained, "The user-friendliness and tight integration of the system's design encourages a level of programming spontaneity not possible with traditional systems. A visiting artist interview can be added or an event changed within a matter of minutes and that new content is instantly available for all *Art On Call* users."



The heart of *Art On Call* is a Plum™ Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system and Voice XML, an emerging open standard for integrating telecommunications systems with other computer systems. The IVR is tied into the museum's internal network as well as external phone lines. When a visitor calls, the system logs their caller ID information and begins to log their activity. This log allows for a continuum of personalized custom interactions ranging from games and bookmarking to surveys and user-specific statistical tracking. In the near future the Walker plans to experiment with many of these techniques and then evaluate and publish their findings. Dowden explained "The Walker and Sandbox see cell phones becoming the universal media appliance of the future. By focusing on this technology now, the Walker is in a great position to learn to better serve our visitors and inform the entire museum community."

The *Art On Call* system is available 24/7 by calling 612-374-8200. More information on the project and system, as well as links to works of art featured in the program, are available on the Web at museum411.com. To take advantage of the true *Art On Call* experience, plan a visit to the newly expanded Walker Art Center. Information on planning a visit is available by calling *Art On Call* and selecting "General Information", or visiting walkerart.org.

Sandbox Studios works with museums to plan, create, manage and assess educational technology solutions and has recently formed a new division "Museum411" which in conjunction with Plum Voice Portals (plumvoiceportals.com) will focus on the development of custom IVR solutions for museum, gallery and sculpture park applications. With over twenty-five years combined experience as museum professionals and independent consultants, Sandbox Studios staff have created everything from classroom materials to Web portals encompassing multi-museum collections. Sandbox Studios creatively applies tested technologies and innovative educational strategies to bring museum collections and people together.



The *Art On Call* Calling Card