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6. Activity Sharing

According to many of the attendees, this format was an effective way to learn about each other. Participants were allowed to give a five minute presentation on their current activities or interests. Over 84% of the respondents checked "Yes" when asked if this should be part of next year's conference. Seventy-three percent indicated that the total time of this session (90 minutes) was "O.K." and over 80% indicated that the 5-min per presentation time limit was "O.K." A few attendees suggested that this format was not worthwhile, but they tended to be a very small minority.

7. Goals and Purposes of Attending

In response to a question regarding their goals and purposes of attending the conference, the following results were obtained:

- Acquiring information 100.0%
- Making contacts with others... 90.0%
- Exchanging information.....77.5%
- Acquiring skills..... 77.5%
- Presenting information..... 37.5%
- Exploring the area..... 17.5%

8. Formal Preferences

Most participants appeared to have preferred the regular session format of paper presentation. When asked to rank order format preferences, 82% ranked regular sessions either first or second. Workshops received the second highest ranking with 60% of attendees indicating first or second choice. Activity sharing and panel discussions were next in popularity.

9. Location of Future Meetings

Almost all of those who attended the Conference appeared to be ready to go about anywhere for future meetings. However, those cities receiving the most enthusiastic support were: Dearborn, Michigan; Toronto, Ontario; Richmond, Virginia; and Chicago, Illinois.

Our plan is to alternate between North and South so that almost everyone will have it close by in future years.

10. General Comments

The comments were varied and, for the most part, quite positive. Many said it was the "best," "most valuable and exciting," "stimulating," etc. conference they have attended. The most common problem expressed, however, was by many who are not acquainted with the visitor studies literature. Speakers often used terms without defining them. We hope to minimize this problem next year by: (1) offering an introductory workshop in the terminology and methodology of visitor studies before the regular sessions; and (2) emphasizing to speakers that terms should be carefully defined. □

Sample Abstracts from the First Annual Visitor Studies Conference

Understanding and Influencing Word-of-Mouth

G. Donald Adams
Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village

This paper discussed a word-of-mouth model describing public impressions of a museum during two phases: (1) pre-visit, based primarily on word-of-mouth, but also on publicity and advertising messages; and (2) post-visit, based on how well expectations were met on site. The model shows a cyclical process by which visitors carry their on-site impressions to others for whom the word-of-mouth is a major influence in their decision to visit. Data from surveys were reported in support of this model. Also discussed were: factors affecting word-of-mouth accuracy (e.g., recency of visit, clarity with which on-site experiences were perceived, pre-visit knowledge); how the model can be used with research methods; and a case study application used at Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. □

Museum Recollections

John H. Falk
Science Learning, Inc.

Museum learning involves a wide range of recollections about a diverse set of experiences encountered over the course of a museum visit. Three key features are: (1) visitors "learn" about many different aspects of a visit (not just exhibits); (2) experiences are stored in memory and are recallable; and (3) learned experiences persist for long periods of time (i.e., months, years, and decades). A series of pilot ethnographics-style interviews were conducted. Each of eleven subjects was conversationally "walked" through his recollections. Several consistent themes ran through all the recollections: (1) every individual interviewed could place the museum visit within a context – social, geographical and temporal; (2) every individual interviewed had a surprisingly good recollection of how long they spent in the museum, and often what their mental state was at the time – such as being bored or harried; (3) most individuals could recall at least a few exhibits they saw, and some specific details about them, though none of these people could recall a full visit's worth of things they saw; and (4) all individuals referred to some aspect of a museum's architecture or "feel."

Arboretum Visitor Profiles as Defined by the Four Seasons

Marilyn G. Hood
Hood Associates

The purpose of this study was to learn how the Holden Arboretum might:

- more effectively serve its current and potential publics
- reach more types of publics
- broaden its programming, public relations, and educational efforts

Since seasonal differences in visitors were suspected, a year-long visitor study was initiated. A questionnaire was designed by the researcher and staff with questions covering psychographics, participation as both adults and children in 12 leisure activities/places, reasons for visiting the Arboretum, preferences for various aspects of the Arboretum, participation in other Cleveland metropolitan area leisure places, and demographics.

Holden visitors did differ considerably from season to season, in psychographics, demographics, expectations of the Arboretum, satisfactions received from a visit, knowledge about what an arboretum is, and participation in other leisure time pursuits (both in outdoor activities and in other preservation-exhibition institutions). □

Some Evolving Principles of Visitor Behavior

Donald Patterson & Stephen Bitgood
Jacksonville State University

In this presentation, principles of visitor behavior were placed into three general categories:

- Characteristics of the exhibit objects/animals
- Characteristics of the facilities' architecture
- Characteristics of the visitors

Visitor research was reviewed and empirical relations between visitor behavior and these characteristics were summarized.

Exhibit objects or animals

Characteristics of exhibit objects or animals that appear to influence visitors include: size of the object or animal; movement or motion of visual stimuli on exhibit; aesthetic features (color, shape, pattern, etc.); novelty; type of sensory stimulation (visual, auditory, tactile); and the intrinsic value of the object.

Architectural factors

Architectural characteristics that affect visitor behavior include: placement of exhibits with respect to eye level, other exhibits, and features of the environment; location and number of exits; proximity or distance between visitor and exhibit object/animal; visibility of object/animal;

complexity of the exhibit; and realism (for objects that are supposed to be realistic).

Visitor characteristics

Important visitor characteristics include: the opportunity to participate; object satiation; museum "fatigue"; special interests of visitors; demographic factors; social influences (e.g., influence of other people in the environment); and visitors' perceptions of the object/animal. □

Strategies for Family Learning in Museums

D.D. Hilke
Smithsonian Institution

Detailed observations of family members were undertaken in two museum environments: a participatory hall with numerous "hands'on" opportunities and a traditional hall where artifacts were exhibited behind railings or in glass cases. In both environments family members persistently attended to the information presented and spontaneously engaged in strategies for acquiring and exchanging information about the exhibits. Learning strategies were biased to favor the acquisition of first-hand, factual information. Complementing individualized efforts at information acquisition were behaviors which served to broadcast current perceptions, conceptions, and queries to other family members. By favoring cross-generational interactive partners, family members effectively distributed new information to family members with the least similar knowledge bases. The family emerged as a highly responsive and flexible learning system that adapts well to museum environments. □

The Effect of Multispecies Exhibits on Visitor Attention at the Jacksonville Zoological Park

John Scott Foster, John J. Koran, Jr.,
Mary Lou Koran, Steven Start,
Ann Blackwood, & Harriet Landers
University of Florida

The effect of multispecies exhibits on visitor attention was examined at the Jacksonville (Florida) Zoo. Visitors were observed at ten exhibits which varied on many dimensions including number of type of species on exhibit. Visitor attention was analyzed in terms of number of species per enclosure, environmental complexity, activity level, age of visitors, and type of species. Two exhibits produced significant effects: the African veldt drew higher levels of attention than predicted; and one of the aviary exhibits produced lower than expected visitor attention. □

Sample Abstracts from the First Annual Visitor Studies Conference

Problems in Visitor Orientation and Circulation

Stephen Bitgood
Jacksonville State University

Visitor orientation and circulation problems encompass every aspect of visitation. A review of the literature identified numerous problems that may occur for people during their visitation. For purposes of this presentation the following stages of visitation were discussed with respect to the problems that arise:

- The Pre-visit phase. During this phase, the following problems may be faced: visitor knowledge of what to expect from their visit (what will visitors see, what can they do, etc.); obtaining directions to the facility; and following directions. If visitors have faulty expectations, they may be more likely to have disappointing experiences during their visit.
- Arrival phase. Problems during this phase include parking, finding the entrance, and orientation at the facility's entrance. These experiences may determine important visitor impressions.
- Visitation phase. Wayfinding becomes a major problem during this phase. How easily can visitors find their way through the exhibits? Can they find the rest-rooms and other visitor services? Finally, is the visitor circulation pathway designed so that it maximizes the probability that visitors will see all of the exhibits they wish to see?
- Leave-taking phase. Exiting problems must also be solved. Can visitors find the exit easily? Can they find their car in the parking lot? Can they find their way back to the interstate?

Individual Differences in Learning in Informal Settings

John J. Koran, Jr., Mary Lou Koran,
& John Scott Foster
University of Florida

One characteristic of museums and zoological parks is the diversity of their visitors. Typically, visitors will consist of a range of ages, both sexes and a range of background and experience. Add to these variables the probability that visitors will be more or less verbal, learn better from visual or aural presentations, be more or less inhibited or aggressive when confronted with a hands-on situation, be more or less attentive, have more or less conceptual or factual knowledge about the exhibits, have well developed memory skills or none at all, and will differ in their ability to function inductively and we see the critical role of "individual differences." Individual differences may be compensatory or facilitative. If an aptitude is well developed, such as visual learning skills, the aptitude can facilitate learning from an exhibit. An aptitude can also function to develop or assist another aptitude such as inductive reasoning. Defined, an aptitude is any characteristic of a person; cognitive, affective or psychomotor that functions to either facilitate learning or interfere with it. Research on individual differences usually involves testing for aptitudes, the administration of a variety treatment designed to achieve a specific outcome. The objective of this research is to address the question, "For whom is a presentation of this type most effective in achieving the specified outcome." This paper described an individual difference model of visitor learning. □

Visitor Behavior
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