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***A two way- conversation: using values research for communications,  
audience building and creating Public Value***

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**Introduction**

For some time now, I have been interested in the important role that **values** play in our communications with audiences. I would like to start this presentation by saying a few words about 'value'.

Values are not ephemeral. They are not the immediate, extrinsic factors that motivate a visit to a museum - they are not 'the weather', 'wanting to see the 'newest exhibition, 'something for the children to do during school holidays' or 'showing visitors local attractions'. Values are overarching goals which guide behavior in the long term and which promise end states that are considered positive and beneficial. They are also attributes associated with things.

My interest has been in whether there is a point of intersection between the values of museums and individual values and whether we can align our communications in ways that resonate to such an extent that we can build long term, sustainable relationships.

What I want to do today is to take you with me in a journey that I have been making to understand these points of intersection. It has often seemed like a puzzle and there are three main parts to the whole picture.

## Part 1: A brand audit

Some ten years ago I managed a *branding project* for the museum where I was then employed. When I subsequently wrote about that process and the findings for the *International Journal of Arts Management* (2000, 35)<sup>1</sup>, I stated that

*In marketing terms, there are three types of brands. Corporate brands and product brands are familiar. A third type is a **values brand**, of which museums are an example (Halliday and Kiely, 1999)<sup>2</sup>. A values brand has an enduring core purpose, which creates a long-term bond with those sectors of the population **sharing the same values**.*

That final sentence is critically important. It raises two important issues:

1. what enduring values *are* associated with museums; and
2. **which** sectors of the population share these values.

## Part 2: Values associated with museums

When I spoke at our MPR meeting in Vienna in 2007, I reported on some of the values associated with museums that emerged from my own PhD research<sup>3</sup>. The population which I sampled identified several core values associated with museums. These included (a) public access to collections (b) opportunities to experience history and (c) social capacity building. But another core value associated with museums was *learning*.

In my study, I found that individuals valued museums for the *type* of learning that occurs (self-directed, engaging the five senses, enjoyable) and the impacts of museum learning (the sense of discovery, the experiences of inspiration, awareness, well-being and pleasure). Communities, too, valued the learning that museums provide, particularly the provision of a learning resource for all ages that includes, but is not exclusive to, the opportunities for a learning experience that extends and enhances that which is offered in schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, Carol A., 2000, 'Branding: Positioning Museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' in *International Journal of Arts Management*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Spring, pp. 35-39.

Kiely, M. and Halliday, M. 1999, 'Values: New Brand for the Millennium' in *Executive Excellence* (Australian Edition) Vol. 16, no.3, March.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, C.A., 2008, 'Using Values to Position and Promote Museums' in the *International Journal of Arts Management*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Fall, pp. 28-41.

So museums are values brands and one of the values the public attributes to museums is learning. But the missing part of the puzzle was whether the public value placed on *learning* converts to museum visitation. If it does, we may be able to capitalize on this intersection of values to build sustainable relationships with our public. The answer to this third part of the puzzle was supplied by a type of audience research that has emerged in the last decade. It seeks to identify the personal values that people are seeking to satisfy with leisure.

### **Part 3: New developments in audience research**

Audience research has traditionally profiled visitors (finding out who comes, why they come, what they do and how do they feel about it), conducted audience research (when we examine trends, changes over time and barriers to participation) undertaken programme evaluation (providing guidance to adjust specific programmes to meet potential audiences needs and interests and assess how people feel about the end product). But, there is a sea-change happening in audience research:

1. We are moving beyond **extrinsic** reasons for engagement to delve deeper into underlying reasons for museum participation in order to build long-lasting engagement;
2. There is a movement from single programme- specific studies to studies for **whole-of-museum planning** and *using* findings accordingly;
3. There is a greater trend to **population** studies. We have in the past researched our visitors and considered the likelihood of creating potential new audiences among non-visitors. But increasingly, studies are tapping into the population-at-large; and
4. There is a change in focus from asking what public thinks of us- to wanting to understand **what the public thinks in general** –and then asking where museums fit into this overall picture.

#### *Methodology*

These studies follow a **two stage** process. In the first stage, a demographically selected group of respondents are recruited from the population- including frequent visitors, occasional visitors, lapsed visitors and non-visitors to a museum. Importantly, the people recruited are leisure decision-makers and in the course of individual sessions with each of them, they are invited to discuss:

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- What values they are seeking to satisfy in their leisure
- How they describe their 'Ideal' attraction on the basis of these values
- How different attractions are evaluated against their ideal and where your museum sits in relation to other attractions
- Experiences/perceptions of your museum
- Reactions to museum marketing and branding elements, programmes and services which might inspire a visit to your museum
- Perceivable barriers to participation.

These responses are distilled to about 20 statements that encapsulate the range of values that respondents are seeking to satisfy through leisure. These statements are then tested against a much wider population sample (900) which again includes visitors, infrequent, lapsed and non-visitors to find where these statements coalesce demographically and what percentage of the total population subscribes to them. From this process, market segments based on the values which motivate leisure choice are determined and alignment with museum values compared. But in addition, these 900 interviews also capture demographics, media sources through which to contact each segment, interest in programmes, where an institution sits in relation to other competitors- and- barriers to engagement.

By way of example, here is a distillation of the outcomes from three studies which sampled populations in three different cities. There were differences between the three studies but there were also some interesting similarities and the following figure demonstrates some of the findings common to all of them.

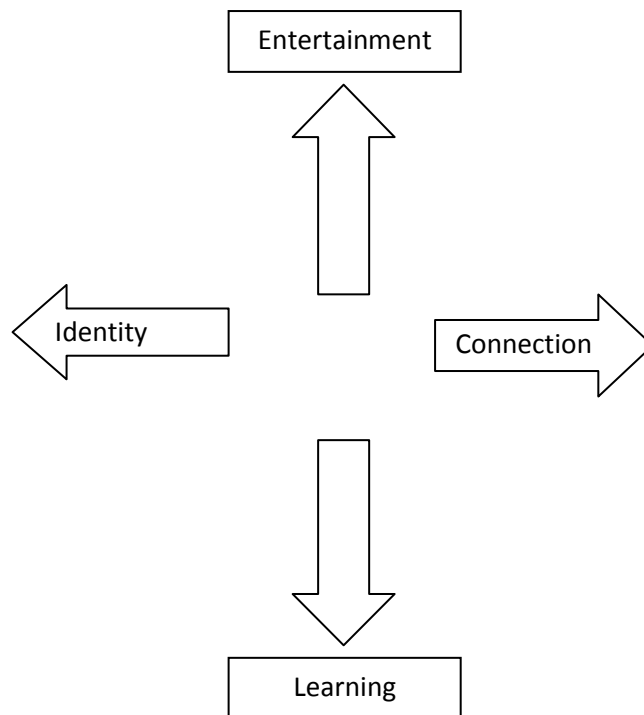


Fig. 1 Some major values driving leisure choice from 3 studies

All these studies revealed that, for a certain percentage of the population, leisure satisfaction is closely tied to **personal identity**. These people want the event or experience to augment *their* sense of self. That can occur through the acquisition of knowledge or attending some significant event that puts them out there on the social scene.

In all studies, **learning** emerged as a value. A significant proportion of the populations sampled in these three studies value learning and are seeking leisure experiences that will provide a learning experience. Some of these people are active seekers of knowledge in their own right and interested in self development. But an even larger component is seeking a learning experience to share with others, whether that is other adult peers or with their children.

And that brings us to the value many people place on socialising with others; in other words, for most people, sharing their leisure with others- be it family or friends- is critically important. The opportunity to bond with significant others and experience something together I term '**connection**' value.

At the opposite end of the continuum from learning is another value- variously described as **'pleasure' or 'entertainment'**. People with a strong orientation to this value are largely out for fun in their leisure and expect the experience to provide the enjoyment they are seeking. They are *not seeking* an intellectual component.

These are some of the values that these three studies found in relation to the populations they surveyed. But the studies then drill down to find out how these values intersect and what market segments they can produce.

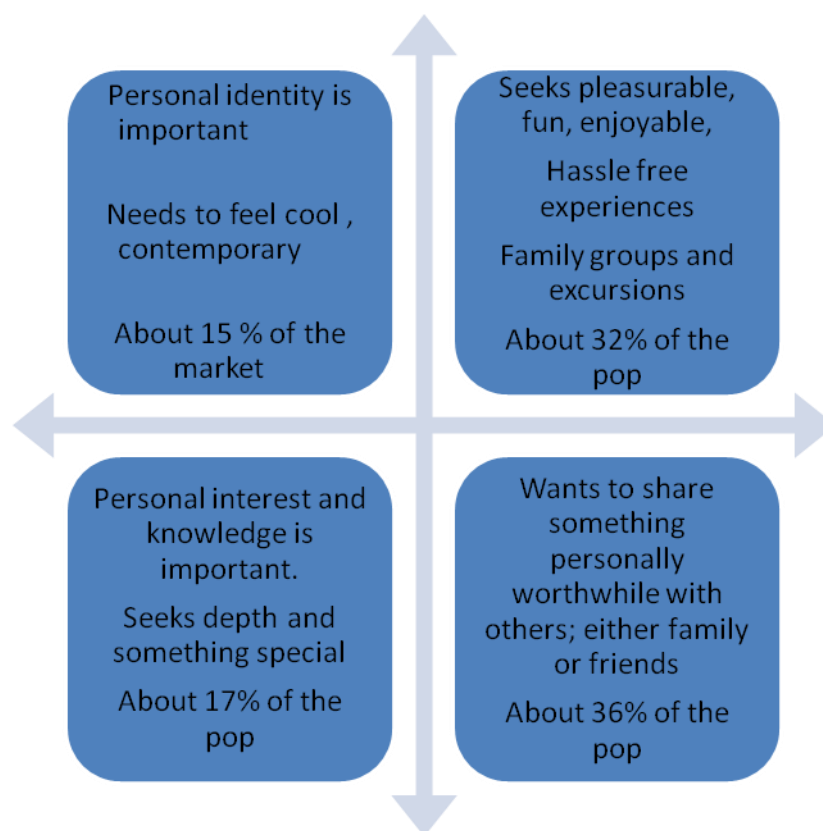


Fig 2: what people want from leisure

Some people value both personal identity and entertainment. They will feel satisfied with experiences that make them feel cool and contemporary. Others will find their personal identity fulfilled through learning new things that increase their own knowledge and make them feel knowledgeable. But for others, learning is best when it is shared with friends and family.

And similarly, there are those for whom leisure primarily needs to satisfy entertainment value and socialization with others. This sector of the population is seeking hassle-free experiences which are fun.

I want to call your attention to the two components below the horizontal line- the proportion of the population in these studies seeking to satisfy 'learning' value in their leisure is 53% of the population. It is here we find an intersection between the values of the museum and the values held by a significant proportion of the population. By any analysis of national statistics in any country, 53% is a very healthy participation rate, better than the 40-42% which is reported in optimal circumstances (free publically funded museums with a focus on access and social inclusion) so we can, with some confidence expect that it is possible to attract slightly over half a population to museums. How can we do this?

What these studies also provide is a set of valued *end-states* that each segment is seeking as the result of the type of learning experiences they value and which can be used in target marketing and programme planning.

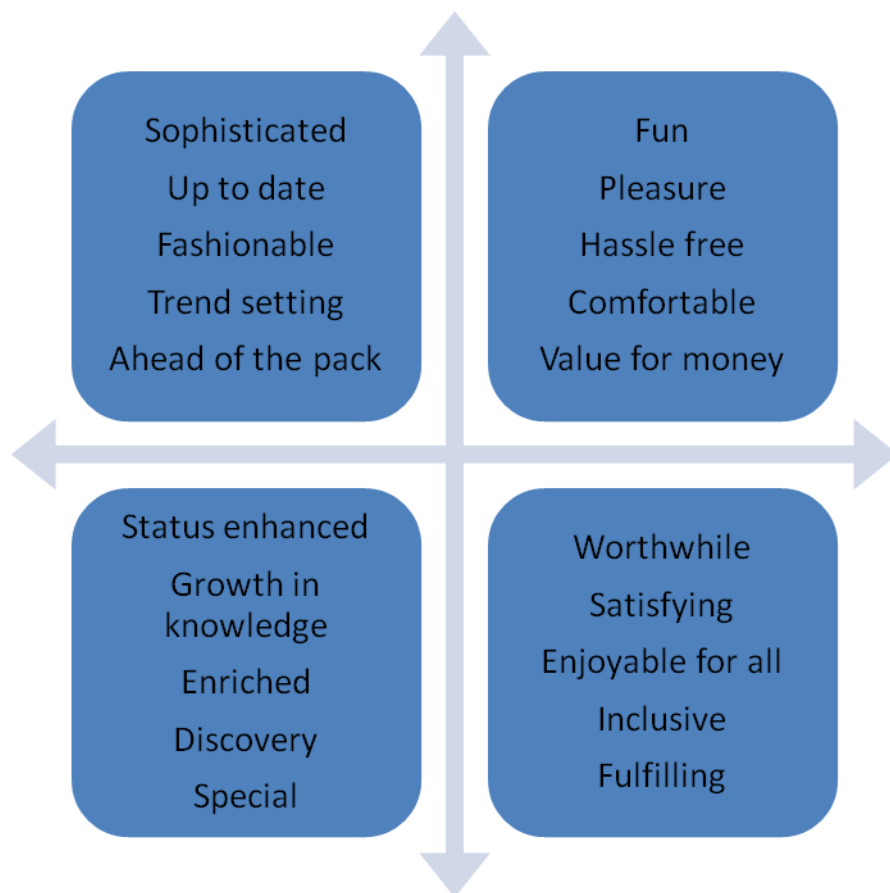


Fig 3: end- states people are seeking to satisfy through leisure

1. The people who seek to augment their personal identity through entertainment, will be attracted if your marketing convinces them that the experience they will have will satisfy end states that are important to them- to feel sophisticated, up to date, fashionable, trend setting, ahead of the pack; and
2. That those individuals who value learning will want to have an experience which is special and different where they feel enriched, discover something new and where, as a result, their own status is enhanced through the knowledge they gain from this experience;
3. Those for whom learning is best shared with others will want to know from your communications that the experiences they will have at your museums will be worthwhile, fulfilling, enjoyable for all members of their group whether it is a family with your children or a group of young adults; and finally
4. Those who value connection and want experiences which enable them to just have fun need to be reassured that what you are offering will be pleasurable, hassle free, comfortable and value for money.

These studies also provide :

- The proportion of each segment within a population in relation to these value positions;
- The demographics of each segment;
- The extent to which your institution is likely to interest each segment;
- Information about what type of programmes and services are likely to attract each segment;
- What type of marketing can motivate visitation (media sources and approaches)

## **Applications**

Information from these value-based audience research studies is being mainly used for:

### *1. Programme commissioning*

Museums have used the segmentation to guide the development of exhibitions and events. They considered new ideas in the light of whether the exhibition idea has the potential to attract any



of the market segments and what modifications may be needed to ensure engagement. Not every proposal had to attract every segment but there had to be evidence that at least one or two segments could be interested. Eventually, staff began to think of their proposals with these segments in mind and to build their programmes with the aim of satisfying the needs of the sectors they were trying to attract. In this respect, these studies also proved useful in uniting staff around a common approach to audiences and to developing programmes using the results of audience research.

## *2. Marketing*

The information has also been used to select which segments offer the best return on an investment. What these studies tell us is that the intersection point between the core values of museums and individual values reveals that it is not possible to attract 100% of a population. Remember that we started by discussing a 'values' brand and that the building of long-term relationships is possible with those sectors of the population who *share* the core values of the museum. This is not everyone. The sectors of the population who were seeking positive benefits from entertainment in their leisure, may be attracted occasionally but are unlikely to become engaged in the longer term because they are genuinely not interested in the intellectual dimension that museums offer. Fun and entertainment is certainly *a way* in which learning is presented in museums but it is not the main purpose.

## *3. Customer service*

One of the things that is important to realize from these studies is the significance of other service components in audience building. For those who enjoy going to a museum in the company of adult friends and family members, it is as important to have a good café where the group can sit over a cup of coffee to chat about the exhibition. For people with young children, family-friendly staff and places for adults to sit and supervise children are an equally important part of the experience.

## *4. New audiences*

The usefulness of this type of study is that it provides the market intelligence to access audience segments within the value set who are aligned with the core values of museums but are not visiting- yet.

## 5. Sustainability

Overall, the outcome of this approach is also extremely important for the long-term sustainability of museums. For, another important dimension of a values brand is *'a desire for the lasting future of the brand because of customer allegiance to the brand's underlying values'*.

From the perspective of public sector managers, there is a need to ensure that the values of an organisation are in tune with those of the public. If the priorities and expectations of the public shift, and the culture of a museum does not, then satisfaction and trust in the service may be undermined, a point attested to by research indicating that service users are well attuned to the ethos of providers (Kelly et al, 2002: 24)<sup>4</sup>.

But the significance of this alignment does not stop at individual museums. For the sector as a whole, this is also important. In the OECD countries, the whole notion of public sector accountability is being recast as the result of a quiet revolution in public sector management called Public Value.

This new model is based on the belief that it is **the** responsibility of governments and the public sector is to work together *'to make a positive difference in the individual and collective lives of citizens'* (Moore and Moore: 2005, 17)<sup>5</sup>. Not surprisingly, this new model of public sector reform puts renewed emphasis on dialogue with the public to find out:

- What the public values about culture;
- What value they should produce; and
- How that value should be delivered.

This Public Value approach is opening opportunities for governments and agencies to work with the public in a more equal relationship- as autonomous definers of value- to align museums and other arts and cultural heritage organizations to delivering against these values.

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly, G., G. Mulgan & S. Muers. 2002. *Creating public value: an analytical framework for public service reform*. London: Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office.

<sup>5</sup> Moore M. & Moore G. (2005). *Creating Public Value Through State Arts Agencies*. Minneapolis: Arts Midwest

## Conclusion

The late Stephen Weil in his book, *Making Museums Matter*, (2002)<sup>6</sup> argued that museums are instruments to carry out particular goals, and they **fail, if** they cannot articulate their value and measure the value the audience places on the resulting experience. In other words, if museums aren't valuable to their communities they will always be seen as a luxury expendable in difficult times.

And, we are living in difficult times. As museums argue their case for sustainable funding in an increasingly uncertain economic climate, try to adjust their service delivery and programmes and compete with other leisure attractions, we need to take the pulse of the community to find out where our value lies and whether our efforts are aligned with the values that the public holds.

We are in a period of transition in relation to audiences and the transition that we are witnessing goes beyond the trend to a more visitor-centered orientation to programming and service delivery. It is deeply embedded in a new culture of public sector management that is putting the public at the centre stage of cultural value identification. In the future, accountability for the receipt of public funding will seek evidence that we are satisfying the cultural value that the public perceives as important.

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<sup>6</sup> Weil, S 2002, *Making Museums Matter*. Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press