

numbers of people served, the number of stops made, and individual's time in the exhibit.

3. The baseline data is being used to track seasonal changes in the exhibit audience. This will be added to other data in preparation for the next marketing plan.
4. After the initial planning was complete and the exhibit opened, the aquarium decided to continue the exhibit for an additional year. The summative data was not designed specifically for remedial planning, but ended up being used in that way. For example, we reached the limit of what could be improved in adjusting the visitor entry line, and we decided to move an underutilized video from inside the exhibit to the waiting area, in a sense extending the exhibit footprint.
5. Planning is underway for the next special exhibit/special event/products combination. We now have from one to five years of data on the various components.
6. Portions of the data from the studies and the meta-analysis have relevance to large-scale planning, such as way finding and planning for a new special exhibit hall as the aquarium implements a new master plan.

We continue to weave together the threads of information from a variety of sources to give us a clearer picture of our visitors and the exhibit experience at Shedd Aquarium, to assess larger, more complex combinations of exhibits, activities, and services, and to provide baseline data to be able to document our progress.

We'd love to hear about other "suites" of studies and share ideas. If you would like to contribute, please call or write.

[VSA Elections - Continued]

As required by the VSA bylaws, only members who have paid their dues for the current year were eligible to vote, meaning that those who don't pay their membership until the conference registration lose their chance to vote.

There were 105 ballots received by the April 11 deadline, constituting a 46% return out of the possible 227 members who were eligible to vote as of April 11. The nominating committee greatly appreciates the willingness of everyone who participated, especially those who were willing to give their time and energy to the organization by accepting nominations for these positions and we commend the elected persons for their commitment to serving VSA.

Molly Hood, Chair of the Nominating Committee; Jeff Hayward and Steve Bitgood, committee members.



ChanSpotting # 2

He's working on a chapter for a new book to be published by MIT Press called *Information Design*.

New Audience Research and Development Efforts at Shedd Aquarium

Kristine Westerberg
John G. Shedd Aquarium

In the fall of 1996, Shedd Aquarium launched a new initiative for audience research and development. Over the past five years, the institution has commissioned a number of visitor surveys, but the use of various consultants and methodologies made it challenging to compare and interpret the data we collected. As staff began to develop a number of key plans for the future, we saw the need to formulate a comprehensive plan for a consistent approach to audience research.

Accordingly, the aquarium contracted with Jeff Hayward and Marilyn Rothenberg of People, Places & Design to help us develop a strategy and program. We presented them with a rather ambitious program goal: to incorporate visitor and community input into all aquarium planning on a broader, deeper, and more systematic scale and to accurately assess the impact of our plans and operations.

On a more down-to-earth level, we listed specific needs for the next two years: to build data on current visitors on a regular basis; to solicit visitor response to our facilities and programs; and to solicit both visitor and community response to plans for major new programs and exhibits.

In October of 1996, we began surveying of general visitors. Our goal is to complete 2,700 of these questionnaires over the next twelve months. The survey consists of several sections, with some data, such as demographics, collected for the duration of the survey. Other sections help us focus on specific issues of concern, from our ticketing procedures to the cleanliness of our restrooms.

Preliminary data has been fascinating; the first month's surveys showed that two-thirds of our audience came from out-of-state, a figure we normally expect to see in summer. One-third of our visitor groups were families, while two-thirds were adults without children. (It will be interesting to compare this with our summer demographics.) Some visitors stayed for less than one hour, while others stayed for more than six hours. The median stay was about 2.5 hours. We also collected many responses on topics from exhibits (they loved our whales and *Frogs* special exhibit) to staff interpreters (enthusiastic and positive) to food service (needs some help).

All these comments will be critical to helping us improve our services and move forward with new plans. We also began a "wayfinding" study to see if and where problems exist with our traffic flow. In addition, we're working on ways to evaluate our existing community programs, to help us develop long-lasting partnerships and use our resources most effectively.

We've had a challenging but rewarding struggle to get this program off the ground. We're delighted to have started, and we look forward to sharing information with our colleagues as the program continues.