

Case study

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# Lates at the Science Museum

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## Background

*Lates* at the Science Museum is a regular late night opening for adults only. We open the museum on the last Wednesday of each month (except December) for adults only and theme each night around a different area in Science, with past themes being, Space, Climate Science and Sexuality. We put on between 30 and 35 events each night which include talks, workshops interactive sessions and shows.

The main objective for this activity taken place is to attract a young adult audience in to the museum and to engage with our collections.

## Objectives

- To attract a younger adult audience
- For the audience to learning something new relating to science and / or the theme
- To engage with our collection
- To make visitors want to visit the museum again at either another *Lates* or during normal opening hours
- To have a diverse and changing programme of themes and events for each *Lates*

## Target audience

Our target audience is independent adults and our reach is as follows:

- 95% between the ages of 18 and 35
- Independent Adults
- Comes in groups

## Process

*Lates* has been running since September 2008 when we trialled this style of event. The trial evening attracted about 2,000 visitors and from this point we realised there was a demand for a late night opening which is only for adults and where we theme the evenings and put on a large number of changing events.

Following the trial the museum committed to investing in this programme and it moved to being a core part of the museum offers.

We have gone from funding this programme from Grant in Aid to getting sponsorship for individual nights. We now have funding from MasterCard secured for 3 years as part of their Priceless London initiative.

We now attract an average of 3,500 visitors per night with the highest being 5,100.

*Lates* quickly became a programme that did not need to be marketed in the traditional sense and we now rely on social media, our website and free press.

## **Outcome**

The benefits of *Lates* to our audience is that we have opened up access to the museum and its collection during evenings when there are no children or school groups and where there are a large number of changing and facilitated events. The impact on our audience is that they learning something new about science and leads to further visits.

The benefit to the museum is that we attract a new audience who are likely to make further visits to the Museum. It also allows us to programme events around themes and subjects which are seen as inappropriate for doing when the museum is open to other visitors, i.e. sexuality and mental health.

*Lates* has also benefited the museum as it allows us to programme themes around our new galleries and exhibitions. This allows *Lates'* themes and events to be offered to potential and existing sponsors as benefits-in-kind.

## **Key points for effective practice**

The most important point we have learnt from *Lates* is the need to keep the programme fresh, changing and audience relevant. This has enabled us to:

- Steadily increased our visitor numbers year-on-year
- Maintain a high level of repeat visits
- Move to social media for marketing
- Reach over 38,000 visitors a year
- Make sure visitors leave having learnt something

The cost of the programme is in the region of £15-20k per night including salaried staff.

The major risk is attracting too many visitors each night - 3,500-4,000 is optimum. Anything over this and you risk not having enough events to cater for the amount of people in the museum.

One of the key things we have learnt is that the format of the events is important to the visitor. They generally dislike events which last over 30-40 minutes and that has content which is aimed above their level, which is a general interest in science or the theme.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

*Lates* has been effective as we have continued to have a diverse and changing programme which attracts about 38,000 people a year. We are now one of the leading institutions in the cultural sector for running these types of events and get request for information from institutions around the world.

### **Further information:**

<http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/lates>