

Best line length for exhibit labels?

In *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, author Beverly Serrell says that legibility of a label is affected by line length. Serrell says that, regardless of type size, 50 to 65 characters (including spaces) is a reasonable maximum for line length.

There are also a couple of formulas that can help. These are also independent of the size of the type (with thanks to About.com's web site on typography):

1. Apply the alphabet-and-a-half line length rule.

The alphabet-and-a-half rule places the ideal line length at 39 characters regardless of type size. Measure the line length in inches for your body copy font using the alphabet-and-a-half rule.

2. Apply the points-divided-by-three rule.

Take the type size of your body text (in points—your word processor will show the point size of your type) and divide it by three. The result is your ideal line length in inches. That is, 24 point type (probably the minimum for an exhibit label) would have a line length of $(24 \div 3) = 8$ inches.

3. Compare the results for method 1 and 2.

Set a column width for your labels that falls within the range established by each formula.

NOTES is intended to be published four times a year. Its purpose is to share useful ideas, techniques and experiences among community museums, and it is available free of charge to community museums.

Comments or suggestions for future articles may be emailed to:
david.mcinnnes@mts.net



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Exhibit planning just got a lot easier

Before computers, exhibit planning for museums required expertise in drawing, preparing blueprints and even modelling. With the technology we have available today, things can be much simpler.

Google, that famous web browser, has come up with an application, called *Sketchup*, which makes it possible to do a lot of exhibit planning right on the computer. It may not be as sophisticated as the fancy (and very expensive) architectural drafting programs, but it certainly is a quick and

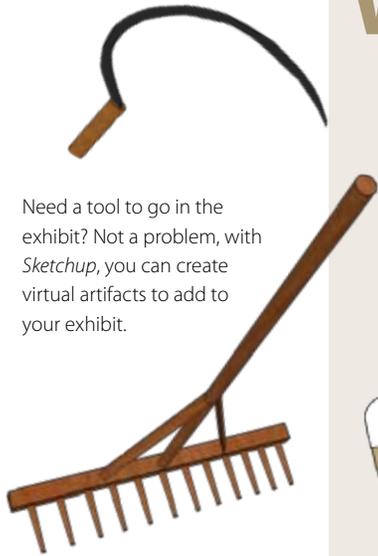
easy way to do some conceptual planning for your exhibits.

The best part is that you can download a free, non-professional version of *Sketchup* at <http://sketchup.google.com/index.html>. It has everything but the bells and whistles that you would need if you were a professional designer.

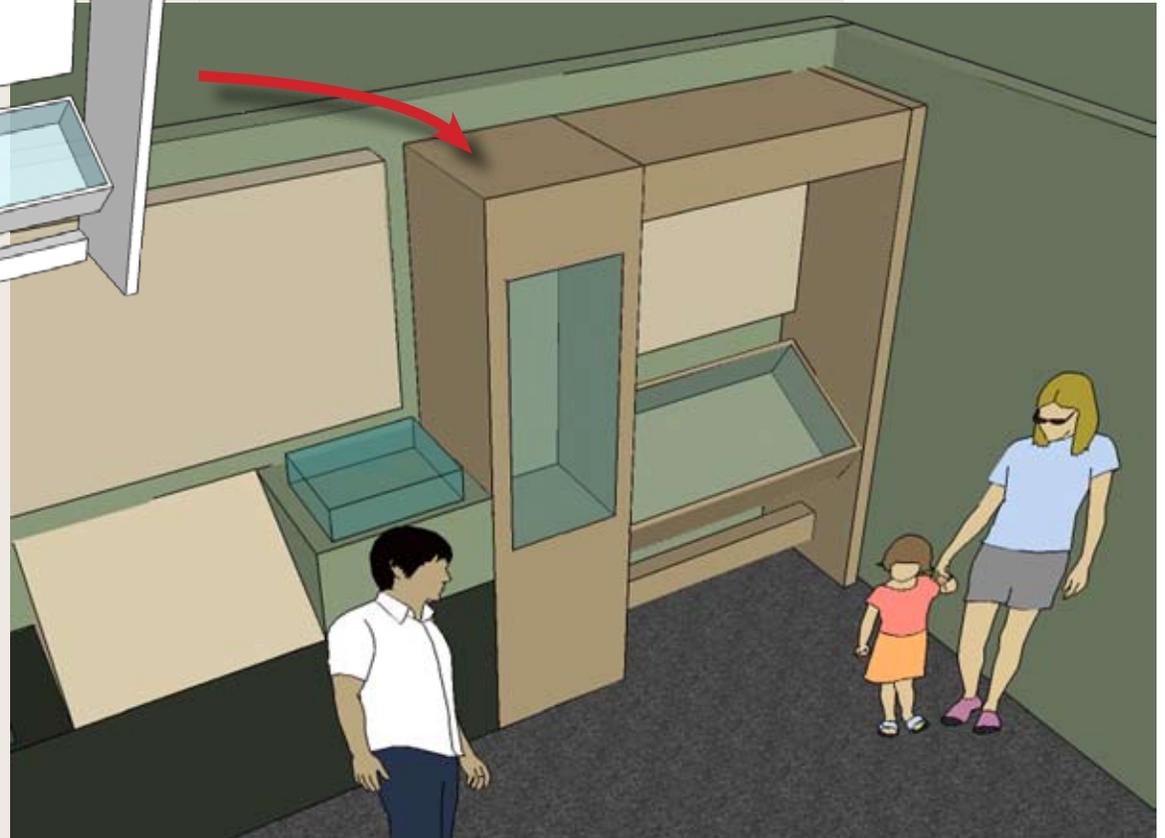
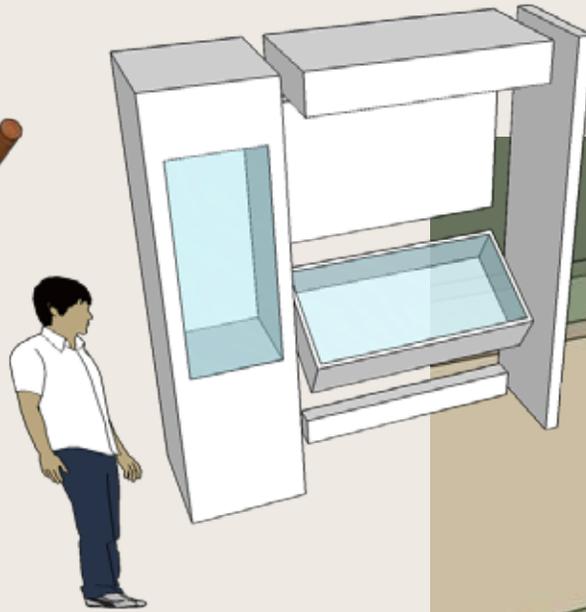
You can get *Sketchup* manuals through your local library (*Google Sketchup for Dummies* is one), plus there are lots of tutorials online at the *Sketchup* website.

New Software for Museum Exhibit Planning...and it's free.

With *Sketchup*, you can design an individual display case, then place it into a room setting based on your own museum space. [this line is too long for comfortable reading at this size, see the article on the back page]



Need a tool to go in the exhibit? Not a problem, with *Sketchup*, you can create virtual artifacts to add to your exhibit.



You can get really carried away with design details, but you will need more sophisticated programs, such as Adobe's Photoshop or Illustrator, to add photos or text.

Freeware versions of these programs may also be found online, although they won't have all the capabilities of the professional programs.

A variety of people drawings are available at the Sketchup site, free for downloading.