

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS HANDBOOK

FOR MUSEUMS, GALLERIES &
HERITAGE ATTRACTIONS

Sue Runyard AND
Ylva French



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**The marketing and public
relations handbook for
museums, galleries and
heritage attractions**

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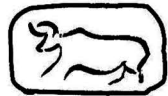
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Bib. 600002090
Item..... 100002237
Barcode..... 000010001504
Call no. AM 124
..... R 86
..... 1999
Date 7 / 10 / 57



ALTAMIRA
PRESS

A Division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

100002237

ALTAMIRA PRESS

A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
1630 North Main Street, #367
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
www.altamirapress.com

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200
Lanham, MD 20706

PO Box 317
Oxford
OX2 9RU, UK


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Typeset by Graphics Matter Limited, Lowestoft

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ISBN 0-7425-0407-7

Printed in the United States of America

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

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Foreword

‘A MARKETING TALE’

Marketing and public relations are an essential part of museum practice these days. Public relations has been on the scene for a while – even if not at a very sophisticated level. The discipline of marketing is more of a latecomer, but has already demonstrated an ability to contribute to the forward planning process, management and performance of museums. This book, which is a newly conceived venture, combines the joint experience and insights of Sue Runyard and Ylva French, showing how museums can use the tools which are offered by these two interrelated activities. It combines ‘nuts and bolts’ advice with theory, ethics and an array of case studies drawn directly from museum and heritage attractions’ experiences on both sides of the Atlantic. I recommend it to any newcomers to the field, but also to aspiring and experienced managers who want to glean ideas on how to improve their own museum’s performance in these areas.

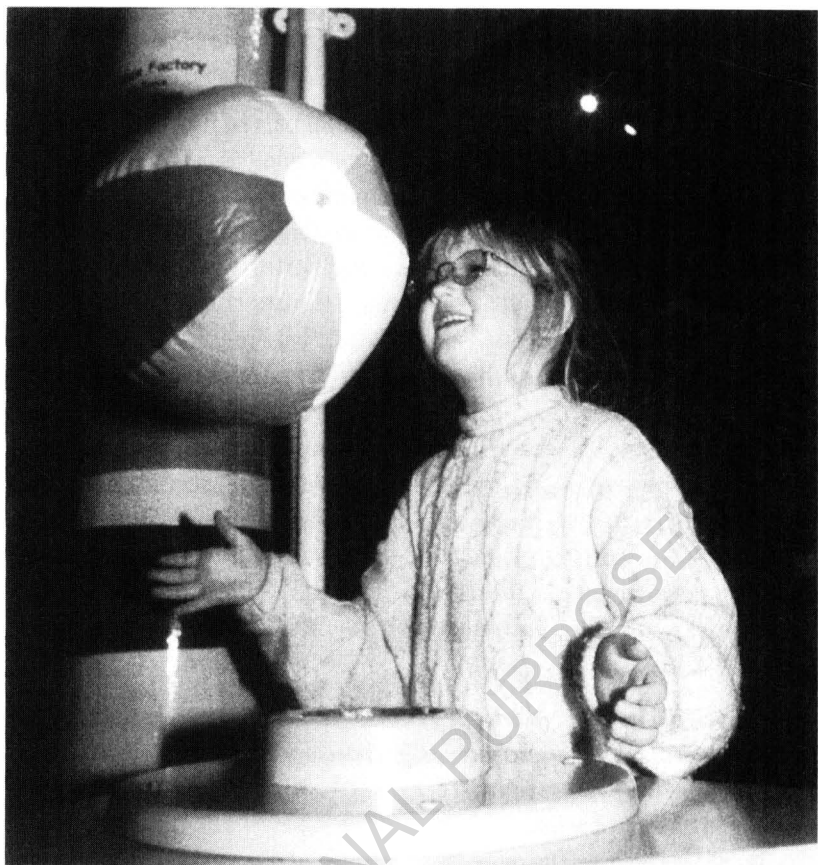
I have my own tale to illustrate the place which marketing occupies in Tyne and Wear.

Once upon a time (in fact, in about 1990) there was a big museum service. Its collections – of art, history, science and archaeology, natural history and lots of other things – were very good. Most of its staff worked very hard, and many were experts in all sorts of ways.

But all was not well. The museum staff were not always sure why they were there and some of them, because they weren’t sure, worked on their own little projects, not talking very much to their colleagues. Nobody ever told them what they were supposed to do, and worse, nobody ever asked them what they thought. They weren’t very happy.

Because of this the museum service seemed a bit lazy, and not doing very much. So, it wasn’t very popular with people. Not that many visited. Worse, the politicians who paid for the museums, did not like them very much either. They started taking money away each year. The newspapers, when they wrote anything at all about the museums, weren’t that nice. The radio and television stations weren’t interested at all.

So the museums, like museums sometimes do, had a review. Then another. Then another. But this didn’t really work. Finally as part of a last-ditch attempt to save the museum service from disaster, it was decided to hire a professionally qualified person to ‘do some marketing’. Before then, ‘marketing’ had meant some leaflets and posters to go with temporary exhibitions, but it hadn’t been seen as an important part of making the museums work, and nobody had had



Enjoying the Discovery Museum. Courtesy of Tyne and Wear Museums.

any proper training. The trouble was, this new marketing person, whose name was Alex Saint, had an awful lot to do. She had twelve museums to worry about. And in any case, she was quite junior and didn't have a lot to say.

But a strange thing started to happen to the museum service. Quite a few people left, and some new ones came with new ideas. The staff started to feel a bit better, and they were encouraged to say what they thought. They certainly had lots to say! A new sense of purpose developed and the museums did some interesting new displays and exhibitions. Marketing became quite an important part of what the museums did, and the rest of the staff started to understand this. Alex was joined by another marketing person, then another, then another. This was all very unusual, and some people said it would end in tears.

But soon the museums were attracting more visitors. The newspapers began to take a real interest and so did the radio and television. Best of all, the politicians became friendly again and started to say nice things about the museums, instead of nasty things.

And do you know what? The more risks the museums took, and the more really good work they did with things like exhibitions, and education, and outreach, the more important marketing became and the marketing department just grew and grew.

Now, where there was once just Alex, there are eight marketing people who do all the fund-raising as well as all the other marketing things. The chief marketing person is now very important in the museum service, but so are the rest of them! Lots of people visit the museums, and many of them are people who would never have dreamed of visiting once upon a time. The politicians think the staff are brilliant, and they have even started giving them more money to spend. What do you think of that?

The marketing people spend a lot of time attending meetings with other staff, so that marketing ideas are always part of what everyone else does, and so everyone understands what marketing is about, and why it is so important. And they are good at their jobs, which helps a lot. Only recently, the most important newspaper in the museum service's region said in its editorial comment, of all places, that the reason why museums are so full of visitors (well over one million every year) is not just because of all the exciting things that happen in them, but also because of 'some sophisticated marketing which would be a credit to a top ad agency'. Isn't that good?

That's the end of our story (so far). And we hope that they all live happily ever after.

David Fleming

Director, Tyne and Wear Museums

THE AUTHORS

Sue Runyard is a former head of public relations at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Natural History Museum and J. Paul Getty Museum. She was seconded to the Cabinet Office during the 1980s to work for the Minister for the Arts and Minister without Portfolio. For nine years she was marketing and development advisor to the Museums and Galleries Commission. She has held visiting lectureships in five European universities and is a former trustee and serving associate trustee of the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. She is currently director of Museums Without Walls, a California-based consultancy which works with museums in the USA and Europe. She is the author of several publications in the museums and galleries field.

Ylva French started her career in tourism as public relations officer for the Hong Kong Tourist Association; she returned to the UK to work as press officer for British Caledonian Airways before becoming head of public relations at the London Tourist Board for ten years. She started her own communications agency, Ylva French Communications (YFC), in London in 1988; clients include major heritage and tourism organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and British Tourist Authority, tourist destinations, trade exhibitions and hotel groups as well as museums. YFC administers The Campaign for Museums and organises Museums Week; she also led the project team which launched the 24 Hour Museum. She is the author of the *Blue Guide to London*, *London for the Disabled Visitor* and *Public Relations for Leisure and Tourism*.



Sue Runyard



Ylva French

INTRODUCTION

Museums, galleries and the majority of heritage attractions operate in a world where the established laws of supply and demand do not on the whole apply. No market research was conducted to establish the British Museum, for example, or the Worthing Museum and Gallery; even new, independent museums have frequently been created by enthusiastic collectors for whom the idea of marketing is unknown territory.

Museums may welcome and want visitors, but they also have other objectives such as looking after the heritage for future generations, providing a teaching resource and perhaps also acting as a research organisation. Increasingly the public sector wants them to become more commercial and apply ways of measuring their performance which are more appropriate to the commercial world. This means that museums and galleries have to operate in a more commercial way in terms of attracting visitors and encouraging them to spend money, while at the same time effectively defending their more diffuse and longer-term objectives for the benefit of society as a whole.

To survive and thrive in the 21st century, museums, galleries and not-for-profit heritage attractions will have to apply increasingly sophisticated marketing techniques to attract visitors in a sometimes highly competitive environment. At the same time they may have to use persuasion (i.e. public relations) to defend and explain their role for the public good, which the short-term policies of local authorities, government and others may unwittingly be destroying.

It is now widely believed that there are more heritage attractions in the UK in the late 1990s than can be economically sustained as currently constituted and marketed.¹

1989/90 is seen by many established museums as the peak year for volume of demand which few have been able to attain in the late 1990s.²

Against a background of slowly growing demand overall for visitor attractions generally in the 1990s, the capacity of museums has continued to increase, defying the normal logic of the leisure market within which the majority have to compete.... More significantly, many museums are so small they lack the means and the facilities to be competitive in the modern world.³

We believe that the principles and practical advice contained in this book will give more museums, galleries and heritage attractions a better chance to be among those which thrive in the 21st century.

What this book covers

This book sets out clearly the principles which define marketing and public relations and how they apply to cultural institutions. It covers marketing for the institution as a whole as well as for individual exhibitions, events or new galleries.

New marketing opportunities, direct marketing through mail, internet and other means, are also covered. Public relations strategy for the institution, defending its status and brand, its funding and reputation, is the subject of the latter part. It includes such important issues as crisis communications and some aspects of sponsorship. Public relations as a marketing tool is just as important and is frequently perceived as the low-cost way for museums and galleries to reach their audiences. This book considers how methods and means are changing as the media continues to fragment. Throughout the text, the reader will find short synopses of successful or unsuccessful implementation of marketing and public relations techniques.

Notes

1. Middleton, Professor Victor. (1998). *New Visions for Museums in the 21st Century*. AIM (Association of Independent Museums), p.55.
2. Ibid, p.23.
3. Ibid, p.23.

Chapter 1 WHAT IS MARKETING?

'Marketing is the management process which is responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably' (Chartered Institute of Marketing).¹

Marketing means:

- looking outwards, not inwards
- constant awareness of what is happening in your market place
- asking, not telling customers what they want
- caring about processes as well as products
- communicating all this through the organisation

'We don't have marketing, we have information', said one famous national museum in the UK in response to a question from a journalist writing about the marketing of museums. The truth is that museums and galleries in the business of attracting funding and visitors require both marketing and public relations and if they don't know that, they are not managing either to their best advantage. The latest Domus (Museums and Galleries Commission 1998) survey showed that just 29% of museums owned up to having a formal marketing policy.² Many more will, of course, be involved in 'publicity' of various kinds and may be unsure when promotions become marketing – something this book aims to put right. Some may even feel 'marketing' to be an alien concept too close to the first definition above, i.e. meeting 'customer requirements profitably'.

So what is marketing about and how does it relate to the day-to-day promotional activities most museums and galleries are involved in?

'Marketing is simply the strategic and systematic approach to audience development which meets the overall objectives of the museum and galleries.'

Marketing as a business concept developed in the commercial field. It is steeped in jargon and tainted by the commercial approach to growth and profits which is not necessarily harmonious with the objectives of public sector or semi-public sector organisations. The second description of marketing above is much more in tune with the thinking in museums and galleries today. Let's look at it more closely.

Looking outwards, not inwards

Museums have traditionally focused on their collections and developed their management philosophy on what is good for the collection and the institution, often without reference to other organisations, the public at large or visitors to the museum. A commitment to marketing will force the organisation to look outwards, to build links with museums and organisations, schools

and universities, and its committed visitors, and to build new audiences. In effect, by adopting a marketing-led approach to its management strategy, museums become part of the local and wider community, as expected by government and other funders, and help to ensure that their collections survive in a competitive environment.

Constant awareness of what is happening in your market place

Half of Britain's 2500³ museums have been established since the 1960s. This phenomenal growth has been accompanied by the expansion of a widening range of heritage attractions, theme parks, science parks, nature reserves and historic houses, not to mention garden centres and, over the last few years, the rise of Sunday shopping. The year 2000 will bring a crop of new Lottery-funded attractions to this wonderful choice of things to do – wonderful, that is, for the public. No wonder museums are reeling from the impact of this huge competition for leisure time.⁴ Awareness of what is going on in the immediate area in terms of competition as well as in the wider world is therefore essential. Museums are part of the tourism industry. Interacting and sharing information with others in the same industry at events organised by regional tourist boards and at national events can be very useful.

The composition of the existing and potential market is also changing; population changes are creating an older population, and tourism is bringing larger numbers of overseas visitors to Britain. Information is available to help museums and galleries define their market. In 1999 the Museums and Galleries Commission started an important annual bench-marking survey of visitors and non-visitors to museums. The tourist boards carry out national and regional surveys of visitors, available usually for a charge. And museums and galleries must do their own research to assess their existing visitor profile and set targets for the future.

What is on offer to the public is also becoming increasingly more sophisticated. What does the public expect in terms of 'entertainment' and how can museums keep up? The museum community is getting much better at sharing ideas and approaches to interpretation, display and educational activities. A number of award schemes such as the Gulbenkian and the conservation awards have helped in this. The annual Museums Association Conference and museums and heritage shows also have an important role to play in stimulating the sharing of information.

Asking, not telling customers what they want

This is a difficult one for museums, which are traditionally authoritarian organisations, based on research and knowledge. How can they change the habits of a lifetime and listen rather than tell? The short answer is: research and ask. Once visitors arrive at the museum, we can assume that they want to see something of the collection. But do they want it presented in the way that your exhibition staff have decided that it should be done? Is there a way of asking visitors and getting reactions and feeding this back into what you do and how you deliver the experience?

At the Tate Gallery they introduced a complete re-hang, entitled New Displays, each January in order to show paintings in storage and inject new interest into the gallery. However, a visitor survey showed that visitors were totally bemused, could not see the point of the re-hang and missed their favourite pictures. A complete re-think of this strategy followed to communicate more effectively the purpose of New Displays.

In setting up a new permanent exhibition of African Art, the Horniman Museum carried out a year-long consultation programme involving Africans and Afro-Caribbeans in the UK, as well as museum curators in those countries. This has produced a revolutionary approach to interpreting the African collection in the new gallery which opened in 1999. Further research will be carried out to measure response.

Caring about processes as well as products

You may think that you know all about customer care. Well, it is questionable. For example, 20% of museums do not have a toilet for use by the public. And what is the most commonly asked question as people enter a museum – ‘Where are the toilets?’ Such practical matters aside, there has been a revolution in museums and galleries around the country, as an increasing number of museums train their warders, security staff and attendants of visitor services in customer care. Simple customer-care programmes run by the tourist boards, such as ‘Welcome Host’, are a good starting point for small- and medium-sized museums who cannot run their own training programmes.

The importance of ‘the process’, from the moment visitors telephone to ask for information, to the walking out of the door, cannot be underestimated. On a recent visit to New York, a potential visitor rang two museums to see if they were open – it was New Year’s

Day. The first call to the Frick Collection was answered by a real person who said 'Very sorry, but we're closed, but welcome on the following day'. The second call to the American Museum of Natural History took almost five minutes and involved listening to long recorded messages before getting to another 'press button' choice, and finally a statement which said that the museum was open every day of the year except Christmas and Thanksgiving. The right information was available but the delivery was laborious and alienating, whereas the Frick was live, direct and friendly. (Recorded messages can be very good and to the point – and are better than no answer at all. Just make sure they are user-friendly.)

Word-of-mouth recommendation is the museum's most valuable asset, as every survey will show, and should be safeguarded in the process of delivering the 'product', as well as in the exhibitions and facilities provided for the enjoyment, education and entertainment of visitors.

More about 'products' follows.

Communicating all this throughout the organisation

When we say 'look outwards' not 'inwards', we are not forgetting the importance of moving everyone inside the organisation along the same path towards greater marketing and audience awareness. This can be a painful process as the experiences in Chapter 2 illustrate. Where an organisation moves from a totally collections/buildings-focused management policy to a marketing-orientated approach, there will inevitably be some people who cannot adapt to the change.

Equally, when new marketing initiatives are launched, the staff at every level have to be informed, committed and involved, to make a success of a re-positioning, a new gallery or exhibition, a new way of charging etc. Ways of communicating successfully with staff and other internal colleagues depend very much on the size and culture of the organisation and will be discussed later.

Developing a marketing strategy

The marketing process is illustrated in Figure 1. Chapters 2–5 look in detail at the process of arriving at a marketing strategy. There may well be more than one marketing strategy – one for the organisation as a whole, and others, perhaps longer or shorter term, to meet specific objectives in particular areas. Each new product launch will require its own marketing plan, which should sit comfortably within the