

EDITORIAL

Audience survey research, the theme of this issue of *Visitor Behavior*, is an ongoing concern for all museums that want to know why people do or don't attend and what happens to them when they do. Since the 1920's there have been numerous observational studies and efforts to determine what visitors learn in museum settings. The first extensive, methodologically-sound, systematically-conducted museum audience survey research was done at the Royal Ontario Museum in the 1950's and '60's. The first community study to learn why people don't visit museums didn't come until the 1980's.

Unfortunately, many audience surveys prepared and carried out by museum personnel and market research firms are not based on sound educational or methodological principles, and are, therefore, usually inadequately conceived, designed, implemented, and analyzed. We are pleased to present in this issue the results of studies that are well done, and some practical advice on utilizing volunteers in carrying out valid and reliable on-site audience surveys.

Since these articles are only representative of the many approaches to audience survey research, we hope that readers will respond with data on additional studies that can be covered in a future issue.

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IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

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Introduction and Background

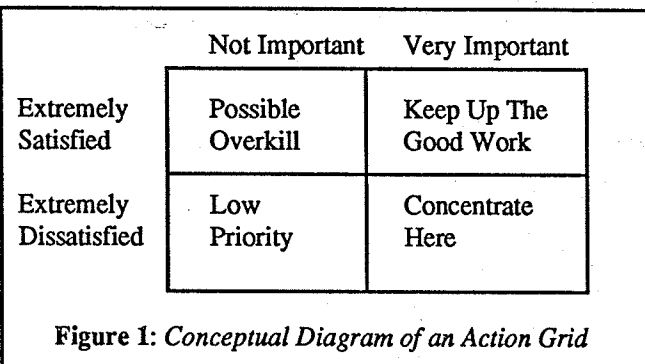
What is important to visitors in a leisure setting? How well are these valued components of the leisure experience being provided? One method of beginning to answer these crucial questions is importance-performance analysis. This article explains that technique; the emphasis is on methodology.

Importance-performance analysis, developed as a tool for market researchers (Martilla & James, 1977), is based on the concept that satisfaction is a result of a preference for an object or service and judgments of its performance (Myers & Alpert, 1968). Thus, the target population is asked to rate certain attributes of the facility or service on its importance to the rater and on the organization's performance of the features.

Recreation researchers have recently discovered the technique's use in the evaluation of leisure (Guadagnolo, 1983; Mills & Snepenger, 1983; Warnick, 1983). The scale is relatively easy to administer and the results relatively simple to interpret.

The importance-performance scale is based on the assumption that satisfaction is affected by both the importance of an attribute and perceived performance on the attribute. Designed for ease of transferring results into actions, the scale's end result is a graph indicating appropriate levels of action.

In this method, determinant attributes of whatever is to be evaluated are presented as two identical lists. These form the basis for two Likert-type scales. On one scale, participants are asked to rate the attributes as to how important these are, while on the other, they rate how well the program performs. A mean or median value (see Martilla & James, 1977), for discussion of median versus mean) for each attribute is determined for each scale. These values are then plotted on a graph with importance as one axis and performance as the other. The points will fall into one of four quadrants -- labelled "Possible Overkill," "Keep Up The Good Work," "Low Priority," and "Concentrate Here" -- indicating to administrators how best to use their resources to upgrade their programs (see Figure 1). The placement of the grid lines defining the quadrants is flexible, allowing for program variations. Each value is relative to the other values.



By adding other questions, either open- or closed-ended, more information can be gained without adding significantly to the cost. Demographic characteristics, group level characteristics, and information on past experiences can be used to create graphs of different groups for comparison. By asking a few well-stated, open-ended questions, the administrator may learn not only which attributes to concentrate on, but also how they may best be improved.

Application of Importance-Performance Analysis

Application of any new technique to a field different from the original design intent requires caution when interpreting results. Importance-performance analysis, designed for a profit-oriented market setting but applied to a leisure setting, raises a major point of caution. Profit orientation seeks a return on investment and, in most cases, customer loyalty. In the non-profit leisure setting, the objectives are broader. Customer satisfaction and a

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willingness to pay with time and/or money along with a willingness to participate is only one measure of success. Two other measures must be considered -- the organization's ability to convey the messages set forth as objectives, and the ability of the resource to sustain the activity without irreparable damage to the resource. Thus, these points should be considered when adopting this technique for applied or theoretical research.

The technique was field tested using 35 attributes of a metropolitan park system in Ohio. The metropolitan park system entails fairly extensive urban nature parks and an established nature interpretation program. The 35 items included in the analysis to assess visitor perceptions were based on objectives of the park system. Included in the items were park attributes relating to park hours, travel distance, opportunities, crowding, facilities, programming, natural history, maintenance, and administration.

Additional open- and closed-ended questions were asked of participants to add further meaning to the study. Due to the extensive nature of the study, data are not reported here.

The target population, all park visitors, was sampled by distributing one survey form per vehicle or one per group of people walking as they entered the park. Questionnaires were distributed in alternating fashion (i.e., the first car received an importance survey, the second received a performance survey, the third an importance survey, etc.). All vehicles were directed to stop at the entrance and occupants were asked to complete the survey. Only a few refused to take the survey. The vehicle driver was given a questionnaire, pencil, letter explaining the survey's purpose, and instructions. Visitors could return the survey as they left the park or mail it to the park office. Overall return rate was 56 % (n=488).

In this study, each completed questionnaire represents a case. To make sense of the data or compare answers, the answers must be combined into one mean answer per question. Here, the average visitor answer is most important, although even extreme cases should be considered.

In calculating the mean, all people answering the importance scale were combined and all people answering the performance scale were combined to give overall means for each feature on each scale. These means were used to rank the 35 scale features for each group and to plot the features on the action grid.

Findings

The majority of the features fell into the two high-performance quadrants of "possible overkill" and "keep up the good work." The midpoint lines were set before the study began.

It is important to remember when examining the action grid that the results represent only the views of the visitors. This is only one aspect of leisure management. Any actions taken must be tempered by a knowledge of the organization's goals as well as natural and cultural resource limitations. Visitor needs may not always mesh with organizational and resource needs. Therefore, this knowledge allows managers either to take appropriate action to match performance ratings to importance ratings or to explain to their clients why this cannot or should not be done. In situations where visitor needs are secondary to organization and resource concerns, the negative impacts must be mitigated through public education/interpretation or alternative opportunities to meet the needs.

References

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VISITOR BEHAVIOR

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