TRACKING & OBSERVATION STUDIES

Why do we undertake these studies?
To obtain data about visitor behaviour in order to:
- report on program outcomes
- make changes and improvements
- compare to other exhibitions/programs
- trend analysis: over time & across programs

What do we really need to know when conducting these studies?
Broad aims:
- total time spent
- pathways/visitor flow
- demographic data - gender, age (kind of), social grouping
- key messages - are these getting across?

Specific aims:
- coverage - how thoroughly is the exhibition used?
- stops - attracting and holding power
- are exhibits used as designed/intended?
- design feedback

What will the information be used for?
- better understanding of visitor behaviour, experiences & learning (meta-evaluation)
- supplementing other research (surveys, interviews, focus groups)
- making changes to floor exhibits
- exhibition refurbishment
- signage
- fixing interactives
- pointer to further research needs

ISSUES TO CONSIDER
Preparation:
- good, clear, accurate floor plan showing key aspects of exhibit
- good quality stopwatch or watch
- photographs for visual support to findings
- Excel/other database to manage data

Process:
- ethics - privacy, notices
- getting caught - explaining
- need to be quick, accurate and concentrate

AUSTRALIAN
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Consistency:
- what counts as a stop?
- how do you define 'reading behaviour'?
- quality control
- sampling over range of times/days

Staff involvement:
- how will they support the findings?
- how to get designers on-side?
- using staff to gather data can help in this

Budget, time & human resources
- what's available?
- how to make best use of resources?
- using staff and volunteers to gather data

WHAT IS TRACKING?
- unobtrusive recording of visitor behaviour in a museum/specific exhibition, noting:
    - exhibits attended to
    - behaviour: reading, browsing, studying
    - time spent
    - pathways and flow
- starts/stops when visitors cross an 'invisible' entry and exit line

Development of tracking at Australian Museum: Two case studies
SEX exhibition (1997):
- use of interpretive strategies and time spent
- conventional format - tick box and analysed via Excel

Thylacine exhibition (2001):
- visitor pathways included
- analysed using both Excel and Adobe PhotoShop via layering technique

How did we do it?
Form:
- draw visitor path
- note stops, time and behaviour

Figure 1: Sample Tracking Form SEX Exhibition

Analysis:
- data in Excel - time, stops
- pathways layered on Abode PhotoShop:
  - grouped as heavy, moderate, light

Figure 2: Sample Charts SEX Exhibition

How they do it: Indirect
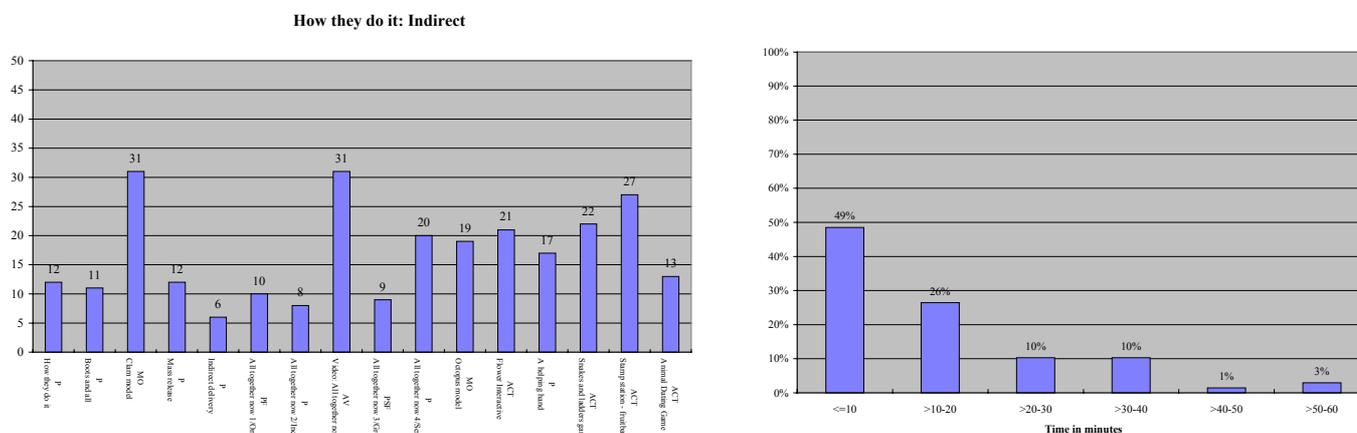
WHAT ARE OBSERVATIONS?
- systematic collection of data through watching visitors at specific parts/sections of an exhibition
- specific audiences can be researched (eg families, schools)
- generally small-scale and targeted

Observation is good ...
- when specific sections of an exhibition need to be reviewed
- when time and budget is limited
- for training purposes (staff, volunteers, students)
- for less experienced researchers

- Easy to collect, collate, analyse and report data:
  - Excel is the only tool needed!
- Also need to consider same issues as for tracking:
  - preparation, ethics, speed, consistency
- But limited as doesn't give an overall picture of visitor use

Bats **exhibition case study (2000):**
- forms used in four sections of the exhibition
- sections chosen by AMARC and Project Team
- observed 20 visitors in each section
- tick boxes where visitors stopped
- time spent in each section noted

- data analysed in Excel
- able to show which exhibits were attractive, how the written material was used, lighting and flow issues

Figure 3: Sample Observation Form Bats Exhibition

Figure 4: Sample Charts Bats Exhibition
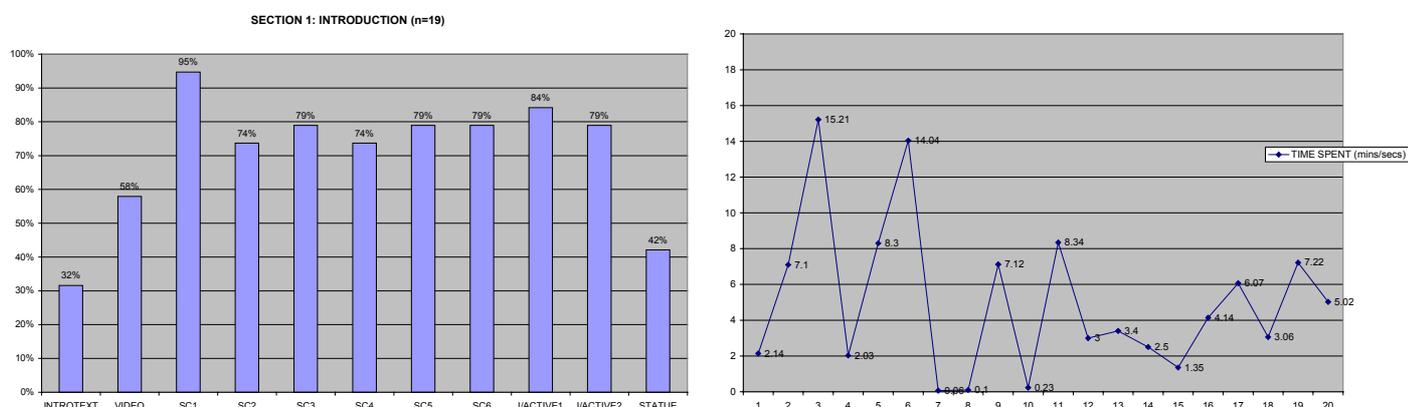
USEFUL READINGS

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