

response. This often dealt with elicitation of commonplace values such as the value of family or frugality or the comfort and security of having one's ideas about the past confirmed.

If, as an analysis of these letters suggests, narrative is strongly implicated in the way in which some visitors experience the museum, museum workers need to be aware of its power and to question the ways in which it works when viewers see displays. Evaluating the role of narrative in the visitor experience is a difficult challenge, but the results may well be far reaching in that a greater understanding of visitor responses will be possible.

Narrative structures are one way in which audiences try to make meaning of their experience of the museum. Narrative structures lend themselves to a wide range of uses from values clarification and values reinforcement to self empowerment — learning is not the only activity that museums encourage. What does go on in the museum often has little to do with what is on show, the museum can often be rather like a theatrical set where family plays occur. Evaluation that goes beyond analyzing visitor behavior to understand the reasons for that is an emerging trend and has much to offer our understanding of the visitor experience in museums.

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What's In a Name? Evaluation of Exhibition Titles

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Clever or catchy? Informative or insane? Brash or boring? Titles are one of the least loved yet important aspects of developing exhibitions in museums. Titles need to capture the "essence" of the exhibition subject area yet still be catchy enough to sell to a public that is constantly exposed to clever and, often inane, advertising and selling messages. Evaluators may be called in to help resolve arguments about this touchy subject, but how is this best done?

At the Australian Museum we have conducted evaluations for titles of five exhibitions so far, both temporary and permanent. We usually try to find out more information from visitors about why they like or dislike a suggested name as this always gives interesting insights into what they think about the topic overall, as well as the Museum generally.

We often think that visitors haven't heard of a concept or term, such as "biodiversity" or "indigenous Australians," and are always surprised at the knowledge that our visitors bring to the Museum.

We often go to our visitors with "sexy" or "cool" titles that they hate, or conservative titles which they like. Either way it seems we can't win!

So what to do? We have found that there are a number of issues or things to be aware of when choosing and testing titles:

- Visitors usually want titles that will tell them what the exhibition is about and what subject matter or content they're likely to see.
- They like titles that imply active experiences, fun and discovery (as long as this is followed through in the exhibition of course!).
- They don't want titles that are misleading or could be misinterpreted.
- Visitors usually dislike titles that are trying to be "too clever", but they want titles that are catchy and interesting, particularly younger visitors.
- There is a mixed view about titles being either too long or too short — some like them long with a sub-title, and some short.
- There is usually one title that they dislike the most — often the one that the museum marketing people like the most.
- There is a need to ensure that a sufficient variety of names are tested that allow some conclusions to be made about many different types of titles rather than just variations on a theme.
- It doesn't matter what great title is thought up — the exhibition will usually be referred to by a shortened name by both staff and visitors anyway.

Is there a way to solve this dilemma of naming an exhibition? Perhaps a set of guidelines similar to those mentioned above could be a starting point.

As to naming exhibitions, at the Australian Museum it's amazing what of a case of champagne as an incentive will do for the creative minds of Museum staff — they'll keep on dreaming them up and we'll keep on testing them!

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