



## Keynote: continuously experimenting

Andy Jasper, Head of Evaluation and Research, Eden Project

### Introduction

Andy has a background in applied social sciences and econometric research. He is an experienced researcher with a decade of experience in measuring social and economic impacts in cultural and heritage attractions which he has carried out all over the world. He's now head of research and evaluation at the Eden Project and the research lead for South West Tourism Alliance. Andy is going to talk about how, with a balance of concerns, Eden Project is able to be a risk-taking organisation.

### Continuously experimenting

Let's have a show of hands so I can get to know you better. Anybody here from art galleries? [hands went up] OK, not as many as I thought! Museums? Theatres? 80%. Botanic gardens? No other botanic gardens! I'm the only one here. Anybody heard of the Eden Project? [hands up] Good brand awareness; 80%. Anybody been to the Eden Project? OK ... maybe 40%.

I'm going to give an overview of what the Eden Project is about and then talk about how we flex the product to meet the various visitor profile needs that we have. I'll also talk to you about us taking risks with this policy of flexing the product and inventing new things and show you how we evaluate it and how we make decisions based on that.

Eden Project is located in Cornwall. Cornwall is a place where there's a much larger tourist population than there is a resident population.



4.5 – 5 million people holiday in Cornwall every year, tourism forms about 25% of GDP, 32 – 35% of jobs are tourism related which means that there's a huge importance on creating a sustainable business model – not one that's seasonally employing people. We want the jobs to be long lasting

so Eden Project has to work really hard at growing the business outside of just the summer season.

Eden is built in a disused china clay pit in an area of Cornwall that tourists would not visit traditionally, preferring to keep to the coasts. In terms of economic regeneration the location is one of the primary reasons that there were public funds, Millennium Commission funds, put into it. The Eden Project has taken a disused china clay pit and built a garden. What is now a very self-consciously constructed landscape is in what would have been a scar on the landscape. It's about plants but it's not just botanic gardens and what we are trying to do is remind everybody that we all have a relationship with nature, that we have this relationship with plants every day of our lives. We go around the world many, many times with the plants we use – the rubber on the soles of our shoes, the cotton in the clothes that we're wearing, the food that we eat. That's as simple as it gets and that's what our purpose is.

Eden is many things to many people and different audiences. It is educational, it is an international visitor destination, it is an environmental showcase, and a place where you can have conversations that might go somewhere in this showcase for sustainability. It is a venue for arts and really *is all* of these things ... it can be whatever *you*; the visitor or the audience, wants it to be and that's the way that we've tried to keep it. Of course it is a garden as well and like a botanic garden it *has* plants but none of our plants are rare. All of those plants are there because they tell a story about our relationship with them and what we're trying to do is reconnect people. If you think about climate change and the big environmental issues it can be very hard for people to relate to those in a positive way and that's what's being dealt with at Eden every day with the visitors who are just really there to have fun.

As an example, Andy showed an image of some cocoa beans and asked who knew of what it was. The stats are that probably 90% of us really like chocolate but 90% of the kids in West Africa who pick those cocoa beans won't have tasted the chocolate that we know and love and 99% of us can't identify cocoa beans. So we try to use the plant as a hook to link people into stories about Fair Trade, child labour and our connection with different parts of the world.

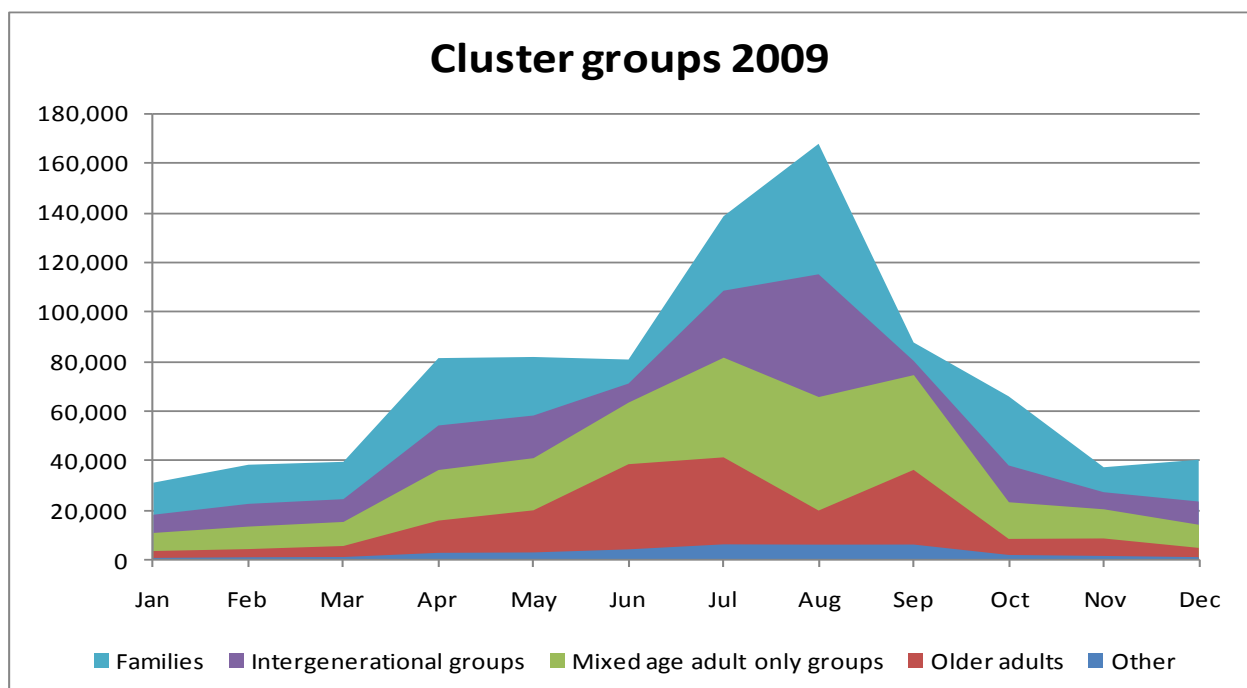


It's classic economic botany and the way we do it is through climatic regions – the Rainforest, the Mediterranean and the Outside Temperate Landscapes.

Eden was built to host 750,000 visitors, we run at around 1 million visitors per year and we've welcomed 15 million visitors in 12 years. We've pulled into the local and regional economy over £1.2 billion which is the equivalent of having the Olympics – not in London but in a deprived economy like Cornwall. The ten-year impact of the Olympics is £1.47 billion and the impact of Eden is £1.2 billion in the previous decade. We have a reputation for regeneration in the region and provoking the envy of others and have this amazing interest from corporate organisations who just like the fact that we're not this entrenched organisation. We actually have to work really hard at bringing in those many visitors a year and here are a few examples of how we think about our visitors and how we then market to them. We're running at 953,000 visitors per year, we're the eighth most-visited paid-for visitor attraction in the country.

**Our audience**

Looking at our audience in a very basic, un-segmented way we can see who these people are. They visit in groups and rarely visit on their own. We have four, key cluster groups; Families 28%, Older Adult Only groups (closer to retirement / early retired) 20%, Mixed Age Adult Groups 29% and Intergenerational Groups 19%. And what you can see in this visitor-flow chart is that 70% of our business occurs in this period (July – September). You can see the difference between our summer, family-oriented visitor and then the 'shoulder' period visitors. They all want different visitor experiences.

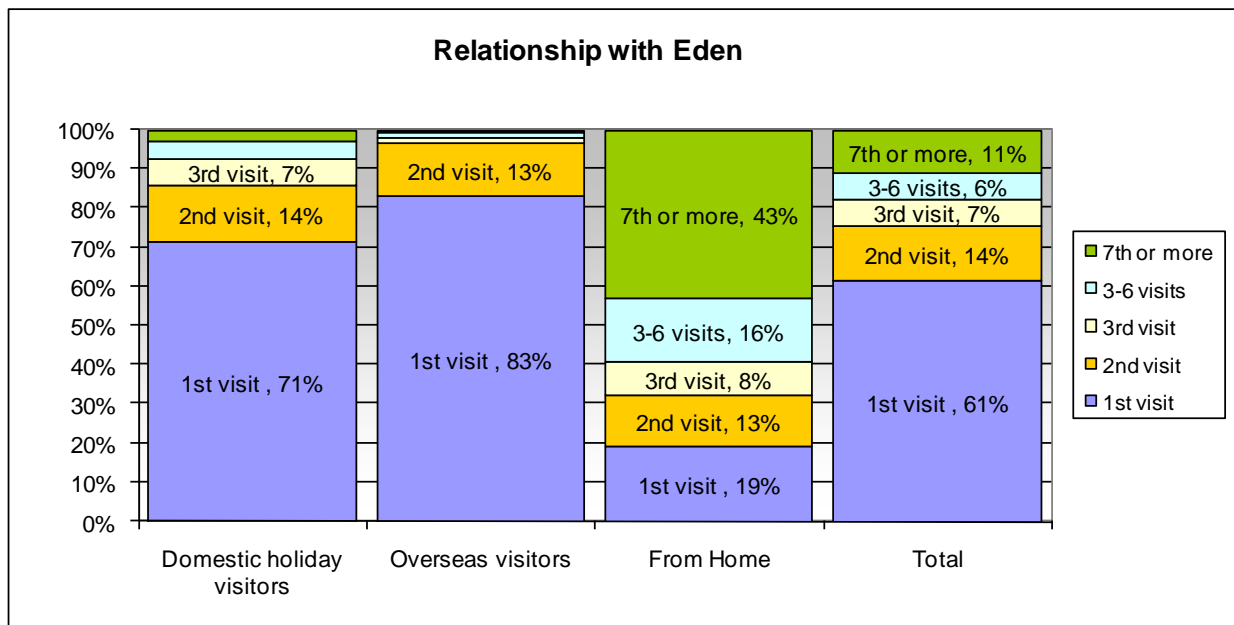


You can see it by looking at the types of pictures we use for staff training – the families want the high-octane, high-adrenaline stuff. And then, looking at the older visitors you can see that they might have different physical, mobility issues but that they also want a much more reflective experience. We have a lot of the Mixed Age Only Adult Groups who come to visit in the ‘shoulder seasons’ without kids. They are a stable back bone of our entire business.

20% are older adult groups



We also track the relationship that they have with us and in 2012 nearly 60% of our visitors were first-time visitors. In order for us to be really sustainable we need to grow repeat visits:



You can see the difference between the relationships of the tourist and the local population have with Eden and you can see that it is almost completely inverse. 20% or 1 in 5 of our local population will be visiting for their first time in any one year and that’s the opposite to those holiday visitors. What I always find interesting is that there’s a big chunk of overseas visitors who have quite a mature relationship with us and German visitors mainly, come to Cornwall and have a love affair with Eden.

**Flexing the product**

What we try to do is to ‘flex the product’ to meet the needs of all those various visitor types that we



have at any one time. The way we do that is to *listen* to those visitors – getting to know them as they are coming in, spending time talking to them and empowering our staff to spend time with them to recognise them when they come. We *experiment*; the project was built on one great big experiment – could it ever be done? Could we build the biggest greenhouse in the world? Could we attract one million people to a part of Cornwall that no one would normally go to? We try to do it with an attitude that allows us to have *fun* – failure is OK and we can *take risks and play* and just celebrate it and develop an attitude within the entire staff team to take risks.

It goes without saying that we need to *market well* but it's really important to us that we get ourselves out there, not just in Cornwall and the South West but for the rest of the nation. The reason that we have 87% awareness across the whole country is because of a brand marketing approach. Then finally, again, we listen to the visitors in order to *measure and evaluate* our performance.

We've got a range of marketing campaigns in which we change the way we market to those different visitor groups but we also change the product quite significantly and invest in different experiences e.g. the *Freaky Nature* experiences where people can look down the microscopes with the plant scientists who work at Eden. We've also experimented with partnerships with organisations such as Aardman Animations.



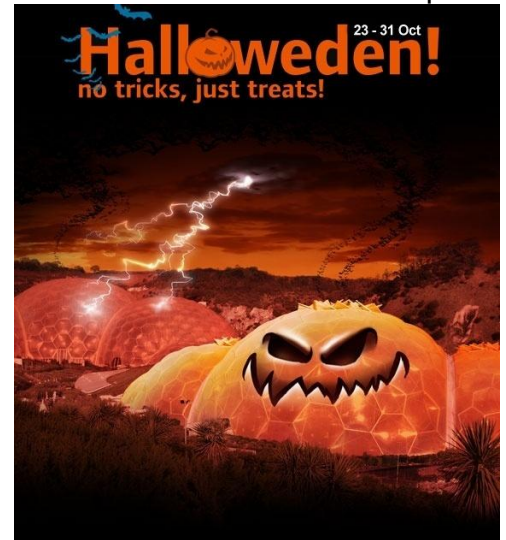
We create very different campaigns for the more reflective audience who might be around Cornwall in the spring – focusing on the flowers and showing them a different experience. We are the first botanic garden in the UK to have a Zip Wire – we're one of the only ones in the world to have a zip wire and just re-launched an extra-long zip wire and while this doesn't really appeal to our Older Visitors it does actually appeal to visitors who haven't been for a while and it gives them another reason to come back.

We produce the *Eden Sessions* and the Jessie J concerts had 12,000 attenders, there were four sell-out sessions and 31,000 tickets sold for the six of sessions. Research shows that two thirds of that audience would never come to Eden if it wasn't for those concerts. They always talk about the experience of what it was like to walk around in the rain forest while somebody was performing on stage.

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Our summer campaigns are very kid focused and include den building, new rides, circus and the horticulture. Our autumn/winter season really tries to re-engage and re-ignite interest from the local population and get them to come back so we kick off with a big party; *Halloweden* where we have a *Little Monsters Ball* and *Skate and Scream* where we install an ice rink which runs all the way through the winter and we get double the amount of visitors we had in the winters of those very early years just because of what we put on. People use it almost like a public amenity – a public park.

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We heavily price promote with reductions for local people and free places for children and have lots of involvement for the local community coming down making lanterns, singing, getting involved in community events. We need to price promote as our lead price is very expensive for local people whereas it is a bargain for holiday visitors.

### **Circus case study**

For us it is a balancing act between trying to develop a product that stands on its own two feet and a balancing act between trying to engage the widest possible audience that we can pull in – not just understanding the audience from the demographics that you have but also thinking about the people that might not normally come to Eden or Cornwall.

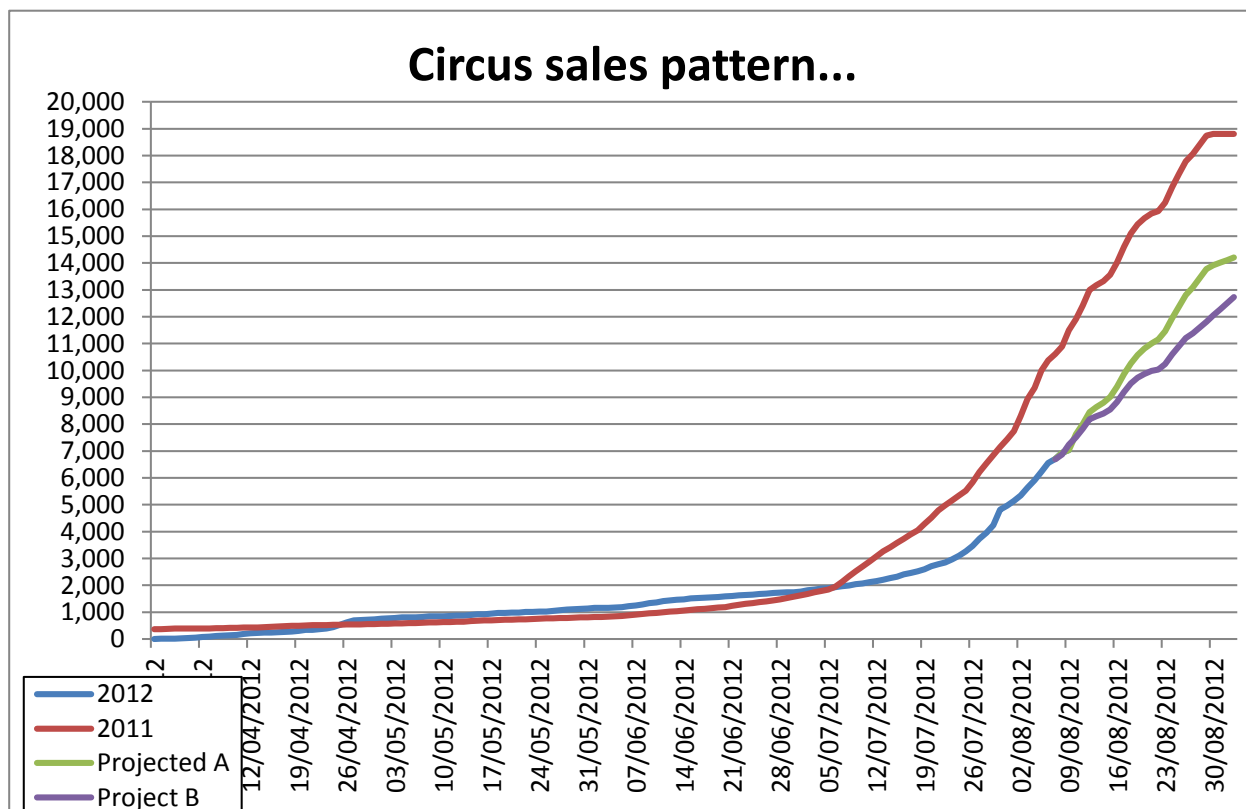
We experimented with a circus in the summer. This was a real risk as this was our peak season anyway and we normally attract about 200,000 visitors in the six weeks of the summer holidays. You could argue that it's the most profitable period we have as there are lots of tourists and holiday visitors around. But we thought that during that period there's an arts-based audience in Cornwall and the South West who aren't coming into Eden and see us very much as a theme park. We partnered with No-Fit State Circus who came and practically lived with us for two summers (2011 and 2012). Two things to note that we did differently were that in August 2011 it was on from Tuesday to Friday (peak days) and in August 2012 it was from Friday to Monday.

It was created to celebrate our 10<sup>th</sup> birthday and to encourage people to revisit by putting on something new and different. This is a challenge that we all face ... we all know that people want to come for certain things and to have an experience they can trust but to have experience something that is a bit different. No-Fit State Circus animated Eden during the daytime, did juggling workshops and created the show. We developed a marketing campaign – targeting an

'arts' audience to run in parallel with our summer family focused campaign core offer. We wanted to create something that had a life that was longer than the show period at Eden.

It was a phenomenal performance delivering over 30,000 visitors in two short seasons (20 days each), visitors adored it; *'... I loved it and felt it fitted in really well with Eden's ethos', 'you can always rely on Eden to come up with something so different ...'* and Eden's team adored them... *'... NFS brought a new energy and ways of working to our team...'*

From a business perspective we really wanted to see if it was something that would add to the business not just supplement what was going on. So, crucially; did it drive a new audience to Eden or simply tap into an existing audience that would have come anyway? Did they add value financially or socially?



August 2011 – Tuesday to Friday / August 2012 – Friday to Monday

30,000 visitors in two short seasons

With a long lead like this it took a while for sales to get going but as you can see, in the first year, week by week all tickets were pretty much sold – I think it was 96% capacity sold out – and then in the second year it took a little bit longer to start but once it did it followed a similar sales pattern but never actually reached the heights that we wanted it to get to. We wanted both seasons to be full sell out at 20,000 visitors but we didn't quite make that and actually ended up at 10,000 in the

second year. The key thing that actually did this was in the first year putting on the Circus from Tuesday to Friday which was better suited to the holiday visitor whose changeover period would probably be at some point on the weekend, the peak days for visiting Eden are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. There was a certain degree of cannibalisation of the day visitor which meant that actually, if we were really trying to attract that arts-based audience so we would put the circus on at the weekends to skew it away from the tourist / holidaymaker audience. It was a risk that didn't work or financially stack up.

In the first year, 2011, there were many more family visitors 63% as opposed to 45% in 2012 which absolutely reflected the fact that it was this core, day visitor audience that actually chose to come in the evening rather than in the day time. It really didn't relate to the Older Adult Group I mentioned before but in the second year we had 28% Mixed Age Adult Group which shows that we did find a slightly different audience for the second season and they were actually a bit more arts oriented. In the second year, only 7% of visitors were visiting for their first time compared to 35% in 2011. So we really did get something that created an urge to revisit.

We also wanted to find out if people had heard previously of No-Fit State Circus – 82% hadn't heard of them in 2011 and 62% hadn't heard of them in 2012 so we know that it was great for raising their profile and showed that those people revisiting had heard about it because of the time that they came before.



With regards the 'arts audience' – 74% of the visitors who came in the second year were 'very arts engaged'. Our definition of 'arts engaged' was 'do they usually, in a year, go to some sort of arts venue, theatre, music event, art gallery?' We monitored it and 74% were actually people who were going frequently going to these things. They loved the beauty of the piece and the skill and beauty of the performers, the music and the avant garde nature of the whole show.

The crux of the matter for us was; 'were you going to come to the Eden Project anyway this summer and you chose to come in the evening instead of the day?' 58% had planned to come anyway and of them, 48% chose to come in the evening because of the circus. What's interesting is that actually even though the circus tickets were more expensive than the lead price of our day ticket, those visitors weren't worth as much to us as there was no secondary spend on meals, ice creams or retail afterwards as the time of day (late at night) wasn't conducive to that activity. In the second year 35% said that they wouldn't have visited if it hadn't been for the circus so we did have



a certain degree of additionality but it wasn't enough to make this whole thing stand up on its own two feet financially.

In reality it is a story of whether to do things 'in ticket' or to do things separately ticketed. All the evidence shows us that actually it is something that we should have done 'in ticket'. It would have really engaged that Family Group audience and we would still have had that secondary spend that you associate with a day visit. By creating it separately ticketed, even though we thought that it was a successful business model and actually add to the bottom line in reality it ate day visits.

To sum up; what did we learn?

- The new product was very compelling ... perhaps too compelling ... so much so that it could be argued that it virtually cannibalised some day visit sales
- Spend was lower per person (less free time for secondary spend)
- But for Eden it was certainly reengaged an audience that might never have visited again
- ... and it was so good for the spirit,
- good for the perception of the brand,
- and good for the team, the energy of the staff and the essence of the place

We took a calculated risk and will continue to experiment – this year with butterflies next year ... who knows?

We all take risks in our jobs and our organisations but with this spirit of experimentation and with the knowledge that you are going to evaluate in order to monitor absolutely what is going on with a particular product you can actually gain confidence to make other decisions and develop from that. It's interesting that when you've got an 'owner' of an event such as the circus it becomes quite emotive, people take it personally. It's great that they take that personal ownership so when you're presenting the evaluation data back and you're trying to make a case for a different way of running it, the culture of the organisation has to create a safe environment for challenging people and for people actually accepting different ways of doing things.

We continue to experiment and this year we've got 5,000 butterflies going into the Rainforest Bio. That's a massive experiment for us but a quick and easy win for something that's going into an attraction in its thirteenth year. But again, it's really good for the soul; it's really good for us all to try to be doing something differently. It comes with its own challenges and again, with the Butterfly Experience, we're doing that completely 'in ticket' and we'll monitor in a way to find out if that should be kept 'in ticket' or if it should be something of a 'bolt on' a bit like the Natural History

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Museum do with their butterflies there.

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The spirit of experimentation will be lasting a long time at the Eden Project ...

