

Case study

# Walrus on the Move



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## Introduction

A large taxidermy specimen of a walrus has stood in the Horniman Museum and Gardens' Natural History Gallery since the organisation was founded in 1901. For generations, the walrus has been one of the most popular exhibits in the museum. It is a much-loved centrepiece of the gallery, perhaps in part as it is 'over-stuffed' and does not look true-to-life.

In 2012, Hayward Touring exhibitions made a request to borrow the walrus for a touring exhibition, *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing*, to be exhibited at Turner Contemporary, Margate. The walrus went on loan to Margate - to the seaside - on 15 May 2013, and returned on 17 September 2013.

## Objectives

Our main campaign objective was to minimise any negative impact of the walrus being away from the Horniman for the first time. We wanted our visitors - 74% of whom visit on a regular basis - to continue to visit, and to embrace the loan of one of our most popular specimens: to enjoy its holiday rather than endure its absence.

Our additional objectives were to:

- Raise awareness and deepen understanding of our iconic walrus and our Natural History collections
- Raise our visitor numbers and profile particularly in Kent / South East England
- Promote and sell toy replica walruses in our gift shop

## Target audience

Our target audience for the campaign was regular repeat Horniman Museum and Gardens visitors; families from local boroughs and art-appreciating adults and day-tripping families in Kent/South East England.

## Process

Our campaign planning started many months in advance of the walrus's departure. We focussed our plans on creating an integrated campaign capitalising on our visitors' existing relationship with the walrus.

We wanted to harness social media, user-generated content, online, print and broadcast media as well as in-gallery interactions.

Our campaign had several stages:

- A social media and PR campaign to announce the walrus's departure in late 2012
- Filming, interactive social media and PR during the intricate lift of the walrus and his transport to Margate in May 2013
- Activities in gallery – a 'walrus wall' where visitors could leave [messages/send postcards to the walrus](#) – and via social media during his absence throughout summer 2013
- A 'wandering walrus' competition asking visitors to send their holiday photos of the toy walrus, alongside social media and PR campaigns to mark the walrus's return to the Horniman in September 2013.



## Outcomes

The walrus loan and his inclusion in Curiosity: Art & the Pleasures of Knowing at the Turner Contemporary was covered in more than 70 print/online articles and broadcast pieces. Among the many highlights were:

- News stories on ITV and BBC South East news;
- A [picture gallery on the Daily Telegraph's website](#) of images taken during the walrus's move;
- Articles and reviews in [The Independent](#), Saga magazine, [Time Out](#), Discover Britain, [The Guardian](#), The Independent on Sunday, The Spectator and many arts and culture publications;
- Extensive coverage across Kent and South London newspapers and websites, including Meridian, Kent on Saturday, Kent Messenger, South London Press, News Shopper and the Isle of Thanet Gazette;
- theguardian.com's science blog featured the [history of the walrus](#), and a piece appeared on [atlasobscura.com](#).

Our Wandering Walrus competition saw more than 80 entries and was featured by the News Shopper, Isle of Thanet Gazette and Culture24. The [winning entries](#) were reported on in the News Shopper and Culture24.

Our [video of the walrus being packed and moved](#) has been viewed online more than 2,000 times and shared on popular websites such as The Guardian, Londonist, This is Kent and Dulwich on View. The video now features in the walrus's display in the Natural History Gallery.

For the five-month period of the walrus's absence, compared to the same period the previous year:

- Our visitor numbers rose by 12%
- Our number of visitors from South East England rose by more than 14,000, an increase of 81%
- Our social media following also increased with our twitter account gaining 58% more followers
- Visits to our website increased by 35% - and May and August 2013 saw its two highest monthly visitor figures ever, each with 56% more visitors than in the same month in 2012

Sales of our toy walrus (pictured) increased by 25% on the prior 5 months, and have continued to increase since.

The coverage of the walrus move was overwhelmingly positive, with no negative coverage, achieving our aim to ensure goodwill around the loan. We did not receive any negative comments about the walrus loan via our comment cards.



## Conclusions and recommendations

We purposefully adopted a playful tone for the campaign, celebrating our walrus as not only a fascinating object but an icon of the Horniman and South London. We believe this was a key factor for the success of the campaign.

We wanted to turn the spotlight on the largely invisible loans process and engage our visitors and online audience to share their love and enthusiasm for the walrus, through social media and audience participation in gallery.

- Adopt a tone suitable for audience and campaign. A playful tone worked for this campaign, but know when to balance fun with key messages.
- Regular campaign catch-ups prove useful, especially to maintain campaign momentum and assess tactics and progress.
- Involving staff beyond the marketing / communications department is key. Their enthusiasm and expertise help communicate the campaign.

## Further links

On social media

- [Walrus gallery on Flickr](#)
- [@HornimanWalrus on Twitter](#)
- [The Great Walrus Move on Storify](#)

From the Horniman

- [Walrus by the Sea \(initial announcement\)](#)
- [Ever wondered how to lift a one-ton Walrus?](#)
- [Walrus Move Liveblog](#)
- [The Horniman Walrus Moves to Margate \(with video\)](#)
- [Giraffe Sculpture to fill in for the Horniman Walrus](#)
- [A Few Favourites from the Walrus Wall](#)
- [The Horniman Calls for your Wandering Walrus Snaps](#)
- [Horniman Walrus in Miniature \(toy\)](#)
- [#wanderingwalrus Inspiration](#)
- [Our Wandering Walrus Winners](#)

