Research Briefing

Briefing 4: Increasing Attendance and Participation

Ailbhe Mc Nabola
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Aim and Target Audience of this Briefing

This briefing aims to provide an overview of research on 'what works' to practitioners in the museum, library and archive sector. This briefing is based on MLA research, data and case studies, available on the MLA Research Resources website at http://research.mla.gov.uk/.

This briefing summarises the evidence for appropriate actions to increase participation among different user and non-user groups, and provides links to further guidance.

Introduction

As of 1st April 2008, local authorities are required to report on national indicators of performance. Museums, libraries and archives can demonstrate their contribution to two key indicators for DCMS by increasing attendance and participation:

NI 9   *Use of public libraries (DCMS Departmental Strategic Objective)*
NI 10   *Visits to museums or galleries (DCMS Departmental Strategic Objective)*

The Taking Part survey provides organisations working in the cultural sector with data about engagement and non-engagement in culture, leisure and sport. The survey provides quality-assured data on participation, attendance and attitudes from a sample of approximately 29,000 people each year. This information is a powerful tool for organisations to build an evidence base on participation in the sector, and to understand who is participating, and why. Organisations can access this information at http://stats.mla.gov.uk/ (registration required).

Targeting Non-Users	Targeting Users
Non-users indifferent or hostile to the cultural offering with negative preconceptions or attitudes	Current or lapsed users, well-disposed towards the cultural offering
↓	↓
New Audience Development	Marketing Techniques

New Audience Development - Targeting Non-Users

Research shows that non-users can be indifferent and even hostile, sometimes with entrenched negative perceptions. Marketing techniques are not appropriate for reaching members of this group – first, new audience development activity must be undertaken to change preconceptions and re-brand services in these non-users' minds.

What research tells us about non-users

Museums: Lack of interest and of time are the main reasons for not visiting a museum, with (higher levels of) education, (higher) income and (increasing) age as important factors (ref.2).

Libraries: The typical non-user is older, white, educated below A-Levels and has no children. 45% of library non-users cite "lack of time" or "no need to go" as the main reasons for not visiting libraries, suggesting indifference or hostility to libraries. Qualitative research has shown that negative perceptions of libraries are fairly deeply entrenched (ref. 3).

Archives: The most frequently reported reason for not visiting archives is the lack of need to do so. The lowest attendance rates are seen among adults in the oldest and youngest age groups, adults from an Asian background, and adults with no qualifications (ref. 4).

Links to demographic information on non-users can be found at the end of this briefing.

What research tells us about which activities work

Research on raising demand for cultural activities shows that certain approaches have been proven to work across the sector: re-interpreting and re-positioning cultural services, outreach (tapping into the demand for local activities), education, using cultural ambassadors and involving representatives of target groups, consultation and community engagement, tapping into existing social networks, manipulation of content (reflecting the interests of particular groups, using content that engages children) and of context (taking culture out of its traditional setting or bringing social activities into the cultural space), and making the cultural offering a social activity or experience.

The MLA Research Resources website contains case studies on audience development at archives, use of champions, community engagement, outreach, and community profiling, all of which are useful if you are looking for tried and tested approaches and practical guidance.

For **museums,** evidence shows that making culture a social activity is particularly relevant for attracting new audiences from lower socio-economic groups (C2, D and E) and that social networks are key to driving demand among excluded audiences (ref.7).

For **libraries**, research suggests that even in libraries where improvements to the service offering have taken place, non-users remain unaware and unconvinced of the value that libraries can add to their lives. Libraries can carry out targeted communications to raise awareness of new library services and public relations campaigns to challenge and change assumptions that indifferent and hostile non-users have about libraries and their services. Research suggests that the key non-user groups to target include alpha consumers or local champions amongst 16-24 year olds and working adults under 44 without children (ref. 5).

Across the sector, in order to develop an effective audience development strategy, **audience research and segmentation** are key first steps in developing an audience development plan. This work needs to include lifestyle and environmental factors as well as traditional demographics. *Links to audience research sources can be found at the end of this briefing.*

Marketing - Targeting Current or Lapsed Users

Maintaining existing users, increasing the frequency of visits and improving user experience of cultural activities requires the use of the traditional marketing tools, addressing Place, Product, Price and Promotion.

What research tells us about users

Museums: Research conducted in 2006 showed that 42% of adults in the UK had visited at least one museum or gallery during the past 12 months (ref. 2). The higher an individuals' social class, household income and education level, the more likely they are to visit museums and galleries. Research also shows that those who were taken by their parents to museums as a child had significantly higher recent attendance rates that those who were not taken as a child (53% and 29% respectively). Repeat visiting is an important factor. Almost everyone who has visited a museum or gallery in the last 12 months is extremely likely to visit either the same venue or a similar one during the next 12 months. Research at Renaissance museums shows that repeat visitors are more likely to be local visitors, and, more importantly, that 70% of repeat visitors are classified as from the socio-economic groups D and E (ref. 6).

Libraries: Non-white adults are more likely to be library users than white adults. More library users are women (49.9% of adults) than men (42.1%). Library users also tend to be highly educated, and to have children. Library use is relatively high for people under 16 (72% of 11-15 year olds visiting a library at least once in 2006/07). Like museums, adult use is influenced by use as a child (ref. 3, Tables 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 5.1, and 5.2).

Archives: Analysis of Taking Part data from 2006-2007 shows that 5% of adults have visited an archive centre in the last 12 months. These are mostly from higher socio-economic groups and from households with two adults and no children. Repeat visits are important, most adults who have been to an archive say they definitely will attend again in the future (ref. 4).

Virtual users: Are most pronounced within the archive sector, with 55% of adults making their visit only via the Internet. 36% of museum visitors used were physical and virtual visitors, with 5% being virtual only visitors. 18% of library visitors used a library website and made a physical visit, with 3% being virtual only visitors (ref. 1).

Links to demographic information on users can be found at the end of this briefing.

What research tells us about which activities work

Audience segmentation can be used to inform the marketing mix to meet the different needs, attitudes and expectations of segments of the user audience. The MLA Research Resources website contains case studies on [increasing disability access](#), [using software to conduct visitor research](#), and [audience segmentation](#).

There is evidence of differentiation in the drivers of participation amongst different groups within society (ref. 7). Issues of identity and cultural heritage are relatively more important to BME communities. Whilst BME groups are culturally and socially diverse, there is evidence of strong common drivers of participation. These include children and family, as well as opportunities for socialising – which is also an important driver for lower socioeconomic groups. Culturally relevant, though not necessarily culturally specific, content has been shown to drive interest and engagement among BME groups. Re-interpreting or re-positioning cultural services, manipulation of both the content (programming) and the context (e.g. location) of the offering, and making cultural activities social activities have all been proven to work across all groups within society.

Recent research (ref. 4) suggests ways in which **libraries** can address the four 'Ps':
Place - refreshing library interiors (décor and furnishing) to be welcoming, comfortable and modern, allow for some variety and separation within buildings (e.g., more or less noisy areas) to accommodate the range of users.
Product - improving stock to place a greater focus on contemporary material, improve access and usability by introducing email reservation, loan extensions, drop boxes etc.
Price – provide extra value by combining the library service with additional services that users wish to use and which fit with both a leisure and reading or informal learning mindset, e.g. the provision of an appealing café, inclusion of exhibitions and other events.
Promotion - promoting new stock with displays and other mechanisms to raise awareness and assist users in finding inspiration, providing request services for new stock.

Renaissance Hub Museums attribute much of the growth in visitor numbers to an increased "audience focus" – including the effective use of marketing communications, the development of permanent collections, the staging of touring exhibitions, capital development and the development of secondary facilities, and the funding of posts relating to both product and audience development (ref. 11).

The **collection and analysis of data** on current users is a necessary step in developing a marketing strategy. Research has shown that museums do not always have a dedicated resource for data collection, and that not all museums collect data on priority groups - young users, people with disabilities, BME groups, socio-economic groups C2, D and E (ref. 10). More widely, data gathering provides organisations with information that can inform strategic planning. Without this knowledge and evidence, organisations are planning and operating in the dark. Research into the user profile and the user experience are necessary for improvement. In addition, data can be used to provide evidence to advocate for the sector's contribution to wider government policy areas, such as contribution to national performance indicators within Local Area Agreements and to the Every Child Matters agenda. Data can be also used to support funding bids and increase income.
Links on marketing and data collection and analysis can be found at the end of this briefing.

Conclusion

The aim of increasing attendance and participation cannot be a 'quick win'. There is no substitute for a certain input of time, resource and management support in order for a service to build an understanding of its community, develop user and non-user profiles, identify target groups and the best methods for reaching them, and evaluate results. Audience development and marketing strategies must be integrated into the organisation's overall strategy - linked to the corporate or business plan, with input and/or support from key senior figures.

There are benefits for the organisation in demonstrating a contribution to local authority performance, in income generation, and in improving the offer to a wider audience.

Sources of further information

Information about users, virtual users and non-users in mla sector

1	Taking Part: Annual Report (2005/2006)	http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/3682.aspx
2	Taking Part – Museums & Galleries (2006-07)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Attendance%20of%20Museums%20and%20Galleries.pdf
3	Taking Part - Libraries (2006-07)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/attend_in_lib_12639.pdf
4	Taking Part - Archives (2006-07)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/attend_in_archives_12637.pdf
5	Library Non-Users (2008)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/non%20use%20of%20libraries%20for%20Research%20Resources.doc
6	Renaissance Museums (2007)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/whos_visiting_12749.pdf

Increasing participation, marketing and audience development

7	Culture on Demand (DCMS, 2007)	http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/CultureOnDemand.pdf
8	Digital Audience Development Toolkit (2008)	AVAILABLE FEB 2009
9	Attracting visitors to museums and galleries (Renaissance North East, 2007)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Audience%20Knowledge%20Digest.pdf
10	Mapping Audience Development amongst Museums in EM (MLA East Midlands, 2007)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Zebra_Square_Executive_Summary%201%20.doc
11	Renaissance: results for 2007-08 (MLA, 2008)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/DCH%20Annual%20Report%202007-08%20final.pdf
12	Audience Development Toolkit (MLA Yorkshire, 2006)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Audience_Development_Tookit.pdf
13	Conducting Marketing Research in Museums (Institute for Learning Innovation, 2008)	http://www.care-aam.org/documents/vs101_2008/YalowitzVS101presAAM.pdf
14	Audience Development Plans (Heritage Lottery Fund)	www.hlf.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C9AEA926-6272-4E65-8F16-B63CF391E75B/0/AudienceDev.pdf
15	Community Profiling Guide (MLA East Midlands, 2006)	http://www.mlaeastmidlands.org.uk/our_work/participation/how_to.html
16	Audience Development Plan Guide (MLA East Midlands, 2006)	http://www.mlaeastmidlands.org.uk/our_work/participation/how_to.html
17	Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners (MLA, 2005)	http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/Increasing_Attractiveness_8784.pdf

Data collection and analysis

18	Renaissance Audience Data Collection (2008)	http://www.mla.gov.uk/programmes/renaissance/what_is_renaissance/data_coll
19	Dazzled by Data? (2008)	http://www.a-m-a.org.uk/ADUKresources.asp
20	Audience Data Collection Manual	http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/renaissance/~/media/Files/pdf/2008/MLA_Audience_Data_Collection_Manual_Nov_2008_Final_v2
21	Audience Data UK	http://www.aduk.org
22	Full House: Turning Data into Audiences (2006)	http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/publications/market_and_audience_development/full_house2
23	Longitude Toolkit: Analysing your data (2004)	http://www.mla.gov.uk/programmes/peoples_network/impact_of_the_peoples_network/2_5_1