

APPLYING HUMAN FACTORS TO EXHIBIT EVALUATION

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A summary of Alter, Paul, & Alter, Rita (1988). Exhibit Evaluation: Taking Account of Human Factors. *Curator*, 31(3), 167-177.

The first part of this article reviews "The Human Processing Model" by Card, Moran, & Newell (1983). The authors review the processes of perception, short and long term memory. In particular they note that short term memory can only retain approximately seven pieces of information and that chunking or grouping familiar items together allows the viewer to retain significantly more information than when the information is unfamiliar and treated as separate items.

Next, "external myths" and "conceptual models" are discussed. An "external myth", described by Rubinstein and Hersh (1984), is created from the staff's viewpoint and understanding of the exhibit as the exhibit is developed. The visitors, however, construct a "conceptual model" of what the exhibit is communicating by forming hypotheses and then attempting to verify these hypotheses from the exhibit information. If an exhibit is successful, the "external myth" of the staff and the visitor's "conceptual model" are matched. How then can exhibit designers develop an "external myth" that matches the visitor's "conceptual model"? Rubinstein & Hersh suggest four guidelines: (1) maintain a consistent and simple "myth" or theme, (2) limit the scope of the "myth", (3) limit the states (control the traffic flow so that visitors see exhibits in a predetermined sequence), (4) minimize the conceptual load.

Informal evaluation is recommended to determine if the exhibit works. Here is where thinking aloud is used as a type of formative evaluation. Thinking aloud requires two staff members and a cooperative visitor who is asked to "tell me what you are thinking" while viewing a mock-up of the exhibit. (The other staff member takes notes about what is said by the visitor.) This process should be repeated for up to ten visitors to get a good idea of the visitors' conceptual model. In this way discrepancies between the external myth and visitors' conceptual model can be found and corrected before the final exhibit is placed on display.

REFERENCES

- Card, S., Moran, T., & Newell, A. (1983). *The Psychology of Human-Computer Interaction*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Rubinstein, R., & Hersh, H. (1984). *The Human Factor*. Digital Press.

ADD ZIP TO YOUR MARKETING

From Haeseler, John (1989). "Five Little Numbers That Say So Much: The Use Of Zip Code Data For Marketing and Audience Research At Zoos And Aquariums." *AAZPA 1989 Annual Proceedings*, Pittsburgh, PA: American Association of Zoological Parks & Aquariums. pp. 102-107.

Marketing with zip codes is useful because it can:

- "(a) provide information on where existing visitors are coming from, and with analysis, some information on their demographic characteristics, and
- (b) help to target mailings for membership campaigns." (p. 103)

Although some theme parks and major commercial visitor attractions use continuous visitor surveys, such methods are not financially feasible for most cultural attractions. However, museums and zoos can use less expensive, more focused strategies. The following describes the use of zip codes in such a system:

"When the visitor enters the attraction he is asked to supply his home ZIP code when he buys his ticket. The ZIP code is entered into one of the attraction's existing computers either through the cash register or through an inexpensive small computer placed next to each cash register. At regular intervals the computer is used to compile a breakdown of visitors by ZIP code and produce a report, aggregating the visitors by previously established geographic submarkets of the attraction. The reports on visitor origins can be produced on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis." (p. 103)

The ZIP code data can be used in the following ways:

- To provide an accurate picture of visitor origins for the entire year, so that market penetration rates may be calculated for individual market areas.
- To provide an accurate picture of where zoo attendance comes from on individual days, weeks, and months.
- To permit analysis of advertising effectiveness on the generation of attendance from specific market areas, and the effectiveness of promotion.
- To determine the impact which major special events have on attendance from various market areas.
- To determine the impact which visitors from different market areas have on revenues to the zoo." (p. 104)