

8 steps to successful Marketing



1. **Identify your overall aims** e.g. to preserve and present a museum collection. Your aims will probably already be included in your forward plan.
2. **Identify your market**, including your existing visitors and any potential markets you could target. Information can be gathered from the results of external research, from visitor surveys and from analysing your existing visitor data.
3. **Review the services you are offering.** How well do they suit the market you have identified? For example, you might need to add to your interpretation, change your opening hours or reduce your charges for group visits. An objective review by an outsider can be helpful.
4. **Set specific objectives**, for example to attract 5000 visitors or to increase shop sales by 5%. Be realistic – failing to reach high targets can damage morale and your reputation.
5. **Set a budget for marketing.** A standard figure is 10-15% of admissions income but many small museums spend far less than this. Even if your budget is small, you need to know what it is.
6. **Plan your marketing.** The plan does not need to be long. It should set out how you plan to use your budget and any free resources to achieve your objectives. It will make it much easier to find out how well your marketing works.
7. **Promote your attraction** using the methods and timings decided in the plan plus any ad hoc opportunities which arise.
8. **Monitor how well it works.** Check ongoing visitor numbers and attendance at special events and change your plan if necessary. Review overall performance at the end of the year and use the results to inform the next plan. One way to compare annual performance is to calculate the admissions income or net profit earned for each pound spent on marketing.

Free marketing!

There are a number of effective ways of marketing your site that are either free or relatively low cost. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of each are listed below. Two separate handouts cover the importance of the visitor experience and websites.

Media coverage

- Free
- More likely to be read than adverts
- Good way to reach the local market but also opportunity in special interest publications
- Some control over content and timing, particularly in local press
- Opportunity of photo inclusion
- Best linked to an event or story
- Opportunities on local radio e.g. MFR's free community event announcements

Posters

- Relatively cheap to produce
- Can be produced to good quality in house
- Good for events
- Good in TICs/other attractions
- Short lifespan but easy to replace

Guidebooks (e.g. Rough Guide)

- Inclusion is free
- The writer's opinions can be very helpful as long as they are positive
- Large possibly international circulation
- No control over what is written – it might be uncomplimentary

Tourist brochures

- Most effective marketing method in HOST survey after word of mouth
- Printed in large numbers – wide circulation and usually free to visitors
- Basic line entries are usually minimal but low cost and good value
- Adverts are expensive
- Long lead time
- No control over format or quality
- Many different ones produced – probably best to stick to mainstream such as VisitScotland area guides

Direct approach to groups (schools, community and niche groups)

- Low cost – takes time rather than money
- Should generate continuing business
- Some groups will need tailored visits and supporting materials
- Contributes to word of mouth effect

Free marketing The visitor!

Visitor satisfaction

Research shows that previous personal experience is the single most important factor in influencing a decision to visit. Visitors who have an enjoyable and satisfying visit will return themselves and will generate new visitors by recommending you to their family and friends. This outperforms any other form of advertising. It is therefore essential to provide the best service you can to all visitors.

The level of repeat visits to the Highlands is very high, with an average of seven visits over a ten year period. For visitors from other parts of Scotland it is even higher. If they enjoyed their previous visit, visitors will return to your attraction. To keep them coming back you need to provide new interest along with the old favourites. This does not have to be costly. It could be in the form of:

- Temporary exhibitions
- Other new things to look at such as folders of old photos
- New ways of looking at what is already there such as quizzes or treasure hunts
- Talks, guided walks, a look behind the scenes
- Events such as demonstrations of crafts or cooking
- Personal interaction with volunteers. Don't underestimate the value of this – for some visitors it will be the most memorable and meaningful part of their visit

Get local accommodation providers on your side by inviting them in for a glass of wine at the start of the season, giving them a free tour and a poster or leaflets. You need them to recommend you to all their guests.

Know your market

A tired old phrase but entirely true in view of what we have seen above. You cannot be confident of providing your visitors with an enjoyable experience if you don't know anything about them. Excellent free sources of information include a large scale survey of visitors to the Highlands carried out for HOST and others in 2002/3. You can download it here: http://www.visitscotland.org/research_and_statistics/regional_facts_and_figures/highlands_index/highlands_of_scotland_host_visitorsurvey0203.htm

This includes summary information for the Highlands as a whole and by area. The main findings for the Highlands were:

- 74% of visitors were aged 35 or over

- 81% were travelling without children
- 78% were on holiday, 11% visiting family or friends, 8% on a day trip, 3% on business
- On average it was their 7th visit within 10 years. Scottish visitors had visited more than 12 times in 10 years
- 39% were from Scotland, 37% from England, 23% from overseas of whom the largest groups were from Germany (5%) and USA (4%)

You should supplement this general background with information about your own visitors. A list of things you should try and find out is on a separate handout. Surveys can be done:

- By staff or volunteers at the reception desk
- By a volunteer or student at the exit
- By leaving forms for visitors to fill in themselves

However you gather the information you need to do something with it once you have it – analyse and use the surveys, don't just file them away. Other useful sources of information about your visitors are visitors' books, comments to staff and volunteers, and observing visitor behaviour.

If there are people you would like to attract but they are not visiting, you need to try and find out why. This is more difficult than tackling your visitors, but if you are hoping to get more young people in, for example, making contact with local youth groups can be a way of beginning to make connections and find out what might work for this market.

Suggested marketing survey questions

Number of people in the party, split by age range

Where do they live?

Where have they come from today?

If not local, why are they visiting the area? (e.g. holiday, business, visiting friends)

Have they visited the area before?

Have they visited the museum before?

How did they hear about the museum? (might be multiple answers)

How long did they spend looking round?

What did they think of the? (e.g. shop, displays, temporary exhibition etc)

What did they enjoy most?

What did they like least?

Do they have any suggestions for changes or improvements?

Would they come back for another visit?

Would they recommend the museum to others?

Free marketing

The amazing worldwide web!

Although websites are rarely completely free to set up and host, they are very cheap considering the number of people they can reach. Nothing else has the potential to put you in touch with so many people in so many places. It is worth spending a little extra to make sure your site is really good – which doesn't necessarily mean it has to be super clever and complicated. Think about your own use of the internet. You don't need to be a technical expert to recognise the qualities of a good website:

- Up-to-date – old news isn't news
- Clearly structured information
- Information provided at the right level
- Straightforward navigation
- Good balance of text and images
- Attractive appearance
- Rapid page loading
- No gimmicks

If your site lacks these qualities it might actually put people off and therefore be worse than no website at all.

You need to make sure your site is linked as widely as possible to other relevant sites. As well as bringing extra users this will help your ranking with the search engines. Links are free but sometimes need to be reciprocal. If you search the internet as if you were a potential visitor to the area you will turn up lots of suitable sites, for example:

- Local accommodation providers and businesses
- Other local attractions
- Community/area sites e.g. www.caithness.org, www.tain.org.uk, www.mackaycountry.com
- Niche sites related to your activities e.g. www.scottishroots.com, www.scottishgeology.com, www.clansinclair.org
- Wikipedia and other reference sites – there are bound to be articles related to your location or something you do.

There are also sites where you can have a section or entry. You have to pay for VisitScotland and some other commercial tourist information sites, but some sites do offer a free presence. Examples are www.heritagenorth.org.uk which will give you a free page, and www.ambaile.org.uk which will pay the cost of digitising material from your collection to go into their digital collection. You can get a page on their site and a link to your own.

Any organisation you belong to will probably have a website which includes a list of members with links, but sites such as these, for example the Museums Galleries Scotland website, are less likely to be visited by members of the public.

Top 5 marketing tips

These are common-sense tips based on rules of thumb from marketing expert Michael Reilly:

- Everything you do communicates. Your visitors will react to every aspect of the museum – the atmosphere, the state of the loos, the bags you use in the shop, as well as the displays themselves. All of these therefore need to be attended to so that they are right for your visitors.
- Word of mouth is critical. Your visitors **must** leave with a good impression.
- You never get a second chance to make a first impression. If your site looks uncared for or your staff are offhand, this will put visitors in a negative frame of mind which is hard to overcome.
- Publicity is important. You need people to hear about you. This will reinforce other forms of marketing. Media content is more effective for this than advertising.
- Keep it simple. You only need to see a leaflet rack to be aware of the clutter in the promotional environment. Develop a message that can be communicated clearly and simply to the target market or it will get lost in the background noise.