

**‘Say it Again, Say it Differently’
Evaluation and interpretation**

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The project

- London Museums Hub interpretation project
- Three hub and three non-hub museums reinterpreting their displays
- Evaluation at three stages:
 - baseline/front-end (some formative) Jan 05
 - Formative (prototype testing) summer 05
 - summative (some formative) winter 05/06)
- Input into good practice handbook

The museums

- Bromley Museum Service (history gallery)
- Grant Museum of Zoology
- Museum of London (Medieval Gallery)
- Brunel Engine House
- Geffrye Museum
- London's Transport Museum

Bromley Museum

BEFORE:

- *“looks like what you’d expect a museum to look like, but nothing new – not much incentive to come back”*
- *“I don’t think the front of the building is very attractive – so you are not going to get many people coming in”*



Grant Museum of Zoology

BEFORE:

“It feels very cramped; like you’ve wandered into a mad collector’s living room – jumbled together”

AFTER:

“It’s retained its academic feel which is quite nice, but you can still learn and now you don’t feel stupid”



Museum of London Medieval Gallery

BEFORE:

*“curators know so much they forget what the level of most people’s knowledge is”
(adult)*

*“who in their right mind would read through all of that?”
(child)*



Panels – before and after



Overall impression of new Medieval Gallery

- *“It’s made me want to come back and have a proper look. I’d like to be able to spend some time reading the text” (adult)*
- *“If you are just going around and it’s just ordinary information, I get bored. If there is some interactive thing just around the corner, it keeps you going” (child)*
- *“This time round its more educative and interesting, layout much more contemporary, first time round couldn’t bear to be here more than five minutes” (adult)*

Brunel Engine House

BEFORE:

“Too much information, cluttered, not really organised”



AFTER:

“It’s inviting... better balance of text and pictures”



Geffrye Museum

- *“For people with bad eyesight reading panels is a problem – you need to provide the information in a different way. I have to stand on tiptoe”*
- *“I was thinking, where does ebony come from? How did it get here? Why? How expensive was it? Who bought it?”*
- *“It doesn’t come alive for me – not enough about the people”*
- *“There’s a certain something about this museum, peace and quiet. Change has to happen, but...”*

Approach

- Main evaluation tool: focus groups
- Incorporated other elements:
 - Brainstorming on flipchart
 - Rating using sticky dots
 - Post-it feedback in gallery
 - Observation
 - Use of visual material – mock-ups, prototypes

Focus group principles

- 6-10 people, with something in common and likely to have opinions on the topic
- Last 1 to 1.5 hours
- Semi-structured using topic/question guide
- Facilitator to guide the discussion
- Someone to provide back-up
- Open-ended questions
- Data is qualitative
- Discussion can be recorded (with permission)

Recruitment

- Different target audiences recruited in different ways:
 - Families in shopping centres or at other museums
 - Adults in a neighbouring museum café
 - Teachers from existing lists held by museum
- Always invite more participants than you need
- Offer incentive, eg. cash, voucher
- Provide good refreshments before/after

Strengths

- Allows ideas to be discussed & developed
- Opportunity to clarify or probe
- Takes less time than one to one interviews
- Provides rich in-depth data (in participants' own words) which is easy to understand
- Does not presume literacy
- Builds personal relationships
- Develops support and sense of ownership
- Other techniques can be incorporated

Limitations

- Small sample size – difficult to generalise
- Time-consuming to prepare, transcribe and analyse
- Need to motivate participants to attend
- Needs skilled management – risk of one voice dominating
- Challenge of objectivity
- May raise more questions

Managing the group

- Speak their language
- Set the tone – relaxed, open and honest
- Clarify what you hear
- Follow up interesting lines of discussion
- Allow everyone to have their say
- Ensure people don't dominate/withdraw
- Encourage different viewpoints
- Manage timing
- Maintain control and focus
- Bring group back to your agenda if the discussion wanders

Analysis

- Transcribe proceedings as soon as possible
- Identify themes, patterns, issues
- Select quotes that go together – or contradict each other
- Look for surprises and challenges
- Use quotes to illustrate more general principles
- Prepare final report/presentation/summary

What we learned

- Allow plenty of time for recruitment and be creative
- Make sure the prototypes have been prepared and are suitable before organising the focus group
- Have as many formative stages as you have time and money for