

Want to Get Started in Audience Research?

From the published materials of
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Getting Started in Audience Research. Museum News, 1986, 64(3), 24-31.

This excellent introduction to conducting research and evaluation should be carefully read by everyone. In particular, it is a wealth of information for those who have not been rigidly trained in the survey method.

Hood insists that you need to know two things in order to develop a systematic plan for conducting audience research:

- Be clear about the information you want to know.
- Know your reasons for conducting the study.

Hood suggests several good reasons for conducting visitor evaluation and several bad reasons. This section should serve as a useful guide for making clear what your reasons really are for an audience research project. Good reasons include: to identify your current and potential audiences; to evaluate exhibits/programs; etc. Bad reasons include: wanting to confirm what you already know; imitate everyone else who is doing it; etc.

The next step in Hood's model is to answer three questions: "Who can give you the answers you need?" "Who will carry out the project?" and "How will you conduct the research?"

The last section of this paper describes methods of collecting information: questionnaires, interviewing (including focus groups), and other techniques (observation, zip code analysis, tallying license plates).

Hood discusses the various techniques of visitor surveys including mail questionnaires, on-site surveys, off-site surveys, and telephone surveys. She also suggests ways to select a representative sample of visitors to minimize sampling biases.

Getting the Answers: How to Do Audience Research Right. 1986 AAZPA Proceedings, pp. 271-275.

This paper is a companion paper to Hood's Museum News article. It also contains useful advice.

Surveying Your Audiences. Museum Update, Volume 6, No. 1.

This brief article provides additional suggestions and references on audience research.

Visitor Behavior, Volume 2, Issue No. 3, Fall, 1987. [Special Issue on Audience Survey Research].

Marilyn Hood served as a guest editor for this special issue of Visitor Behavior on audience research. The issue is rich with ideas and examples of audience research and is strongly recommended to those who wish to engage in this type of evaluation.

Summary

Although these papers won't make you an expert, they do offer an excellent start. Careful study of Hood's works should help you get started in audience research. This material serves as an exemplary model for the rest of us to follow.

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