

[Checklist for Surveys - cont'd from page 8]

- Information booklet for the volunteers containing:
 - Instructions for sample selection
 - Guidelines for carrying out the survey
 - Answer sheet to provide standard answers to most-asked questions
 - Signup sheet for volunteer hours
 - Coding sheets and samples of coded questionnaires to volunteers to code answers during slack times
 - Complete list of volunteers' names, addresses, phone numbers, and availability sheets
- Manila folder for completed survey instruments
- Box to hold supplies, including extra blank survey forms
- Free coffee and tea for respondents and volunteers

Of course, on busy days when you double the number of volunteers, you also double the supplies, so it's a good idea to have a second box ready ahead. The surveys taken to the second site should be temporarily numbered 1, 2, 3, etc., with a location code letter such as "P" for picnic area. These surveys are later renumbered into the record book in order of the time they were completed, to maintain the proper sequence overall. This must be done before the next survey day.

Preparing for and carrying out an on-site audience survey requires time, diligence, and patience, but we have found that visitors are very willing to participate and volunteers have had enjoyable experiences. □

HOW DO PEOPLE PERCEIVE MUSEUMS, PARKS, AND ZOOS?

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Introduction

Whether or not people visit museums, parks, and zoos is dependent, to a large extent, on how they perceive these facilities. For example, Hood (1983) found that museum attendance was correlated with the leisure values and expectations of the potential visitor. Hood's study is unique since there has been little investigation into the relation between how people perceive a particular facility and whether or not they actually attend. Hood has argued convincingly that informal educational facilities should be studying those audiences who do not visit rather than concentrating only on those who do (Hood, 1983; Hood, 1986).

In two studies using the semantic differential survey technique, we attempted to determine how people perceive museums, parks, and zoos in terms of 27 bipolar

characteristics (Shettel, 1986) and to measure the effects of a visit to a science museum on the perceptions of respondents. Since the respondents in these studies were all students, we must be cautious about interpreting the generality of results. However, the results are suggestive.

Method

In the first study, 150 undergraduate and graduate students from Jacksonville State University were given the semantic differential survey which asked respondents to rate, on a 7-point scale, art museums, science museums, zoos, state parks, and theme parks in terms of 27 bipolar characteristics (e.g., active-passive, formal-informal, complicated-simple). When reporting the results, lower numbers indicate ratings toward the first term, e.g., "active", and larger numbers toward the second term, e.g., "passive". A rating of "4" is a neutral score.

Results

The "child-adult" characteristics revealed that art and science museums were perceived as more "adult" than "child", while zoos and parks were viewed as more "child".

Art Museum	5.3
Science Museum	5.1
Zoo	2.7
State Park	3.6
Theme Park	3.3

The "bland-spicy" dimension revealed a difference between science museums and other facilities: science museums were rated on the "bland" side of the dimension while the other facilities were rated as more "spicy".

Art Museum	4.3
Science Museum	3.9
Zoo	4.8
State Park	4.5
Theme Park	4.7

The data also suggested that respondents view museums as more "formal" than zoos and parks. Art museums were considered the most "formal" of the five types of facilities. Parks were rated as most "informal".

Art Museum	3.8
Science Museum	4.3
Zoo	5.9
State Park	6.1
Theme Park	6.1

Ratings of the "complicated-simple" dimension suggested that museums were viewed as complicated, while zoos and parks were seen as "simple". Science museums were perceived as more "complicated" than art museums. State parks were seen as the most "simple" of

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[Perceptions of Museums, Parks, Zoos - cont'd]
the facilities.

Art Museum	3.8
Science Museum	3.1
Zoo	5.1
State Park	5.7
Theme Park	5.1

Important differences were also found for the "work-fun" characteristic. Parks and zoos were clearly viewed as more "fun" than museums. Surprisingly, state parks were viewed very similar to theme parks in terms of "fun".

Art Museum	5.0
Science Museum	4.3
Zoo	5.9
State Park	6.2
Theme Park	6.3

In a second study, 74 of the original participants were asked to visit a local museum (Anniston Museum of Natural History) three weeks after completing the original survey. Five days after the museum visit, students were again asked to complete the semantic differential survey, but this time, they were asked to rate only the science museum. The following results were obtained.

Adjective	Before Visit	After Visit
Children-adult	5.1	4.4
Bland-spicy	3.9	4.5
Formal-informal	4.3	5.0
Complicated-simple	3.1	4.4
Work-fun	4.3	5.3

What can we conclude from these results? Obviously, museums are viewed differently than parks and zoos in terms of characteristics such as "child-adult", "bland-spicy", "formal-informal", "complicated-simple", and "work-fun". In addition, art museums are viewed differently than science museums in terms of several characteristics. Finally, perhaps the most important result was that ratings toward science museums was changed in a more positive direction as a result of a visit to a museum of natural history.

If these results have generality to other potential visitor populations, they strongly suggest that perceptions can be easily changed as a result of a museum visit. The next question is, "How do you get people to make that initial visit?" Hood (1986) has argued that marketing efforts should be based on a study of those audiences which do not come to the museum. The current results suggest that changing the misperceptions of the facility

by these potential visitors should be an important aspect of any public relations program.

References

- Hood, M. (1983). Staying Away; Why People Choose Not to Visit Museums. *Museum News*, 61(4): 50-57.
Hood, M. (1986). Beware of Catch-22. *Visitor Behavior*, 1(2): 10.
Shettel, H. (1986). Personal communication. □

WANTED: Convincing Arguments in Favor of Visitor Evaluation

When I was attending the AAM conference in San Francisco and the AAZPA conference in Portland, many of you gave glowing testimonials for *Visitor Behavior*. Many said you found it informative and useful in your work. Others told me that it was helpful as a source for arguing with administrators and colleagues with respect to visitor evaluation. It pleases me that so many of you are finding our publication informative and useful. There is danger, however, that *Visitor Behavior* will be used like a drunk uses a lamp pole -- more for support than for illumination. I hope that, above all else, it informs you about the state of knowledge concerning visitor evaluation, draws your attention to greater concern for visitor studies, and stimulates you to evaluate your visitors. However, we need to convince decision makers that visitor evaluation is a critically important undertaking that can save precious resources, improve exhibits, and produce greater visitor satisfaction.

I would like to challenge you velvet-tongued promoters of visitor evaluation to submit essays to *Visitor Behavior* that provide convincing arguments for the importance of evaluation. What arguments can professionals use with their directors and boards to convince them that visitor evaluation is necessary?

SEND US YOUR ESSAYS FOR PUBLICATION IN FUTURE ISSUES.

[Steve Bitgood, Editor]