

ASPAC 2007

APEC Science Centre Impact Project

Roundtable Discussion, Conference Room 1

Chair: Dr T. C. Chew, CEO Singapore Science Centre
Rapporteur: Sarah Bugg, Scitech, Perth, Western Australia

Attendees:

Mr Mac West, Informal Learning Experiences, USA
Mr Lee Sing Choy, Petrosains, Malaysia
Shimrath Paul, Otago Museum/Discovery World, New Zealand
Ms Phyllis Lam, National Science Centre, Malaysia
Mr Kim Sung-Bong, National Science Museum, Korea
Ms Jarinya Tahomtin, National Science Centre for Education, Thailand
Mr Neville Petrie, Science Alive, New Zealand
Ms Lizzy Cox, Natural History Museum, United Kingdom
Mr Andy Giger, Singapore Science Centre

Question 1: Who are your audiences?

- Typical audience in the US is parents and children aged up to 12 years.
- Similar audiences for Malaysia, Korea, Thailand and Australia
- Thailand has approximately 60% of visitation as school students, they would like to encourage more teenagers and vocational students
- Singapore has increasing numbers due to higher levels of tourists (international), can be up to 40% of visitation during peak times
- Otago Museum focused on different markets with different products, programs and timed events recognizing the differences between the visitors to the centre.
- Science Alive noted the difficulty of drawing in the teenage markets
- Korea has a similar visitor demographic (junior school students), no input from tourist market
- Need to capture people who visit the centre for entertainment and encourage them to leave knowing/enjoying/appreciating some science. People are using the science centres as safe places for learning/recreation

Question 2: How are you reaching new audiences? How relevant are your centres?

- People come mainly for entertainment, not for the science
- There are two versions of relevant: what visitors think is relevant and what the science centre is trying to get across
- New Zealand noted the importance of relevance to teachers so that they bring in school students who are the key markets
- Relevancy: Different relevance to different markets
- Relevancy: How relevant are you? Are you achieving your mission?
- Visitor numbers are not necessarily an accurate measure of relevance, there needs to be some investigation of the true impact of programs
- There may be a little benefit/impact/relevance to a lot of people, but a lot of benefit/impact/relevance to a few people. These few people take more resources, time and effort on behalf of the science centre, but have a longer lasting impact.

- It is our responsibility both to make science available to the public, encourage people into the science centre for low level engagement with science and to encourage some people to move forward to the top levels of achievement/career development.
- Numbers are not always the best method of gauging interaction or engagement of visitors but they are easy to measure and demonstrate impact
- Importance of life long learning, sustainability both as a business and as a resource for the community to engage and be involved/informed about science and science issues
- Critical time between ages 15 – 30, currently is a “black hole”, this age group does not see the relevance, how can we become more relevant to this age group? Target programs, media campaigns etc to this market through programs such as careers programs only for secondary students and entertainment options within the science centre environment for after hours etc.
- Issue of bad science teachers turning off this important age group of students: need to support and develop professional learning programs for science teachers. These programs are currently run in a number of centres, but could do more.

Question 3: how are you reaching these new audiences?

- Mac West: many target audiences, all requiring different strategies and different relevant focuses to each audience
- Andy Gieger: Need to develop teacher resources to help those teaching/developing students of the critical age group, help support the people working with people at the top of the pyramid
- Lee: Set up specific areas for different target audiences (i.e. different areas for young kids, teenagers, adults etc). Each area will be relevant for each group
- Shim: Need diversity of relevance for all audiences, also need to be able to measure this impact: Teachers are a good place to start with
- Lizzy: Teachers could benefit from being trained as science communicators, distill the thought that teachers are part of the science engagement strategy, rather than as something extra to the process that only science centres can deliver
- Phyllis: Important to bridge the cultural and religious boundaries eg Islamic science exhibition, not about religion its about the people who have developed the technology/science
- Kim: Trying to attract company personnel to use the museum as a training centre to improve knowledge and understanding of science in the community
- Jarinya: Improving contact with middle school/high school students through outreach program delivery. Also doing informal learning with non school groups on weekends, special events, family days etc
- Sarah: Developing links with scientists through programs and exhibit delivery. Developing links with government through providing scientists to brief Ministers etc on important issues (Science @ Parliament). Developing new audiences through innovative programs

Key point to note: One size does not fit all, different programs and approaches are needed for each different audience.