

INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Jenkins, D. (1985). A Survey of Interactive Technologies. Proceedings of the 1985 American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums. Columbus, OH. pp. 72-83.

"Hands-on" and "interactive exhibits" are popular buzz words in exhibition facilities today. If the visitor can't push it, feel it, ring it, or smell it, it is just not state-of-the-art. The level of technology ranges from simple play activities to computers and scientific instruments. Jenkins suggests that, instead of copying the ideas of others, exhibit designers should use their imagination. He warns against using exhibits that do not educate. "A device may work and prove very popular, but if it does not build respect and understanding for life, then we have succeeded technically, and failed philosophically."

Jenkins divides "interactive" exhibits into four types: comparisons; extending human senses; learning play; and conservation reinforcement. Examples of each type are described in the paper.

1. Comparisons include animal-to-animal and animal-to-human. An example of animal-to-animal is found in a dissolve unit at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. This unit shows anatomy and ecological equivalents. The Louisville Zoo offers a comparison between elephant and human skulls by illuminating the inside of the cranium.

2. Extending human senses is a technique with infinite possibilities. Magnifying vision, hearing, taste, and touch can be applied to almost any exhibit. Jenkins suggests that the use of infrared, ultraviolet, sonar, and magnetic senses is an untapped area for exhibition.

3. Learning play is described as the broadest and least defined category. "Play is the primary process for young children, and certainly our most practical way to teach them." Rope spider webs, a play-pen with stuffed animals, animal masks, dressing a child as a walrus with simulated blubber, crawl-in shells, turnable blocks to create animals, are just a few creative ideas that have been developed. Giving visitors the opportunity to make something that they can take home with them is an excellent reminder to visit again.

4. Conservation. The ideal interactive exhibit enlightens the visitors' attitudes on the most important message, conservation. "Herp lab has perhaps the best interactive exhibit in this survey. A visitor examines endangered species material and answers a series of questions, then creates a pledge card, pledging what he or she will do to help wildlife conservation."

Jenkins concludes his article with a list of interactive exhibits at 24 institutions including museums and zoos. The list includes addresses, contact people, and phone numbers.

This article should stimulate some efforts by exhibit designers to use more participatory elements in their exhibit development.

[Michael Pierce, Anniston Museum]

VISITOR BEHAVIOR

P. O. Box 3090

Jacksonville State University

Jacksonville, Alabama 36265

To: