

Seminars: Conceptual Discussion Seminars

Claire Hyde, Head of Communications, National Maritime Museums ***Using research to effect attitudinal change and increase engagement***

Claire Hyde joined the National Maritime Museum as Head of Communications in March 2007 where she leads the marketing, media relations and membership teams. She has over fifteen years' experience heading up communications activity, for example at the South Bank Centre, Kew Gardens, Sadler's Wells and the Barbican Centre. As part of her MBA from Henley Management Centre she looked at the role of audio guides in learning, visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Her particular interests include models of organisational change, exploring ways of increasing audience and visitor engagement, interactive technologies and visitor segmentation models.

This case study demonstrated that sharing research and customer information across an organisation can support change across departments and break down silo working.



In 2007, the museum commissioned research into potential visitors and non-attenders. The project was completed at a time of significant change for the museum as it was joined by a new Director. This appointment was quickly followed by the appointment of several other senior management posts, notably a new Director of Exhibitions and Public Programmes and a Director of the Royal Observatory, Greenwich. The research became a catalyst for change as the organisation embarked on a period of fresh thinking and a new strategic planning process.

The result is a stronger shared understanding of how the museum's visitors see it and how they might interact with it in the future. Across the museum, there is a stronger sense of purpose and clarity as it embarks on a £35m capital project. This is an interesting example of an opportunity arising through good timing and how solid, well-presented research can not only influence conversations and thinking, but impact positively on all areas of operation in practical ways. Claire will discuss how this was achieved and which lessons we can take away into our own organisations.

Measuring and Strengthening Public Engagement

This case study is about how visitor research helped to:

- Create a shared language and understanding across the museum about visitors
- Shape an agenda for change in which we have a new wing being built
- Set up new initiatives to reconnect with visitors and boost attendance that have worked through increased numbers.

The case study highlights the benefit of using research as a springboard for audience development and clear communication with visitors and colleagues.

Although this case study focuses on a museum, it is still relevant to performing arts organisations, as the principles are transferable.

Claire began by asking the group if anyone had research, or who was able to do research when they needed it. Two of the group were able to do this. The Sainsbury Gallery, Norwich has a 'Feedback Fortnight' and Compton Verney undertakes research for all its exhibitions as well as undertaking monthly mosaic profiling.

The research

- Looked at potential visitors and their perceptions of the National Maritime Museum
- Took place from May–July 07
- Involved 465 participants
- Conducted with Morris Hargreaves McIntyre



The museum already undertook regular Mosaic profiling and visitor comments were included in SMT reporting structures. The research was envisaged as a layer on top to help with engagement and interpretation so it was important to have focus groups/research – interpretation and analysis. The research was very focused: about who's not coming – potential visitors. It was the first time the museum had worked with MHM and this has developed into a continuing relationship so they are able to measure and map results formatively and summatively.

The results were sobering

- NMM, ROG and Queen's House weren't seen as one coherent site
- Few visitors took in all three sites
- The external view was off-putting
- There were low numbers of London museum-goers and visitors from the south-east



The Museum found that the biggest visitor segment were those coming for a 'day out'; they weren't coming to see anything in particular. It really mattered for the museum brand that people didn't see it as just one site, but understood that there is the NMM, Queen's House and ROG. The comments about being off-putting were around the barriers the architecture presented: '*not for the likes of me*'. The museum was also disappointed over the numbers of London and SE visitors, even though the number of international visitors was about 50% as this clearly presented a loyalty/awareness issue. It showed up a mismatch between what NMM believed, and the true situation. The museum had picked this up before but weight of reporting gave it urgency.

There was more bad news for the museum:

- Most visitors came only once – showing low loyalty
- There was an expectation of entry charges
- Locals didn't know what was inside and assumed it would not appeal to them
- Visitors wanted more use of technology including audio guides

On a positive note, the museum found that:

- The aesthetic appeal of the site was universal
- The setting, views and vistas make it one of London's best landmarks
- Visitors were pleasantly surprised by their experience

In itself, this gave the museum food for thought: for example, the location and landscape was universally admired, and yet that hadn't been included in the offer at any stage. Due to the poor understanding that there are three museums, visitors were surprised at how much there was to do, and so they frequently underestimated the time they would want to spend at the museums. There was a lack of awareness of the museums as a specific destination or day out. However, the fact that visitors were pleasantly surprised gave the museum many options when devising a strategy.

The research was the starting point... But how to tackle the issues raised? More to the point, how to lift the research off the page and translate it into a manifesto for real change?

Sharing the results

The marketing team understood that it was crucial to disseminate the research and so they:

- Fed back results to Museum colleagues
- Started to develop a shared understanding based around the needs of visitors
- Gave presentations to exhibitions, learning, collections, curatorial and research departments
- Shared results with the new Director

As results came in, the marketing team did workshops, presentations, pen-pictures of the key visitor groups etc at interdepartmental meetings. The team also arranged a series of special events to increase understanding about the research and the findings. The team took the view that if the research stayed within the marketing and communications team, the understanding would not be shared with programmers/curators, and the findings would not work through to interpretation, catalogues etc. The team knew that this information would help the entire museum staff decide where to put money and effort.



The timing of the research was fortuitous. As a newcomer, the museum's new Director shared the views of the museum's potential visitors and what they said exactly mirrored his perceptions on arriving at Greenwich. This helped the process enormously. The new director was keen on using research, not least as a way of getting buy-in for the planned changes with Front of House, programming etc.

The museum realised that the research could inform an overall strategy to strengthen visitor engagement by tackling the issues. The museum began by taking stock of:

- The place
- The people
- The programme

The Place

The findings showed that the NMM had a split personality... a national museum, a visitor attraction and a historic house housing a specialist art collection.



The People

The research identified seven key groups:

- Self-defined specialists, such as the museum's Sea-dogs (those professionally involved in the maritime).
- London museum-goers, who are also self-defining. The NMM has a large cross-over audience with the British Museum.
- Day trippers who want a light touch, lots of variety and things to see – a growing segment for NMM.
- Contemporary arts attenders are currently a small group for NMM, but could be developed further with the new programming opportunities.
- Local people/families who are closer to NMM geographically and can participate in out-of-gallery activities – using the park and ROG for short visits, for example.
- International visitors, who range from young to old, with an independently travelling sub-group.
- Online users who are making use of resources and the collections.

Once the museum knew this, the issue was to produce a solution - with only one marketing department – for one destination comprising three sites across seven segment markets. It seemed to the team that there were two options.

Either: market multiple offers to multiple markets, splitting budgets and impact

OR: market the overall destination externally, majoring on the biggest market sectors

AND market the individual offers onsite



The Solution

NMM decided to redefine themselves as a day-out destination, encompassing maritime heritage, science, arts and technology and the focal point of the World Heritage Site of Maritime Greenwich

The task:

- the museum needed to link the whole site more coherently
- the NMM needed to cater for each visitor segment
- the museum needed to use their experiences, motivations and interests as the starting point for their visit

The museum devised a number of new initiatives:

- Destination Greenwich- communicating the whole picture
- Re-engaging with London museum-goers and the days-out market
- Cross-site and on-site marketing initiatives
- Re-engaging with local visitors
- Feeding research results into plans for the new wing and masterplan

Destination Greenwich - Summer 2008 marketing campaign to communicate the whole picture. NMM used Landmark sites at major gateway stations to create the *Time to Visit Greenwich* campaign, which highlighted the landmark views and vistas:



The museum took out big poster sites, which were left up for longer, so they ended up paying £10,000 for 3 months. The museum selected gateway stations, targeting the considerable South East visitor market. So, for example, the museum highlighted:

- free entry and overall offer
- rapid travel times from central London
- Greenwich is well connected but not central, can park, no hassle.
- Poster sites at Waterloo and Charing Cross specifically highlighted the travel time from their sites to the museum
- the Riverboat would drop visitors off at Greenwich, seeing an increasing number of people arriving by boat.

Reconnecting with local visitors

- Using planetarium promotions to encourage loyalty
- Changing programme of shows, tying in with key school holidays
- Promoting membership benefits
- Using the International Year of Astronomy to redefine and refresh profile of the Royal Observatory

The NMM had to establish that the Royal Observatory Greenwich is very different from the planetarium, but that the planetarium was a good local resource for local people and families. It also has the advantage that it is now the only planetarium in London since Madame Tussaud's shut theirs. The museum now programmes a new show every half term and is seeing an increase in attendance figures.

Future plans include collaboration with the learning team, on how to keep the subject matter relevant to these key audiences. At the moment the teams are talking about ways that the programme can reconnect the NMM's visitors to the sea. Our maritime history has shaped and influenced what we are today, yet it has somehow become invisible in modern Britain.



The museum is also developing further local initiatives to build on this start:

- Focusing on local families - 'my museum' using high-quality photographic campaign
- Youth Council
- Ambassadors volunteer programme

The NMM now has a number of Young Ambassadors, several of them have never been on a boat. The museum is acting as a broker, getting people to talk to each other, for example, the Sea Dogs are now leading storytelling sessions. The NMM's Youth Council is another way the team stays connected, encourages engagement and gathers feedback.

Cross-site and onsite marketing

The Museum also revisited the way it engaged with visitors through a fresh mixture of marketing tools. The aim was to focus the promotion for different activities once visitors were on-site, which was less expensive than telling them about everything beforehand through a variety of media. The Planetarium is cross-promoted through in-museum promotional leaflets, tray liners in the café, etc, and visitors can book for showings on their mobile when they get there. Other marketing included:

- Large external banners- NMM and ROG
- On-site poster frames, table top promotions, leaflet holders and tray-liners
- Re-designed visitor map – 1.78m produced each year
- Re-vamped website, which is still an academic resource but is also more informative for the general user

This solution moved NMM from being a smaller player to one of the major visitor attractions. The museum knows who they're not competing with (such as the V&A, Tate, British Museum etc) and when positioned as a destination, NMM can optimise its natural advantages of location and diversity.

This repositioning could be compared with Sadler's Wells' work in being recognised as a national and international dance house. They offer every kind of dance and are known for it. Similarly, when the NMM decided to market itself as destination, it opened up different marketplaces. The museum turned the barrier of not being in central London into an advantage when they put it in a different frame: as a day out, the museums worked very well.

Complementing museum wide initiatives

- Comprehensive new guidebook project
- Audio-guides at ROG - August 2009
- Feeding into plans for new wing, opening by 2011
- Major refurbishment of permanent galleries in five year masterplan to refresh visitor experience and collections



In themselves, these new initiatives have brought about discussions between all the teams: the new wing brings up issues of programming, then planning and then delivering the new build without disrupting the rest of the Museum. And this doesn't operate in a vacuum: it has taken 14 months to get planning permission for new, 5 metre high promotional banners. Changing the lift buttons in the museum to make navigation easier involves the Properties Team, and so on.

Another example would be the guidebooks. NMM is rewriting their guidebooks, and this has been interesting in how to get buy in from other departments. The research has given the Museum staff more clarity now about who the guidebooks are for and how they are used. For example, the one million day-trippers need different information from other groups. Therefore the Museum is making them less academic, drawing a clear relationship between what's in the book and what they can see.

NMM is revisiting everything about their guidebooks: size, shape, paper and it is being written by a published and professional travel guide writer to get the right tone and style. However, some museum goers love coffee table books with big pictures and long essays; there is also a market for the specialist reader and so the Museum is making sure their publications catalogue still produces smaller runs of these volumes for those visitors.

Results

- Overall visitor figures up 17% for 2008-9
- Figures up 25% for first half of 2009
- Average time on site is now 2.5 hours, up by 53 minutes since last year
- More local visitors – up 4%
- Younger demographic - 58% under 45

- More visitors from the south-east – up 4%
- More repeat visits – up 4%
- More define NMM and ROG as a ‘major attraction in the area’ – up by 8% and 9% respectively on last year

The research has supported the ten year Masterplan for NMM, as they now know what visitors want on an ongoing basis and this is giving the team a clear sense of what needs to be shown in the New Wing and the facilities. There is a shared understanding, because of research and being able to act upon that knowledge has delivered results as can be seen above.

The National Maritime Museum had aspired to be in the top 10 visitor attractions; it is now number eight. Needless to say, the museum is very pleased with the results. They feel that they have now positioned themselves as a major attraction and it is pleasing to everyone because it builds on the idea of a museum as a place of specialist knowledge.

In Conclusion

- Taking a fresh look at positioning in the leisure market place can help re-define weaknesses as strengths
- Sharing research can help build a shared language around visitor perceptions and needs with impacts on many levels
- It pays to pursue a few initiatives well and thoroughly and build on them

A few key questions to take away if you are planning similar work:

- Can you use research to address some of your key audience issues?
- Do you need to refocus your existing research work?
- What if you can't afford to do research?
- How can you achieve senior management buy-in?
- How can you use research as a medium for change?
- How do you balance the needs and interests of your audience with programming policy?

Questions

How was the research structured?

The first piece of research was commissioned separately. The Museum then contracted Morris Hargreaves McIntyre on an ongoing basis to follow up with surveys. This means that NMM can map different points in the year, and test new initiatives as they're happening. It works well because the communications team can track progress and update colleagues all the time.



Could you talk about translating the findings of the research into a manifesto for change, because this can be a huge stumbling block?

This was mainly achieved through the team sharing the research very widely; NMM used many verbatim statements to illustrate the findings. The team also used the meeting to include questions about who the audience was for proposed exhibitions and how the museum would speak to them. This is reinforced all the time because of the ongoing surveys. The team argued that if the museum knew its audience, they could benchmark against other organisations. We also did this alongside developing a marketing strategy which was not shared with anybody else. The real secret was having verbal and face-to-face contact and through discussion and conversations, they were able to change minds.

Another useful point is that apparently people have to hear research three times before it actually goes in. It was necessary to keep repeating it as the staff change in departments, too. There is also a large element of being persistent. There is no denying that this is a long hard slog, you can't just click your fingers and get results. Organisations who are thinking about using research in this way should choose a visitor segmentation that works for the individual museum and create pen pictures to talk to colleagues about. This makes it more real for colleagues who are not marketers.

Audiences Yorkshire: There are ways of getting over the challenge of converting team members to research. If it is possible to get representatives from different departments to buy into the research before it starts, the better the chance of success. It enables organisations to start having a conversation about audience engagement, not just being the responsibility of the marketing department, but also the responsibility of the curator, programmer and educator. This research can be used as an active agenda for change.

We have had to work more closely with Visitor Services, because they lead on the organisation of workshops. Since this change in approach, the Visitor Services team naturally come to the marketing department and ask for advice. Marketing are not the owners of the research now.

The Place: the approach was certainly effective in shaping change when change is happening, but how can the museum handle a culture of gradual evolution?

It certainly feels like a long process but the new wing will change the museum significantly on a permanent basis, not least because it's part of a 10 year plan. The museum is shaping a new piece of research for each new gallery that is currently being planned. These would be more specific pieces of research to help the museum make sense of collections when planning, alongside the needs of visitors. The museum is not going to stop being a destination, but will continue to refine the offer. The museum believes its role is to help audiences move up from being novices to independent travellers along the continuum of the collections and depth of knowledge. The NMM sees its job as fostering this curiosity and learning.

Birmingham Rep: how was the research structured?

NMM used questionnaires and focus groups from four different segments. The curators went on walking groups with non-attenders from different groupings and then the researchers asked the questions again, such as what would stop you? Would you come back? The team observed groups as well as accompanying them on visits. This is also backed up with exit surveys. NMM has taken a qualitative approach first, followed with quantitative.

How do you avoid getting bogged down in the programme and keeping focused on the experience of the attenders?

It's important to be clear about who you are there for; identify the different segments. The biggest problems are the stalwarts and novices: at opposite ends of the spectrum, meeting their needs requires very different approaches. The Museum is not going to change people's heads that much but can help them move along incrementally, by programming to meet their needs and their convenience in terms of timing and the right amounts. The communications team now talk about making the effort to persuade people to come. The team acknowledges the amount of change, but have built up to it. Just as the NMM was able to be generic before the new wing and new exhibitions, they still hold onto their core vision. The Museum found that looking at the generic helped them also revisit the basics. The research also equipped the marketing team with the language to influence decisions. They are able to make the rest of the team aware of the risk and point out opportunities and highlights. Sadler's Wells had a similar need to offer the full range. Those conversations can give the marketing team power, because they know the audience *and* the bottom line. This can add weight and influence discussions. After all, increased attendance pleases everybody.

Firstsite: how confident was the museum that the increase in attendances came from research in 2008 and not from the economic downturn?

The museum was aware of a small downturn before, but they unveiled the landmark campaign before the crunch. The impact was almost immediate. The downturn has helped, but NMM is quite clear that the improvement started before the credit card crunch. When the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions put together their list of key attractions, the museum has the biggest increase. (An attraction has to have at least 1 million visitors annually to be considered by the Association.)

The museum is doing more promotions through the Royal Observatory Greenwich; the Planetarium is now advertised in Time Out. The team is getting better about vocalising and sharing their offer internally and they're seeing an increase in paid for attractions.

The budget for Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's initial piece of research was £30,000 for potential visitor research. The annual exit survey has the same cost. This is supplemented by using existing research.

Something else that the NMM tried when planning the marketing strategy was a "Safari". The team visited five other places, hoovering up their materials taking it back and analysing the data.