

Capacity Building in Science Museums Today

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Summary

In this presentation I will look at how to increase capacity building in science museums and centres through different forms of ongoing training. I will present two recent workshops that can provide a model for science museums in the Republic of Korea.

Key Words: Capacity building, museum training, skills development, types of museum training workshops

1. Introduction

In recent years, the need for training and capacity building in museums of all types has increased dramatically. In large part, this need came as a result of the changing social role of museums, the challenge of addressing the expectations and needs of museum users, the impact of new technologies on museum activities.

As a response to this need, many new ways of training museum people were created. They range from one day symposiums to long distance courses and everything in between. National museum associations have taken on a key role in meeting this need and international museum organizations such as ICOM have put in place programs to meet this demand.

2. Main body

Museum training has become very important over the last decade or two. People who work in museums of all types continually encounter new terms and new ways of doing things. New concepts such as community engagement, Museum 2.0, social media, collection development strategies, financial sustainability, ethics of collecting and storytelling have become common language in museums. At the same time, people who work in museums are asked to change the way they work. Curators now engage with the public, the public participates in exhibition development, and museum users have different needs and expectations.

Many museums and museum organizations have set up programs that aim to increase the knowledge and skill sets of their staff. We often hear about capacity building. Simply put, capacity building is the combination of activities and programs undertaken by an organization to improve how its operations so

that it can more effectively and efficiently fulfill its mission. Capacity building is not a one-time effort to improve short-term effectiveness, but a continuous improvement strategy toward the creation of a sustainable and effective organization.

(see for example www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/what-capacity-building)

The ICOM International Training Centre for Museum Studies (ICOM-ITC) is a museum training centre that has been offering two workshops a year on different aspects of museums. Since its first workshop in 2013, the centre has offered museum training to more than 300 young professionals from China and from countries around the world.

The ICOM-ITC, as it is generally known, was officially inaugurated on July 1, 2013 and is housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing, China. The ICOM-ITC is the result of a collaboration between ICOM, ICOM China and the Palace Museum, Beijing. The operation and management of the centre is conducted by the Palace Museum.

The ICOM-ITC currently offers two training workshops a year, one in April and one in November. Each workshop is 10 days long and offers a combination of lectures, group work, discussions and museum visits. The participants must be under 45 years of age, be in mid-career and occupy a middle management position in their respective museums. Each workshop admits up to 35 participants, half of them coming from Chinese museums and the other half from museums primarily in the Asia-Pacific region. Each training workshop has a specific theme and in the past the themes have related to museum management, education, collections and exhibitions.

By providing inclusive and participatory training programs for museum professionals, the centre is intended to “promote research and exchange among museums at an international level and develop the museum expertise of professionals from developing countries, especially those from the Asia-Pacific region,” where the museum sector is growing rapidly and there is a high demand for museum professionals. In addition, in keeping with the current ICOM Strategic Plan, the centre provides ICOM members from developing countries with the opportunity to participate in ICOM-led training programs in areas relevant to museum management.

For more information on the ICOM-ITC, please go to:
<http://icom.museum/activities/training/icom-international-training-centre-for-museum-studies/>

3. Conclusion

Training workshops such as those offered in recent years in China offer a unique approach to capacity building in science museums. The mix of participants from different cultural and professional backgrounds, the interactive teaching style and the variety of approaches offered by the lecturers make for a very rich and rewarding training. I believe that such an approach to capacity building would benefit the science museums of the Republic of Korea.

Museum Hack: How to Reimagine the Museum Experience for Adults

Michael Alexis

Museum Hack

Summary

Museum Hack started in 2013 when our founder, Nick Gray, started leading fun museum tours for his friends. These tours included fun stories about the art and artists, activities in the galleries, gossip about the museum, selfies and wine. Since then, Museum Hack has become one of America's fastest growing private companies with tour operations in six major U.S cities, and 50+ team members. The New York Times recently featured our tours. We also consult for museums around the world on how to attract and engage adult audiences. In this talk I'll share some of the major lessons we've learned.

Key Word: audience engagement, museum tours, millennials, attracting audiences

How to Reimagine the Museum Experience for Adults

The 1900s were good to museums.
Here is why:

massive population growth meant there were more people to fuel the economy;
economic growth birthed new industries, including expansion of travel options: railways, affordable cars & highways, and air travel;
growth of the middle-class and the "9 to 5", with the money and flexibility to travel.

Yes, that is a MASSIVE oversimplification of 100 years of history, but let's focus on the most important outcome: all those people traveling meant hundreds of millions of museum visits, more than any other recorded period EVER.

And then we hit the 2000s and everything changed.

One of the biggest challenges facing museums is they were built for 1900s audiences and don't match the style, energy level and attention span of "millennials" (the generation that is coming of work age now). Sorry museums, they just aren't that into you — what can you do about it?

Some museums are investing millions in new exhibits, crossing their fingers that young people

will be more attracted and engaged. And this approach, a bit of a gamble, CAN work. But it turns out there is a much smaller investment that can MASSIVELY increase attendance, no renovations required.

What you need to do is tell a story.

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Museum Hack started in 2013 when our founder, Nick Gray, started leading fun museum tours for his friends.

These tours included fun stories about the art and artists, activities in the galleries, gossip about the museum, selfies and wine.

Since then, Museum Hack has become one of America's fastest growing private companies with tour operations in six major U.S cities, and 50+ team members.

We offer public tours, as well as private tours, bachelorette parties, corporate tours and more. Our tours are available in NYC, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington DC and Philadelphia.

The New York Times recently featured our tours and Museum Hack has also appeared in the Washington Post, Forbes, CNN and hundreds of other media outlets.

In addition to running unconventional museum tours, we also consult for museums around the world on how to attract and engage adult audiences.

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One of the key traits of a Museum Hack tour is that we lead with stories. This means that instead of listing facts, we blend the educational elements into a true narrative that is designed for modern audiences.

Two of the “secrets” of our success with stories are hiring and our proprietary rapid prototyping formula for engaging stories, The Five Elements of a Hack.

In addition to sharing stories about the art and objects in world class institutions, we also share insider knowledge about the museum itself and add other elements to tours that make them more engaging for millennial minded audiences.

For example, our tours include activities and games in the galleries, which can range from Matchmaker Matchmaker to drawing games, imaginary heists, or a story throw-down.

We also fight against museum apathy; a real problem where guests become tired viewing galleries, by including recharging elements like a quick yoga break or covert “Art Appreciation.”

No two Museum Hack tours are alike; they are created by the Renegade Guide to be unique each time they run.

In addition, Museum Hack offers a variety of tours to the public, including Un-highlights, VIP and themed tours. For example, in 2015 we began offering Badass Bitches of the Met at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC, which is a tour focussed on positive feminism and celebrating the women of the museum. Now we offer this tour in all of our operating cities.

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As Museum Hack has grown, we’ve developed repeatable systems for attracting and engaging adult audiences. We share this expertise with museums via our consulting and workshops. We’ve consulted for museums around the world, including the U.S, Canada, Australia, and Norway.

Our primary offering is an Audience Engagement workshop that teaches museums how to create tour

experiences like Museum Hack. This workshop includes details on the Five Elements of a Hack, as well as tour scaffolding and other advanced topics.

In addition to consulting on tour creation, we also help museums create unique, custom experiences for their visitors and communities.

For example, we recently created an “Escape the Museum” event for the museum at Arizona State University. We’ve also designed events for young patrons and other groups which include mini tours, trivia and social media campaigns.

The result is that museums we work with are better prepared to attract and engage modern audiences, including millennial-minded adults and up-and-coming generations.

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All so that we can keep spreading the good word: that museums are f***ing awesome!

How to Make Exhibitions That Make a Difference

Lessons from 40 years of creating your own exhibitions.

Dr Stuart Kohlhagen PSM

Senior Fellow – Science and Learning – Questacon - Australia's National Science and technology center

Summary

Questacon has for 40 years always initiated, designed, prototyped and manufactured its own interactive exhibitions. These exhibits have ranged from the most simple, portable low- tech exhibits, to technically complex sophisticated permanent installations. Questacon has, over the decades, trialed and innovated the processes by which exhibits are initiated, developed and evaluated, ensuring real outcomes, strong visitation, and long term sustainability. The model we now use, starts by specifying the outcome, or the impact on the visitor that is the mission for the project. This provides clear guidance during the subsequent evolution of the concepts, through subsequent design prototyping and value engineering decisions. These approaches are especially valuable for those institutions that outsource the concept development, or subsequent manufacture of their exhibitions. It involves turning our minds from the exhibit and towards the visitor.

Key Word: Interactive, Impact, Participative, Inquiry, Learning

1. Introduction

Making exhibitions is easy. Even making popular exhibitions is not very hard. Yet producing exhibitions that reach their audiences and have the impact we need is very challenging. Questacon has always conceived, designed, manufactured and hosted its own exhibitions. This has allowed us to control, and observe the journey from idea to exhibit, and to ultimately to its use and impact on our visitors. The insights we have gained from this have helped us understand how to specify and monitor the development of exhibitions to achieve powerful and intended results. These principles are relevant to all exhibition development processes, in-house or externally contracted.

2. Main body

Major projects such as the development of S&T exhibitions usually involve significant commitments of time, resource and funding. Many Museums (and their staff) may only undertake exhibition development sporadically, during times of major renovation or renewal. Few Museums have an active and ongoing exhibition development cycle, and fewer have the capacity or facilities to undertake this work entirely in-house. The development of a major exhibition might be divided into a few distinct phases – Initiation, concept development, design, fabrication/installation and operation. In large projects within established museums, and the establishment of new museums it is common for only the first (initiation) and last (operation) stages to be managed internally. Out sourcing, sub-contracting obviously provides access to additional resources, skills and expertise not available in house. At each point, however, there is the need to establish and communicate

the requirements, the scope of work, the specific goal or definition of success, for that component. Often these specifications will focus on the inputs, or the contents of the project. Often the desired outcome is not directly articulated. Teams involved in initiation of projects may have a shared understanding of the rationale – the reason – for the selection of a topic, what they hope will be the result of the visitors attending the exhibition. However this rationale is often described in general terms, not expressed in concise or tangible language. It may describe what the exhibition will show, what it will contain, not what the visitor will do, what they will experience. The difference might seem small, as developers we see the connection between the device, the exhibit and the learning. We may have a clear idea about the impact we wish to have on the visitor from an exhibit. We describe an exhibit with certain characteristics that we feel will achieve this.

Yet, during design, development, value engineering many many choices will be made about the execution of the exhibit. If this work is based on the description of the physical components of the exhibit, these changes can easily result in an exhibit that fails to meet the original objectives, even though it might honor the technical specifications. If the specification is focused on the content, the objects then the development process may result in exhibits that do not have the effect on our visitors that we required. We have all seen exhibits that have great content, pleasing aesthetics and no visitor impact.

In our process, significant effort is placed in defining and clarifying the real objectives for the project. A program logic framework is used to make certain the objectives are clear and shared. The process operates at the level of the complete exhibition as well as individual exhibits. The development of the specifications takes time, but the clarity of the goals means simpler communications during subsequent development. More autonomy and confidence as the project moves through various stages, and through the hands of different professions and technical stages. Prototyping and formative evaluation is against relevant and priority areas. Changes are often needed in response to shifting resources, time lines, budgets or technical challenges. Having a specification that describes “success” in terms of what the visitor can do, or experience provides a framework for making these choices that serves to keep the objectives of the project on track.

Individual exhibits have specifications that detail the types of activity the visitor could undertake, the types of exploration, the options for comparisons and observations they might make. Their scope for influencing the exhibit. Aspects such as group involvement are included, as are the target demographic cohorts. A possible physical mechanism for achieving this may be suggested in the brief. But it is not the central or fixed part. During design, prototyping changes, alternatives will emerge, or be required. These options can be checked against the original specification, to see if the changes support or impede the intended outcomes. This has proved essential as Questacon's fabrication facility has grown in scale and sophistication. This IN-HOUSE - process – developed to ensure our own exhibits have the required impacts on our visitors has been shared and adopted by other organizations which out source many phases of exhibition development. It has proven to be a solid framework for communication and decision making between commissioning organizations and contractors .

By Changing our thinking from

“This exhibit is about...”

or

“This exhibits shows...”

to a specification that has the form

“ The exhibit will be successful if the VISITOR can discover..”

3. Conclusion

The complexity of exhibition development, with its multiple inputs, stakeholders and constraints, often leads to compromises that dramatically and unintentionally limit the value of the invested effort and resources. Compromise will always be necessary. By taking steps to

clarify the real objectives of the exhibition, and express them in a concise and tangible way, the compromises can be made without the inadvertent corruption of the projects objectives.

The two simplest steps are to:

- Express the success of the project in terms of the impact or outcomes for the visitor.
- Use visitor focused language in the specifications. Not describe what the exhibit will show, but what the user will do, what they will take from the exhibit.