

Report on Family Focus Groups conducted at Museum of Lancashire & Fleetwood Museum September 2005

Background

We have recently undertaken focus group research with two groups of people; one at The Museum of Lancashire and one at Fleetwood Museum.

The main purpose of conducting the research was to help us improve how we promotionally communicate with the family audience.

As well as hoping to understand what families think of our promotional communication, each group were also given a brief tour of the respective museums to see whether they thought the museum leaflets were a fair reflection of what they saw. It's hoped that any feedback will help feed into future site development plans alongside the MUSE research recently conducted for each venue.

The groups

Both groups were comprised of a mixture of regular (visited 3 museums in last 6 months with grandson), occasional and non attenders (last visited when at school). The Museum of Lancashire group was comprised of mainly younger mothers of children, while the Fleetwood group were older, (mainly grandparents). Grandparents potentially play a large part in looking after children and taking them for days out.

Perceptions

Both groups were asked what the word 'museum' meant to them. Words used by both groups included 'history', 'old', 'reminiscence', 'boring', but also:

'Museums were seen as boring in the past (when we were children) – nowadays they seem more 'living history' and 'interactive'

'Museums seem more alive now'

'They seem less strict nowadays'

Some barriers to visiting were mentioned, including:

'Opening times are the main problem I think'

'Some people think museums are expensive – that's why they won't go'

Perceived barriers to visiting Museum of Lancashire and Fleetwood included:

'I've seen photos of a museum in Fleetwood – it never looks open. I wasn't sure whether anyone could go in, but it looks interesting'. (person at MoL group).

'I thought this museum would smell funny' (Fleetwood)

'We walked past this museum with my son – my preconception was it would be boring – he didn't want to go in' (Fleetwood)

'This museum never looks open' (MoL)

'It's bad to get to...it's a busy road, especially for kids' (MoL)

'The front door is always closed' (MoL)

'They need to make it look more inviting – try opening the front door' (MoL)

'You would think this museum was just for schools, by appointment only' (MoL)

Conclusion: Museums are seen as being more accessible than they were in the past. However regardless of advertising and publicity if it looks closed people won't come in. Barriers whether perceived or real must be broken down.

Action: Improve promotion at front of museums to make them look inviting, make sure people know when they are open and that they are open!

Product

The groups were asked what kind of things would attract them to museums (with their families). Both seemed keen on the people and physical aspect of museums, as in doing, talking and watching rather than just static displays – for example finding out how people lived ('like at Beamish'), seeing people in costume and having things going on outside the museum where possible:

'It would help break down barriers if people took the museum outside – take objects outside'

'VE day was lively – get more things going on outside to attract people'

'I like people to be around so I can ask questions...they need to be approachable though'

Have people in character – in costumes – I wouldn't want them to be in your face though'.

Some museums can be interesting...the ones in York actually use smells to recreate the past

'Costumes – what people wore, what they cooked'

Where people lived and worked'

'Museums are the only places you can go to see lost skills'

'For the dinosaur exhibition they should have put a blow up dinosaur outside'

Conclusion: People are an important part of the product. Products for families to take account of this. Staff play an important role – making people feel welcome, being approachable, able to answer questions etc.

Action: Promotion to focus on some of these aspects ie living history, people, skills, interaction, physical. Consider briefing sessions for front of house staff about exhibitions, events and static displays, frequently asked questions

Price

The groups were also asked about admission charges – whether they thought the museums were free and if they did have to, how much would they be willing to pay. The groups were split as to whether the museums would be free or not, some thought all museums were free, unless there was a special exhibition, some thought just schools should pay, but others thought there probably would be a charge. Paying would not put them off if it was 'value for money'. Between £2.50 and £3.00 was thought to be about right for an adult ticket and no more than £10.00 for a family ticket. Family tickets were thought to be 'good value'.

After touring the museums and being shown the leaflets, both groups seemed happy with the admission charges. There was some discussion about children going free which both groups thought was good. However it was felt that children were being discouraged from visiting

the museums alone and that this should be addressed, along with clarity of at what age children do go free.

Action: Further promotion of season tickets / multi-pass tickets for families to encourage repeat visits.

Consider dropping ‘accompanied children’. Clarify what age children go free.

Promotion

Both groups were shown promotional communication material (for families). This consisted of paid advertising in magazines, leaflets and flyers.

Advertising

They were asked to comment on what they thought of the adverts and whether they had seen or heard of the magazine before. There were some contradictory points of view raised, especially between the younger group (MoL) and the older group (F/wood). The younger group in the main seemed happy with the style of the advertisements, the images and the fonts.

‘The font is modern and cute’

‘I like the pictures of the kids – it makes it look interactive’

‘It’s colourful – it’s a nice layout’

Both groups were drawn to the heading of the adverts ‘family friendly museums’:

‘It says it’s alright to take the kids in – it’s not too delicate’

‘The bit that really stands out for me is Family Friendly’

They also picked up on facilities being mentioned such as cafes, free car parking and baby changing facilities – all seen as important to this audience. Free offers were suggested by some as a way of drawing their eye to an advert - money off coupons or a free gift for the kids – badges or pens for instance.

A couple of people thought the ad was too general, but they might look at the website on the strength of the advert

There were some negative comments about the adverts, mainly about the positioning of the adverts on the page and the images used (this in particular from the older group).

‘The third picture down tells me nothing (two boys looking at computer). What is it?’

‘They are pictures of buildings...so what?’

‘The building picture is a waste of space. It needs bigger pictures and less writing...it’s a big ad but small pictures’.

‘The writing doesn’t stand out...you can’t see it at all, it should be black. The ad underneath stands out more, the LCC logo should be smaller...they’re losing important advertising space with the size of that logo’

‘The ad is the wrong colour for that page – I notice the ad for swimming lessons more – the blue colour stands out more’

‘They should have got the left hand space on the page instead. The ad with the word ‘imagine’ and the bubble on the right hand page – that catches my eye more’

There was also confusion about who the ads were aimed at.

*'You need to aim at kids – take an item from each museum that kids would like.'
'This ad – you don't know where they are? It should have the names of the museum'
'The ads should be more interesting for kids...it wouldn't attract my 12 year old grandson – it needs to be more touchy feely'*

The group were asked to comment on whether any of them had seen the magazines before (Primary Times, Family, Let's Go with the Children, Good Life). Neither group had seen or would buy Let's Go 'unless there were good offers in...too expensive at £3.50'. Good Life magazine had been seen by some of the older group, although no-one had bought it. None of the younger group had seen it 'looks like it's for someone wealthy...if that's where they're advertising we aren't seeing it'. Primary Times was the only publication that had been seen (by those in the Museum of Lancs group) though as someone in the Fleetwood group pointed out, they wouldn't see this publication anyway.

Conclusion: Style of ads appeal to younger mothers, but older audience are not keen. If targeting family communications at grandparents more careful thought needs to be given to images/text; Ads should use images that will appeal to children aswell as parents;

Actions: When buying advertising consider colour of ad and where placed on page; consider including promotions & competitions when placing ads – this will also help monitor effectiveness; Images are important and text must be carefully targeted to appeal to families by putting emphasis on facilities and other benefits important to this audience.

Family Leaflet

The leaflet was well received by both groups with mainly positive comments about the layout, design and information:

*'It looks nicer as a leaflet (than an advert)'
'This leaflet is great...I like it...I wish I'd seen it before'
'It needs to be out before school holidays'
'It's got everything you want – you don't need to use a website. I like it in date order'
'This is pretty good – it's all listed...dates are listed. The headings are in a different colour, so your eyes are drawn to it'
'This is quite good – it tells you what's going on in different areas'
'Good for school holidays – I'd put it away and keep it'
'The map is good'
'Will it be on the website? I like this one very much'*

Action: Style of family leaflet doesn't need to be radically altered. However available facilities, opening hours and more detailed maps could be included (space permitting). Promote multi-passes, website, mention about adding to mailing list. Consider PDF version on website.

Flyers

A selection of flyers and posters were shown, including Revolution, Grin up North, The Living River and Beasts of the Nile (all aimed at the family market). Comments were mixed but simple images, bright colours and relevant text (opening hours, facilities, maps) were all seen as important. The 'Beasts of the Nile' flyer was received positively for the 'interactive' cut-out element and also because opening hours were phrased positively rather than negatively (ie when we are open, rather than when we are closed).

Keep text simple and relevant and consider 'interactive' elements in any flyers aimed at this market.

Place

To ascertain where we should be promoting the museums both groups were asked how they would find information out about the museum should they want to visit. Places where we already target such as libraries and tourist information centres were mentioned, although the point was made that generally only tourists visit TIC's... 'they aren't for local people'. The groups would like to see information about their local museums in their local newspapers, (both articles and listings). Vision was also suggested 'Why can't Vision promote the museums more....some people flick through it?'

They also thought that websites were useful for finding out information:

'I use them to find out opening times...when planning a visit I need to know directions, facilities – it must be up to date'.

'A website's a good thing to start with – but don't give everything away on the website – just a taster'

I've been on the website- it's quite interesting. It's basic – gives you opening times, prices...I'd never heard about Judges' Lodgings until I looked on the site. There's only a bit of text about each museum – maybe it needs to be more of a taster – say two or three pages'

A website aimed at mothers www.netmums.com was suggested and one person as a mother had received information about libraries from her health visitor. Other suggestions were sending information with the Council Tax bill, using hotels in Blackpool (for Fleetwod), local radio and personal selling (representatives going out to organisations to give talks etc), council offices, waiting rooms and cinemas.

Schools were also seen as a good way to promote the museums to families:

'Send leaflets to schools and press releases. You would get families in then aswell'

'Why can't the museum service take things to schools and then give them these leaflets'

'Get the teachers to come and have a look first'

Action: better promotion of events etc for families on a local basis – consider allocation of budget for local promotion? Better coverage in Vision; continue to build family pages on website, ensuring that facilities, directions etc are prominent; continue to expand on distribution network for family audience; use schools and school children as ambassadors to promote to families.

Museum of Lancashire

After a brief tour of the museum the group were asked for their opinions of what they had seen. Reactions were positive with one comment being 'it's very good - I could spend a couple of hours here'. Again the point was made that because the museum always looks shut, people are missing out on something. They were then asked to judge the leaflet against what they had seen. Reactions were mainly positive. This group focused more on the facilities that the leaflet flagged up:

'How to find us, that's good...it's colourful'

'It's a part time museum – it's not open on Sundays or Thursdays!'

'It should open bank holidays at least'

'We are used to 24 hour shopping...things need to be open when we want them to be'

'It definitely needs a café'

'The mailing list bit is a good idea'

'It's good - it shows it has a car park'

'It shows smiley faces– that's good'

Conclusion: opening times & visitor facilities are not particularly 'family friendly'
Action: to attract more of this audience opening hours should be changed; refreshments be made available

Fleetwood Specific

Feedback after the tour was positive, with people saying they would return and bring their grandchildren. The only slightly negative comment was that the writing could do with being bigger on some of the displays. The group were then asked whether the Fleetwood leaflet was a fair reflection of the museum. They did not think this was so, finding the museum 'much more interesting than the leaflet'

'The leaflet doesn't do it justice'

'There is nothing about the saltmine'

'Showing hands and arms is just silly – it's a waste of space'

'That room with the tables in..the Victorian one – is really good. Why are there no pictures of that one?'

'I didn't see that fish – virtual fishing...what's that?'

'Seagull Sam – it should be in it's own leaflet – it's not prominent enough in this leaflet'

Conclusion: for an older audience the leaflet does not seem to tell them what they need to know.

Action: Wait for MUSE analysis to see what age profile of visitors to Fleetwood. Commissioning of new key images for Fleetwood (budget dependant); consider in house 'seagull sam' leaflet & devise trail?

Both groups were then asked 'if you were in charge here what would they do?'

Museum of Lancashire

'It needs to open on a Sunday...that's the day you go out with the family'

'You need to promote the front of the building more...great potential but it doesn't look friendly from the outside at all'

'The Museum of Lancs and The Harris could maybe get together and do some joint advertising or something'
'Why don't they put a billboard at the front'
'The records office opens later one evening a month – maybe the museum could try that'

Action: As previous – improve opening hours, better promotion of building at front – ie better positioning of open sign; consider joint family leaflet for Preston museums

For Fleetwood

'Target coach tour operators...add on to market trips'
'Bus drivers can point it out'
'I'd improve the stupid photos'
'Put posters up in the market'
'I would have to see something in the leaflet which would make me want to bring the grandchildren '

Action: Consider speaking to coach tour operators (although this would not be a family audience); continue to improve on local promotion; changes to leaflet

Ideas that were suggested relevant to all museums were:

'Keep updating the museum'
'Have a section in the museum that advertises the other museums – say a small display that links them all – just like a website really'
'What about displays in libraries...you could use them for mini displays'
'Testimonies work – “a fantastic day out”...you could have recordings of peoples voices on the website. People pick up information in different ways – some are visual, some read, some like listening'

Action: improve point of sale to help advertise other museums in the service; consider mini displays (with pull-ups) space permitting; work with libraries to improve awareness; use testimonials more