Towards an audience focus: using insight from audience research to inform decision-making in museums & heritage

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We work with arts and heritage organisations across the UK to help them understand their audiences. Turning information into insight so that it’s strategically useful.
How do you make decisions in your organisation?
What’s in our toolkit?

Paper surveys, online surveys, voting boards and polls, fulfillment maps, accompanied visits, visitor observations, online journals, comment books, comment cards, photos, mystery shoppers, graffiti walls, chalk-boards, light-boards, white-boards, perception maps, mind maps, mood boards, depth interviews, postcode profiling, learning diaries, consultation groups, journey mapping, vox pops, visitor tracking, model-making...we could go on!
Here’s seven strategic examples that show a direct link between research and decision-making.
Question
What sort of tours do visitors want in Dove Cottage?
Approach

Method
5 different types of tour trialled + short survey & observational research

Resources
Train staff in observational research & tour content, paper survey

Decision
Offer choices of tours based on domestic life, literature, poetry, political context
Questions
What should the attraction be called? Which objects would encourage a visit?
Approach

Method
Roaming kit box at British Grand Prix + marquee. iPad survey, voting board & jar

Resources
Marquee, ‘scrappy’ voting kit, outdoor wear, tablet, archive collection display

Decision
Centre named Silverstone Heritage Experience, star object displays
Question

How can we engage young people? Should there be a cafe?
Approach

Creative drawing session: what could an archive centre look like? Survey in MSM

Long rolls of paper, pens, stickers, magazines

Zoned spaces (loud, quiet, study, play). Main space cafe with interactive tables

Method

Resources

Decision
Which stories must we include in the museum and tour?
Approach

Popcorn paired idea generation + voting for top three ideas

Method

Flipchart, post-its, dot stickers, pens, plenty of space, stopwatch

Resources

Secret! Ideas directly informing content of new museum and stadium tour

Decision
Manchester Jewish Museum
Manchester, UK

Question
Which content themes and events will motivate non-users to visit?
Approach

Object handling box event at four city museums with structured feedback

Handling box, curator time, programming teams, museum space

Storylines in displays, food and music as common themes for programmes
Question
How can we develop our teacher CPD opportunities?

Manchester Art Gallery
Manchester, UK
**Approach**

- **Journey mapping** to share project highs, lows, key learning points  
  **Method**

- **Wallpaper rolls, magazines, newspapers, glue, pens, scissors**  
  **Resources**

- **Repeat CPD which includes personal return to art study for teachers**  
  **Decision**
Question

How can we get more low income families to come to our programme?

St Helens Cultural Hubs (Libraries)
St Helens, UK
Approach

Depth interviews with parents and carers at four soft play centres in St Helens

Method

Digital recorder, notebook, pen

Resources

Changed marketing mix

Decision
Takeaway tips

➔ Know your ethics
➔ Recruitment takes longer than you think
➔ Be ready to adapt
➔ Create your own researcher kit bag
➔ Get scrappy
➔ Photograph & record (with permission)
➔ Use the data
Right method.
Right audience.
Right decision.
Get in touch

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Q&A provocation

- How do you use audience data to inform your decision making?
- Do you have success or failure stories to share?
- Is the audience always right?