

The Guide to Researching Audiences

Illustrative Case Study

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1. Introduction

1.1 Disclaimer

- 1.1.1 The institutions, resources, situations and people in this case study are for illustrative purposes only. Any resemblance to actual institutions or people is unintentional.

1.2 What is the illustrative case study?

- 1.2.1 This document presents a fictional case study which illustrates audience research in the lifecycle of a museum (both digital and non-digital services). It is a supporting document to 'The Guide to Researching Audiences'¹ which is described in more detail in Annex A. The illustrative case study and the guide have been produced by Curtis+Cartwright Consulting Limited on behalf of the Strategic Content Alliance.
- 1.2.2 This illustrative case study is designed to demonstrate a range of research methods, highlight some common pitfalls, and show how audience research is linked to the lifecycle and development of a service. It augments the guide by giving an account of the audience research undertaken by the fictional museum from three different perspectives:
- research on visitors to the physical museum (Section 3);
 - research on use of the museum website (Section 4);
 - research to support a possible application to digitise material from the museum archives (Section 5).
- 1.2.3 The rationale for the research, the objectives set and the methods chosen are set out for each of the research projects. Illustrative results are given and conclusions drawn. The *Making use of the research* sub-sections show ways in which the knowledge gained from the research might be used to help tackle the problems faced by the museum services. Results are described briefly, but detailed analysis procedures are *not* given.²

1 *The Guide to Researching Audiences*, Curtis+Cartwright Consulting Ltd, v1.0, 5 December 2008.

2 The variance in the data is also not discussed, and neither confidence limits nor statistical significance are given.



- 1.2.4 Throughout the case study, comments on the approach to the research and data collected have been added in boxes. A review of the audience research is provided at Section 6, assessing the successes and shortcomings of the research.

1.3 Link to ‘The Guide to Researching Audiences’

- 1.3.1 The case study illustrates the use of some of the different audience analysis methods referred to in the guide:
- **surveys:**
 - **online** (sub-sections 4.3.3, 4.4, 5.3 and 5.4);
 - **email/postal/on-site** (sub-sections 3.4, 4.4, 5.4.3 and 5.4.8);
 - **focus groups** (sub-sections 3.4, 3.5 and 4.4);
 - **interviews** (sub-sections 3.4, 5.3 and 5.4);
 - **web analytics** (sub-sections 4.3.1 and 4.4);
 - **user-tracking** – accompanied browsing (sub-section 4.5).

2. Background to the Museum

2.1 The Somewhere Museum for History of Science and Medicine

2.1.1 The museum holds extensive collections of:

- measuring instruments;
- surgical instruments;
- scientific and medical texts;
- calculation devices;
- detection devices.

2.1.2 In addition the museum hold archives of papers from a number of scientists including:

- Frederick Turner;
- Julian Neill;
- Enid Lockwood.

2.1.3 These archives vary in size and completeness, but include personal and professional correspondence, manuscripts, experimental notebooks, annotated copies of textbooks, manuscripts, articles and other paraphernalia.

2.1.4 The museum has a presence on the internet: its website provides basic information about the museum, including advice on opening hours and access arrangements and descriptions of the holdings. Images of important items in the collection can be viewed, some with 360° views. There has been some attempt to provide 'interactivity': images can be zoomed and it is possible to view images of the night sky as they would appear through different telescopes, view a series of X-ray crystallographs of different structures and simulate alpha-scattering experiments.

2.1.5 The website hosts a blog, which was intended to be a forum for viewer/museum visitor comments and a way for the museum to promote its activities – changes to displays, new acquisitions, visiting exhibitions etc. The blog has been running for several months but only 3 visitors have posted comments.



- 2.1.6 The museum is funded by various government grants and legacies, and received a grant from the local university to index archive material on Neill. There is a possibility that they will be able to obtain money for a digitisation project.

2.2 Importance of audience analysis

- 2.2.1 Decisions about allocation of resources and possible changes to the 'mission' of the museum need to be taken, so the Board are keen to obtain as much information as possible. They plan to obtain costings for different options, but have also decided to do some audience research.

3. Investigating Visitors to the Museum

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 Visitors to the museum include tourists, students and researchers wishing to view material in the archives or the collection of scientific and medical texts. Based on data from the infra-red detectors at the entrance to the exhibition rooms, visitor numbers have been declining for the past 4 years.
- 3.1.2 In view of declining visitor numbers some members of the Board wanted to reduce the space devoted to exhibitions in order to cut costs. Others insist that money should be invested in 'updating' the exhibitions to attract more people. The Board would like to:
- discover more about who visits the museum and why;
 - identify potential new audiences for museum and work out how to appeal to them.

3.2 Objectives

- 3.2.1 The Exhibitions Manager was in charge of this work. She set the following objectives:
- determine the composition of the audience (eg age; purpose of visit; likelihood of returning; what would they like to see more of);
 - find out what the museum could do to attract more students.



Comment

The Exhibitions Manager is trying to find out more about the actual museum audience. But she has also chosen to investigate service enhancement for a particular audience segment, students:

- This is partly a pragmatic decision: she thinks it will be easier to find out about what schools want.
- She is assuming that more schools will visit if the museum caters explicitly to their needs and promotes itself to them.

Is this wise?

- She doesn't know how many schools already visit: there may not be much potential for increasing the size of this audience segment.
- She's implicitly placing a lot of weight on her staff's identification of school groups as a significant audience segment, yet this may simply be because it is easier to recognise them as a distinct category: they visit in groups and are often in uniform so they stand out. Would staff realise if a large proportion of the audience were amateur astronomers, or unemployed, or retired?

It might have been better to find out more about the actual audience before deciding on the focus of the audience development research.

3.3 Team consultation

3.3.1 To help her plan the audience analysis the Exhibitions Manager had consulted her team, which yielded information such as:

- staff were not sure why people visited the museum;
- school groups sometimes visited;
- there were not many families, even at weekends;
- presumably the museum was useful for school work;
- Dr Blah from the local university brought her students every October to look at the measuring devices;
- visitors probably needed to be interested in science to enjoy the museum;
- no-one had any brilliant ideas for attracting more visitors.

Comment

Note that the Exhibitions Manager used her team as an informal focus group. They interact with visitors and can observe their reactions; they also know the collections. The Exhibitions Manager and senior staff have specialist knowledge about other museums.

3.3.2 The Exhibitions Manager also looked at the cards placed in the 'Comments box', but these were few in number and not particularly informative: 'Why no coffee shop?', 'What about the 20th century?' and 'Fascinating stuff!' were amongst the more useful.



3.4 Methods

Surveys

- 3.4.1 The Exhibitions Manager relied on two surveys to assess the opinions of visitors:
- a visitor survey prominently displayed in the museum; pens and prepaid envelopes were made available;
 - a slightly different survey mailed to heads of science at all local secondary schools and 6th form colleges.

3.4.2 Surveys were used because:

- this would be less effort for museum staff;
- they would obtain information from a more representative sample of people.

3.4.3 The visitor survey covered: purpose of visit; enjoyment of experience; best features; suggestions for improvement etc. but collected no demographic information apart from age.

Comment

The Exhibitions Manager could have tried to identify where visitors are coming from – are they fairly local, or do they travel from further afield? Visitors travelling from further afield may well be different:

- they could have a strong motivation for visiting;
- it would be interesting to know how they found out about the museum.

3.4.4 The schools survey also asked about reasons for not visiting and what the museum should offer schools. Non-respondents were contacted by phone.

Focus group of key users

3.4.5 Respondents to the schools survey were invited to participate in a discussion group or interviewed by telephone:

- to solicit more detailed information about the needs of schools and colleges;
- to establish how they used the museum in teaching.

It was hoped that this would provide ideas for improving the museum experience for school groups and persuading more of them to visit the museum.

In-depth interview with key user

3.4.6 A telephone interview was arranged with Dr Blah. She was a regular user of the museum, and the Exhibitions Manager wanted to take advantage of this. Dr Blah was asked:

- how and why she used the museum in her teaching;
- whether she knew of any colleagues who also used the museum etc.



Comment

The Exhibitions Manager is concentrating on finding out who the museum does appeal to in order to recruit more of this audience segment. She isn't really trying to identify a new audience segment.

It might have been interesting to approach the problem from a different angle:

- What does my museum offer?
- What kinds of people would this appeal to?
- Do these people already visit?
- If not, how can I persuade them to visit?

or:

- Who do I hope would visit the museum? [target audience]
- Are they visiting?
- If not, why not?

Both these approaches would probably have led the Exhibitions Manager to think more about audience segmentation and collect data which would have allowed her to segment the audience in more detail.

3.5 Results

Visitor survey

- 3.5.1 214 surveys were completed – a 10% response rate, based on visitor counts from the infra-red detectors at the entrance to the exhibit rooms. Nearly all of these were completed at the museum, but 46 respondents returned the survey using the prepaid envelopes.

Comment

Without the survey returned by post the response rate would have been 7.8%. Was the extra cost of the prepaid envelopes worthwhile?

- the smaller sample size would make it harder to draw statistically valid conclusions about the whole audience;
- wider confidence limits would be needed when findings are generalised;
- the respondents who used the prepaid envelopes may have been different in some way from the rest of the sample.

- 3.5.2 Respondents had not been asked to categorise themselves on many dimensions, so detailed demographic segmentation was not possible.

- 3.5.3 82% rated their trip to the museum enjoyable or very enjoyable, but very few intended to return with the exception of the teachers (>70% said they were likely to visit again). Statistical analysis showed that the museum was rated most highly by:

- tourists at least 35 years old;
- visitors interested in science.



Comment

Very few respondents rated the museum as 'not very enjoyable' or 'not at all enjoyable', but as there is no way of telling if the sample is a representative one it is likely that a higher proportion of visitors did not much enjoy their visit but didn't respond to the survey. People are more likely to participate in research for a service they value.

Audience data for the museum need to be compared with data for similar museums elsewhere. This kind of benchmarking would provide a better idea of how well the museum is doing.

- 3.5.4 No clear pattern emerged from responses to the question asking about the best aspect of the museum.
- 3.5.5 Suggestions for improvement included 'more modern exhibits' and 'stuff to show how things work'.

Schools survey

- 3.5.6 The results from this survey were surprising:
- 3.5.7 11 out of the 18 schools returned the survey.
- Only 7 had visited or planned to: reasons cited for not visiting were 'no time' and 'not relevant for GCSEs'.
 - 3 responses were received from history departments and these teachers rated the museum more highly than the science teachers who had visited.

Comment

Unexpected results should always be pursued:

- they are often the most informative;
- if they are artefacts of the method used to collect the data it is important to know about the problem.

Focus group of school users

- 3.5.8 The group comprised both science and history teachers. An expert facilitator was hired to assist with the session. The Exhibitions Manager enjoyed the discussions and learnt a lot about what the teachers thought the museum should be doing:
- History teachers used the museum exhibitions as a basis for projects; they wanted to be able to use archive materials with 'A' level students.
 - Several teachers of both history and science reported that students wanted to be able to see the old textbooks so as to compare with their own modern ones. They were surprised that so few textbooks from the museum's extensive collection were on public display as they thought these were a real strength.
 - Science teachers felt the exhibits need more scientific context and thought subsequent progress should be referred to in information about the exhibits.



- History teachers thought the museum should provide more information about how the science of the time, and the museum exhibits in particular, affected people's day-to-day lives;
- One teacher expressed surprise that the museum didn't offer audio guides and suggested this would be a good way of providing more background information.
- Most of the teachers agreed that whilst grouping the exhibits into collections rather than chronologically was a good idea the 'thematic organisation' could be a lot stronger.
- All the teachers were disappointed that the museum website didn't offer more. They wanted to be able to use resources from the website as a follow-up to the visit. Quite a lot of time was spent discussing this.

3.6 Making use of the research

- 3.6.1 After reviewing the findings the Exhibitions Manager suggested ways of increasing the appeal of the museum to schools and other visitors:
- reorganising exhibits by theme, rather than chronologically;
 - adding more background information and linking exhibits to modern science (she thought audio guides might be helpful);
 - acquiring more modern items to supplement the collection.
 - promoting the museum specifically as a museum of scientific history;
 - having facsimiles of parts of the old textbooks made so that visitors could see more of the content.
- 3.6.2 The Exhibitions Manager passed on the comments about the website to the Web Services Manager. She mentioned that she hoped to attract more school groups to the museum, but that the teachers seemed to expect to have supporting learning materials available online.

4. Investigating the Online Audience for the Website

4.1 Background

- 4.1.1 Web statistics suggest that the site serves about 550 unique users per month, about 55% of whom have UK academic institution IP addresses. Over 80% of all users reach the site through Google. Last month the pages on the site receiving most views were the home page, an image of a leg amputation and the index listing the various archives.
- 4.1.2 The Board felt the museum website was under-used. They were disappointed as it had been hoped that the website would attract more visitors to the museum, yet visitor numbers at the museum continue to decline.

4.2 Objectives

- 4.2.1 The Board wanted to:
- understand the relationship between the audience for the physical museum and the audience for the museum website;
 - discover how to make the website more appealing;
 - decide whether it was worth spending money on a redesign.

Comment

The Board have taken a piecemeal approach to understanding the audiences for the museum and museum website. It would have been better to have an integrated audience analysis programme, and provided for formal liaison between the different teams:

- duplication of effort could have been avoided;
- the teams could have coordinated use of methods and questions;
- an approach to audience segmentation could have been agreed.

- 4.2.2 In order to address the issues the Web Services Manager investigated:
- reasons for using the website, and their relative frequency;
 - proportion of museum visitors who used the website before or after their visit;



- level of satisfaction with the site;
- ease with which the website could be found;
- navigation and usability of the website.

Comment

Looking at how people discover the website doesn't provide any information about potential users who failed to find the site, eg what search terms they used.

4.3 Methods

Web statistics

4.3.1 The Web Services Manager started using Google Analytics, a browser-based application, to collect the web statistics. This had advantages over the simple server log statistics that had previously been used:

- it was possible to track a user's path through the website;
- visits by web crawlers and spiders would no longer be included in the statistics.

4.3.2 Google Analytics was used to collect information on:

- proportion of users viewing different pages;
- repeat users (ie repeat visits from the same IP address);
- duration of visit;
- entry and exit pages;
- referrer sites;
- keyword searches (for external and internal search engines).

Online survey

4.3.3 A survey was placed on the website asking about reasons for visiting; success in achieving goals; resources the website should provide; intention to visit the museum etc. Respondents were also asked about their educational status. Tokens for a well-known web merchant were offered as an incentive in an attempt to improve the response rate.

Other research

4.3.4 The survey of visitors to the physical museum (Section 2) included questions on use of the website. Background research on how other museums were using the web and what other online resources there were for history of science was carried out.



Comment

Background research is a good idea. It will provide useful context for the audience data and perhaps ideas for improving the website.

4.4 Results

Online survey

- 4.4.1 The response rate for the online survey was 2% (based on the web statistics estimate of the number of 'unique users' over the period for which the survey was available). The site was rated 'very easy to use' or 'fairly easy to use' by >80% of respondents.

Comment

Visitors who struggled to use the website are unlikely to have completed the survey, ie they are probably under-represented in the sample, which is therefore unrepresentative of the audience as a whole, so this is not particularly convincing evidence of usability.

- 4.4.2 Ratings of different features of the site revealed that:

- images of exhibits were least liked;
- interactive exhibits were most enjoyed.

- 4.4.3 Suggestions for improvement included 'video clips of real experiments'. Of the reasons for visiting the museum, the most commonly chosen were 'information on the archives' and 'to find out more about the museum', but nearly 20% failed to select a reason.

Comment

The rather high proportion of users who fail to give a reason for visiting is a concern. Including an 'other reason' with a 'please specify' free text response option might have elicited reasons from this group. The results may fail to capture important data about the goal of visit for a significant audience segment. A possible reason is that none of the options given seem appropriate to these respondents.

One obvious option to include would have been 'to plan a visit to the museum'.

- 4.4.4 Most of the respondents were involved in formal education as students or teachers but a substantial minority were not. Over 80% of respondents not involved in formal education had not given a reason for visiting. 23% of respondents said they were very or fairly likely to visit the museum in the next 3 months.

Web analytical data

- 4.4.5 The analysis showed that:

- The most frequently viewed pages on the site were the home page and information about opening times, location and travel arrangements.
- Users spent least time on pages containing an image of an exhibit; these pages were also a common exit point for the site.



- Most users who viewed opening times etc. spent little time on the rest of the site.
- The page with the longest mean view time was an article entitled ‘from the plum pudding to the Higgs boson’; users viewing this page tended to spend a long time on the site and viewed multiple pages.
- The only images for which the enlargement was also viewed in >5% of visits were the pages from the medical textbooks.
- Only 65% of referrer sites were major search engines.

Desk based research

- 4.4.6 There were a lot of other history of science resources. Several university websites had lecture notes and resources for undergraduate courses that included details of landmark experiments and images of experimental equipment, simulations of the results etc. The member of staff who did the research thought these were more impressive than most of the museum sites.

Focus group

- 4.4.7 The Exhibitions Manager (see Section 2) passed on some of her findings:
- Science teachers felt the website could be used to explain how and why the experiments had been done. They suggested making videocasts or interactive versions of classic experiments – the pages allowing the user to simulate famous experiments were much praised. One science teacher complained that the website had few links to other relevant material, and the rest of the group immediately agreed with this.
 - History teachers wanted links to biographical material about the scientists and how they had lived, but the science teachers suggested links to explanations of the science and contemporary research in the field.
 - One science teacher suggested that if it wasn’t possible to display more of the old textbooks, these should be made available online.
 - One history teacher who was especially enthusiastic (Ms Tookeen) thought it would be nice if the website allowed students to post their project work. This received a mixed response from the rest of the group.

Museum survey

- 4.4.8 8% of respondents said they were very or fairly likely to visit the website following their visit to the museum; 7% had already visited the website.

Comment

This doesn’t provide very much information. Perhaps it would have been better to ask about:

- reasons for using website;
- awareness of the website before visiting the museum.



4.5 Further audience analysis

4.5.1 The Web Services Manager's remaining concern was that a number of the highly rated features of the site were viewed infrequently and that a number of visitors used the internal search engine, but exited without viewing any of the results, so he recommended further research to understand:

- how users would naturally explore the site;
- what sort of 'interactive features' would work best;
- whether users were able to find all the information and features currently available.

Comment

Reviewing more detailed information about patterns of site visits has helped to identify potential problems with usability that may mean that good features of the website are not well used.

Methods

4.5.2 This work was outsourced to a firm who specialised in ethnographic research. They carried out several studies: detailed analysis of clickstream histories; accompanied free browsing; accompanied task-based browsing.

4.5.3 For the accompanied browsing studies users commented as they explored the website and the interviewer/recorder was able to prompt them if they got lost trying to complete the tasks. School groups were named as an important audience segment and this influenced the tasks that were chosen for the browsing exercises.

Comment

Research of this kind can really help to improve the success of a website. Analysis of clickstream histories could have been done in-house fairly easily.

A more informal version of the accompanied browsing could have been attempted, but it would have been necessary to find a good way of recording users' comments as they explored as these provide important insights into some of the problems with the website.

Recruitment for this kind of research can be problematic, but the museum could have exploited its good relationship with the local university and growing links with the school – particularly as one of the aims of the redesign is to increase the appeal for school groups.

Results

4.5.4 It was found that:

- The website is difficult to navigate and as a result many users don't discover the best features.
- Not all 'added value' or 'interactive' online exhibits are appealing.
- Users expect the website to provide more background information about exhibits and their context.
- The internal search engine needs improvement.



- Information about the archives should be organised differently. The archivist should be clearly identified as the person to contact for further information about the contents or visiting the museum to use the archive.

4.6 Making use of the research

- 4.6.1 The Web Services Manager realised that the website could serve a number of different audiences with different needs. He proposed redesigning the website to provide:
- Basic information about the museum and a promotional page making use of knowledge gained about reasons for visiting and the best features of the museum.
 - Resources for schools including interactive features and an area for user-generated content.
 - Information about the archives collections including how to arrange access.
- 4.6.2 He suggested that the redesign could be carried out piecemeal, to see what worked. He emphasised that it would be important to test new design features with real users and proposed that school groups could be involved in this as one driver for the redesign was to create a useful and appealing resource for school groups.

5. Investigating the Audience for Future Digitised Content

5.1 Background

- 5.1.1 The Board would like to take advantage of the opportunity to digitise some of their archived material but they are uncertain about copyright and intellectual property rights for their various collections. They would like the digitised archive to be a resource for researchers.
- 5.1.2 Several staff from the History of Science and Medicine department at the local university made extensive use of the archives and research students also relied on the material. The Neill archive had been indexed for a research project carried out by Dr Thingummy, who often encouraged undergraduate students to use the archive for their dissertations.
- 5.1.3 The Archivist assumed that a digitised archive would be used largely by research students and academics as this was the audience for the paper archives. He occasionally received requests for access for school students, but this was not permitted.

5.2 Objectives

- 5.2.1 The Archivist was confident the digitisation would be worthwhile, but he needed evidence to show this and he wanted to be sure that the digitised resource would be right for the academics.
- 5.2.2 He set some specific objectives:
 - demonstrate the audience for a digitised archive;
 - determine past use and likely future demand for the different candidate archives;
 - define the features and characteristics the digital archive would need to provide.



5.3 Methods

Surveys

5.3.1 A multi-stranded approach was used:

- Questions were added to the online survey (See Section 3).
- A survey asking about use of the archives was emailed or posted to all users of the archives in the past two years for whom the Archivist was able to obtain contact details from the record of visits to the archives.
- A similar survey was emailed to all teaching staff in UK HE institutional departments covering history of science, technology and medicine. A note at the bottom of the survey indicated that they should not respond if they had received the past user survey.

5.3.2 The surveys asked about past and potential future use of archive materials, features for a possible digitised archive, educational status and institutional affiliation of the respondent.

Interviews with key users

5.3.3 The Archivist also contacted key users to discuss the project:

- members of the History of Science department at the local university;
- past users from further afield who had used the archives for an extended period or made repeated visits;
- users he knew held prominent positions in academe.

5.3.4 He wanted to find out how such a resource would be used and what search tools etc. would be most valuable.

Other user groups

5.3.5 Dr Thingummy suggested that the Archivist should contact his research students as they might have different ideas and opinions; he gave the Archivist their email addresses and offered to mention the project to them. Several of the students sent detailed replies to the Archivist's email.

5.3.6 The Exhibitions Manager spoke to the Archivist about her focus group findings. She gave him contact details for Mr History, who had expressed most interest in using the archive with his students.

Comment

Had it not been for the intervention of his colleague the Archivist would have neglected an important potential audience unique to an online archive.



5.4 Results

Online survey

- 5.4.1 Only one respondent had used the archived material although 8% said they would definitely use the archives in the future and 5% said they might use the archives in the future.

Comment

It is not clear how many of the people who claim they 'might' use an archive online actually would; there is no way of knowing how they would use it nor if they know very much about the contents.

- 5.4.2 71% of all survey respondents wanted to be able to access the archives online and 61% of university research and teaching staff were willing to pay to access the archives in digital format.

Comment

Including a question about making archives available online may have resulted in over-representation of people interested in online archives in the survey sample. The chances of this were minimised by placing questions about the archives towards the end of the survey.

The Archivist would have liked to place these questions in a mini-survey on the page listing the archives held by the museum, but it was explained that having two surveys running on the site at the same time would probably result in a very low response to both.

Past user records and survey

- 5.4.3 The Archivist eventually managed to contact 59% of those who had used the archives over the past three years.
- 5.4.4 The archives that were most used were: Enid Lockwood 31%; Frederick Turner 25%; Julian Neill 22%; scientific and medical textbooks 9%; other collections 13%. This is broadly in line with potential future demand as indicated in the online survey. The popularity of the archives was slightly different amongst local users, with the Neill archive being most heavily used.

Comment

The Archivist has used 'number of visits' as a measure of usage. He needs to bear in mind that local users may visit more frequently but for shorter periods of time.

- 5.4.5 Most users were based in UK institutions and the proportion of student users was higher amongst local university users and UK users. UK users were more likely to give lower ratings for the importance of the archives to their research.
- 5.4.6 A goodness-of-fit test revealed that the use of the scientific and medical textbooks was proportionally greater for UK users than non-UK users.
- 5.4.7 These differences between UK and non-UK users suggest that accessibility of the archives is influencing the audience for the archives and will be important evidence for the Archivist.



UK audience survey

- 5.4.8 The response rate was 1.3% and less than 1% of respondents had used the archives.
- 5.4.9 A very slightly higher proportion of respondents stated that they might or definitely would use an archive collection in the next six months if the archive were digitised.
- 5.4.10 A majority of non-students would be willing to pay for access.

Comment

The low response rate to this carefully targeted survey suggests possible sample bias. The percentage of respondents who stated they might or will definitely visit the archive was higher in this sample than in the online sample, which suggests that those with an interest in the archive material are over-represented in the sample.

Responses to questions about hypothetical situations are notoriously unreliable and a poor predictor of actual behaviour. In this instance the decision about using an archive collection is likely to depend on the interplay of many factors, of which ease of access is only one, and possibly not a particularly important one for this UK-based potential audience.

Interviews with key users

- 5.4.11 Most of the members of the History of Science and Medicine department at the local university wondered if it might be better to spend the money indexing the paper archives; several of them expressed concern that digitising one particular archive would be unfair to staff working with other archive materials.

Comment

Investigating audience priorities would have been useful; it may be important to know if digitisation delivers the best return on investment for the archive users.

- 5.4.12 Nearly all the users were enthusiastic about a digital archive, although some expressed concern that digitisation would distort the way in which research was carried out, with disproportionate weight being given to material that had been digitised and other relevant material being ignored as people became too lazy to travel to use it.
- 5.4.13 Although most of the users were based in history of science or history departments, two of the North American users of the Lockwood archive were affiliated to gender studies departments.

Functionality for a digital archive

- 5.4.14 From conversations with local university staff and students as well as emails from users in other institutions the archivist was able to put together a rough picture of what users would want from a digital archive.
- 5.4.15 The students expressed very similar requirements but:
 - they were particularly interested in being able to search for or follow links to related materials;
 - a number were interested in having the facility to annotate a digital document.



School users

- 5.4.16 Mr History was enthusiastic about the possibility of a digital archive but suggested tagging resources that were suitable for 'A' level students as he thought they would struggle to navigate the complete archive.

5.5 Making use of the research

- 5.5.1 The Archivist recommended that the museum apply for funding to digitise the Enid Lockwood archive on the basis of the audience data about past and likely future usage. The suggestions for features and tools that a digitised archive should include were reviewed alongside desk-based research on functionality of other digitised archives.
- 5.5.2 The Archivist said that in his opinion it would not be worth devoting the necessary extra resources to making a digitised archive suitable for schools use. He argued that schools had specific needs that differed from those of the research community. He thought that one of the main benefits of digitisation would be the potential to use powerful search tools and carry out textual analysis more easily and the teacher he had consulted viewed the challenges of searching for and retrieving information from an archive as a barrier to use rather than an opportunity to teach new research skills.
- 5.5.3 The Archivist also recommended that cataloguing the remaining archives and making the catalogues available online be considered a priority. He hoped that this would increase the profile of the archives and lead to more visits and requests for online access that could be used as evidence in future funding applications.

6. Reviewing the Audience Research

6.1 Successes of the research

6.1.1 In summary:

- The Board has a much better picture of the museum and museum website audiences.
- The Exhibitions Manager has done some excellent audience development work with school groups.
- The Web Services Manager now has a much better idea about the failings of the website and with the help of the Exhibitions Manager he's developed some interesting ideas for making the site more appealing to school users.
- The Archivist has collected evidence of demand for a digitised archive and gained some understanding of the wider issues surrounding digitisation: he was able to advise the Board about other approaches to increasing use of the archives and some of the potential drawbacks to digitisation.

6.2 Shortcomings of the research

- 6.2.1 The research into the different aspects of the museum's services (physical site, online site and archives) should have been properly coordinated. It would then have been much easier to uncover the relationship between physical and online audiences.
- 6.2.2 It is hardly surprising that the website is not perceived to be successful as prior to this research it seems there had been little thought about who might use the website and why they might visit. There was little appreciation of the extent to which the website might be used by audiences whose primary interest is in the physical museum or the archives and as a result these needs were neglected.
- 6.2.3 The research has been least successful in assessing the reach of the services, partly because target audiences are not clearly identified. Possible audience segmentation schemes should have been considered at an earlier stage and a coordinated approach taken to segmenting the audience using the same demographic and broad functional categories across the



research. The lack of demographic data means that the museum does not even know if most visitors are local to the area. It will be difficult to develop an effective promotional strategy without more information about the existing audience and additional potential audiences.

- 6.2.4 It was not certain that audience samples were representative (particularly in the case of the visitors to the museum and the website users). Research tended to focus on the audience segments whose identity was known and who could be easily reached.
- 6.2.5 There was little comparative analysis: the performance of the website and museum could have been assessed against national averages, or similar museums. It is important to put the performance of the museum in context. For the website this will mean taking account of eg the global trend towards increasing use of the internet.
- 6.2.6 Poor questionnaire design meant that survey results were often less informative than they might have been. Questionnaire design is far from trivial and it is important to consider how the type of response format, style of question etc. may affect response rate and bias responses. Reasons for a low response rate to a survey or to a question within a survey need to be investigated.
- 6.2.7 Research on the website was informative, but it might have been more cost-effective to obtain an expert assessment of the usability of the website instead of, or as a preliminary to, commissioning the user studies. If the website is to be redesigned there was little point in carrying out expensive research on the usability of the current design: effort should have focused on defining the target audience and determining their needs and expectations and establishing how this audience could and should discover the website. The rather low number of search engine referrals has been neglected.

6.3 The future of the museum

- 6.3.1 The Board needs to make some strategic decisions about the services the museum should be offering and the audience they want to attract. It will then be possible to draw on knowledge about audience characteristics to enhance the service that is offered and promote it effectively. Further audience research will be able to measure success in attracting and satisfying these target audiences.
- 6.3.2 Although the Board now has a much more detailed knowledge about the audience for the museum and its website the needs, desires and expectations of the audience will not be the only factor in their decisions about future spending.
- 6.3.3 The results of the audience analysis also have clear implications for the marketing and communications strategy.
- 6.3.4 Monitoring the effect of changes will be needed to provide reassurance that the museum is moving in the right direction.

Appendix A: The Guide to Researching Audiences

A.1 Introduction

- A.1.1 The case studies are a supporting document to 'The Guide to Researching Audiences'³ which was produced by Curtis+Cartwright Consulting Ltd on behalf of the Strategic Content Alliance. This annex provides some background information about the guide.

A.2 Why, what, who...

Why do audience research?

- A.2.1 It is increasingly important for public sector services and resources to be able to demonstrate that they are *used* and *valued* by an appropriate audience. The uses of audience research extend far beyond simply demonstrating a certain number of visitors or website hits to tick a box on a service level agreement. For example, audience research can be used to:

- develop a product or service;
- evaluate the service (eg audience satisfaction);
- demonstrate accountability to funders (eg value for money, highly valued by a niche audience);
- inform long-term planning;
- attract sponsorship and marketing;
- inform business planning (eg to feed into a business case);
- inform the management of contractual relationships;
- support professional development.

³ *The Guide to Researching Audiences*, Curtis+Cartwright Consulting Ltd, v1.0, 5 December 2008.



- A.2.2 Audience research should be seen as an ongoing process, rather than an occasional, one-off event. Even a small audience research project is worthwhile. Many techniques can be implemented quite cheaply or adapted to a shoestring budget. Some insight into your audience is vastly better than none at all.

Who is the guide for?

- A.2.3 The guide has been written for people in the UK public sector delivering online digital services who wish to research their audiences.⁴
- A.2.4 It is primarily aimed at non-experts who do not have market research skills themselves, and who do not have access to dedicated market research teams. It is therefore likely to be most useful for people in small organisations/services, or those conducting small projects in larger organisations. It may also be useful for people procuring services who want to know what guidelines to provide, and for those setting policies.

What is the guide?

- A.2.5 The guide sets out the basic principles of audience research:
- describing and defining the target audience;
 - planning audience research (including setting clear objectives for the research);
 - collection of audience data;
 - modelling the audience;
 - making use of audience research.
- A.2.6 These principles can be followed regardless of the type of service or audience, and will help you to conduct audience research more effectively (better results) and efficiently (lower effort), with fewer problems and unforeseen complications. They provide the building blocks to enable you to design, conduct and apply your own audience analysis research. What the guide will not provide you with is a ready-made audience analysis programme specifically designed for your service.
- A.2.7 It is a guide to current good practice and a starting point for further reading. There is nothing very radical in the guide – there are many other resources available on audience analysis and modelling, some of which are referenced in the guide.
- A.2.8 The guide has a specific focus on online digital services. The digital revolution has resulted in an explosion of possibilities: new and innovative services; a deluge of content; availability of additional research techniques (eg web statistics); and potentially new audiences. Relationships between digital content and non-digital content, between digital services and non-digital services and between a ‘digital audience’ and a ‘non-digital audience’ are a new and interesting consideration for service providers.

4 Although it is focused on online digital services (ie those accessed via the internet), it will also be useful for researching audiences reached via other channels.





The Guide to Researching Audiences
Illustrative Case Study

December 2008



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