

Know your visitors

Do you know who comes to your museum and why? Do you know who doesn't come to your museum and why not? Knowing your visitors is an essential part of building your audience and planning your services.

What do you know ...?

... about your current visitors?

- How many visitors come to your museum?
- At what hour and on which day do most visitors come?
- How long do they stay?
- Where are your visitors from?
- Why do they visit?
- Do they come alone or with others?
- Do they bring their children?
- What parts of the museum do they visit?
- What do they enjoy the most?
- How much money, if any, do they spend?
- How do they rate your museum?
- Will they recommend your museum to others?
- Are they likely to return?

... about your potential visitors?

- Who are the people who could visit but don't?
- What are their perceptions (positive and negative) of your museum?
- What might you do to attract them to return or visit for the first time?

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The need to *know*



THE MORE YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR VISITORS, THE MORE EFFECTIVELY YOU WILL PROMOTE YOUR MUSEUM OR ART GALLERY.

You can improve your exhibitions, public programmes and customer services and market them much more effectively if you know who your visitors are, what they want, what their interests are, and what they like, and dislike, about your exhibitions and activities. Having this valuable information in hand makes it a lot easier to improve their experience at your place and their desire to return.

Finding out

You can learn a lot about your visitors simply by ensuring that your paid staff and volunteers talk to them during their visit, finding out where they come from and how they enjoyed their visit.

But to achieve a more detailed and accurate picture you will need to:

- monitor your visitor numbers
- undertake formal visitor surveys.

See *Introduction to Visitor Surveys* (Te Papa National Services Resource Guides Issue 4) for guidance on how to devise, conduct, process and report visitor surveys.

What the *numbers say*

Counting your visitors

The first step in knowing your visitors is to establish and record the numbers. How many people visit your museum? You can find this out through ticket sales or by manual or electronic counting. Whatever your counting system, it needs to be accurate.

Make sure that your system:

- counts visitors rather than staff
- counts all visitors including children
- covers all entrances or exits
- counts nobody twice
- operates reliably.

Ideally, the system will be able to provide you with hourly, daily and weekly figures.

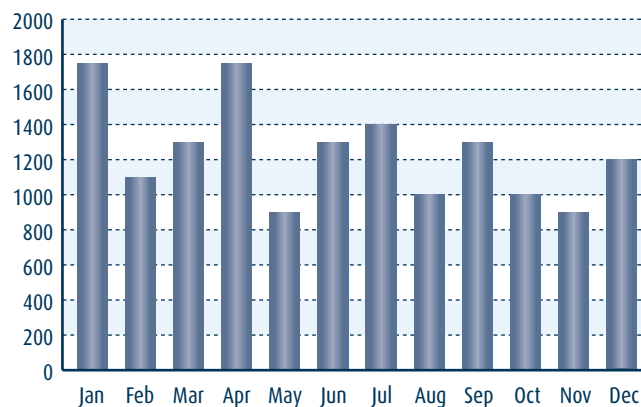
Attendance patterns

Once you have your visitor numbers, you can graph them into hourly, daily, weekly, monthly and yearly formats and look at the trends over time. Using the graphs, you can then check for patterns of attendance. Here are some examples of questions you can ask:

- Are visitor numbers increasing, decreasing or staying the same?
- What are the peaks and troughs in visitor numbers?
- Do events or seasonal effects explain these patterns?
- What affects visitor numbers most?

A sample record

Here is a bar graph of visitor numbers for a hypothetical New Zealand museum over the period of a year. You could use a similar model to graph your own monthly figures.



Visitor numbers to a New Zealand museum

Points to note

- Visitor numbers are high in January (when there are holidays) and again in April (when there is Easter and school holidays).
- The numbers drop in October and November (maybe as school visits drop away and people focus on winding up their year and gearing up for Christmas).
- Wintry July is still high because of the effect of school holidays, and the museum can be a warm place for a family visit at that time.
- It is not immediately clear why May should have such low visitation.

The **visitor** *profile*

More than numbers

THE BETTER YOU KNOW YOUR VISITORS, THE BETTER YOU CAN ADJUST YOUR EXPERIENCES FOR THEM AND PLAN AND INVEST IN NEW ONES.

To know your visitors well, you will need more than just numbers. You will also need a detailed description that will give you a profile of:

- who they are and where they come from
- when they come to visit
- what they do during their visit
- why they visit - what motivates them to come, what they want from their visit.

Who visits?

The demographics

Obtaining a wide range of information about visitors is helpful for planning purposes. Key demographics include their age, gender, education, occupation, household structure, family structure, income, ethnicity and place of origin.

From this, you can build a profile of your overall audience. What is the age or ethnic mix of your visitors? Is there any gender imbalance? What is their purchasing power?

Who do your visitors come with? Do they visit on their own or with others? How many families visit with young children? How many adult groups visit? Do you have tour groups? How many school groups visit?

Where do they come from?

A very important demographic is your visitors' place of origin. What proportion are local, regional, national or international in origin? What parts of the country and what urban areas do your New Zealand visitors come from?

Your local visitors

Knowing the potential local visitor market may reveal opportunities that you are currently missing out on. Are there any unusual demographics in your area that you may not be aware of? Otago, for example, has a high proportion of full-time tertiary students during the academic year, and the lowest proportion of Māori of any part of New Zealand. Waikato, on the other hand has a very youthful population with a high proportion of Māori.

What are some of the defining characteristics of your region? Statistics New Zealand can provide you with Regional Profiles based on the latest census data. You will find these useful in understanding your potential local and domestic market.

Who, when, what and why? These questions can provide you with valuable market intelligence on your visitors.

Your international visitors

International visitors make an impact on quite a few New Zealand museums. What are their numbers, proportions and trends at your museum? When are the seasonal peaks and troughs? Compare your visitor figures with the latest New Zealand tourist statistics for your area - these are available from Statistics New Zealand (see their website: www.stats.govt.nz) and from local tourism organisations.

Other sources of information

There may be other sources of visitor information you can take advantage of - people you know who have done visitor research in your region, or websites. Local government, university or other research agencies are other good sources.

Profiling your international visitors

Look at the following example of tourist numbers to New Zealand in 1999. Peak numbers occurred from November to March (winter in the northern hemisphere). December 1999 also coincided with The America's Cup. The trough was from May to August 2000 which was also the peak of the northern summer.

Month (1999)	Number of visitors
January	156,600
February	169,117
March	145,444
April	121,628
May	89,780
June	87,527
July	111,832
August	104,026
September	114,283
October	132,888
November	168,924
December	205,392

You can take a similar approach in profiling domestic tourists. Think how you can appeal to and accommodate the different visitor types.

Arrange with a backpacker bus or hostel operator to deliver young travellers to your museum. Welcome them with a snack, fruit or wine experience.

International visitors to New Zealand in 1999 (Statistics New Zealand)

Information on where tourists are from is vital in knowing how to respond to the needs and the typical visiting behaviour of different nationalities. In the above example 22% of the international visitors in this period were from Australia, 14% from the USA, 14% from Japan and 10% from the UK.

You will want to know the tourist figures for your region. Where do most international visitors to your region come from? What is the purpose of their visit? How long do they stay in your region for? How many nights do they stay? Where do they stay? Which international visitors come your way - or to key destinations close to you?

International visitors can be categorised into different lifestyle and travel groupings - for example, there are backpackers, people on package tours, independent travellers, each with their own interests, needs and characteristics.

Consider changing rather than increasing your opening hours.

When do they visit?

Knowing when your visitors visit is also very important.

- Does your visitor mix change with the seasons?
- Does the mix change during holiday periods? At weekends? At different times of day?

What is the frequency of visitation? That is, how many visitors of what kind do you get each day, each week, each month, each year? Plot this information over time to see how successful or not you have been in attracting your visitors.

What do they do during their visit?

Knowing your visitors' behaviour includes finding out such things as the places they go during their visit, the museum activities they select, their style of participation, and their purchasing behaviour.

With this kind of information you are able to assess the impact of your exhibits and museum, and design and adjust your visitor experience accordingly.

Why do they visit?

WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR VISITORS TO VISIT?

Understand your visitors' preferences and needs. Attract visitors by meeting those needs.

What do you know about your visitors' attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and stated interests? Which visitor groups have special interests or tastes? What do they want to see? How educated or informed do your visitors seem to be? What do different visitors buy in your shop? What things do they take the most interest in, ask about, complain about, praise? What does this say about their motivations, attitudes and beliefs, opinions, interests? What else do visitors do at your museum? What attracted them there in the first place?

Your visitors and potential visitors are very diverse and have very different needs. For example:

- If they are in full-time paid employment, they will probably only have time to visit on weekends or during holidays and they will have many other things competing for their time. They will visit for a particular exhibition or programme.
- If they are teachers bringing students to your museum, they will only visit during term time, during school hours. They may have to demonstrate that the visit is of educational value and that the programme or exhibition has clearly defined curriculum links. Also, some terms are better than others for school visits.

Ideally, what you offer school groups should assist with their year's curriculum.

Customer categories

Your challenge could be to attract categories of people who may not traditionally think of visiting a museum.

Here are some categories that marketing companies use to get a better understanding of what people do and why they do it. They are matched with some of the reasons that people give for participating in their favourite leisure activities. They can provide you with a useful tool for researching visitor behaviour.

Ask your visitors which of the following statements best represents them.

- **Intellectual challenger** - 'I will have the opportunity to learn something new.'
- **Treasure hunter** - 'I would have the opportunity to see something rare.'
- **Physical challenger** - 'I will be doing something that is physically challenging.'
- **Trend setter** - 'I can be part of something that is new and "cutting edge".'
- **Escapist** - 'It will require little effort and I won't have to think or do anything.'
- **Follower** - 'I can get to meet people and feel part of the group.'
- **Immersionist** - 'I will feel like I'm in another time, place or culture.'
- **Team player** - 'I can join in and play a team sport or game.'

From their answer, you can track which type of visitor you are attracting. For the typical museum, the 'intellectual challengers', 'treasure hunters' and 'immersionists' are the kinds who most regularly visit.

Visitor surveys

You can get detailed visitor profiles by conducting surveys. These involve having an interviewer (a paid staff member or volunteer) undertake a short face-to-face interview with selected visitors. The interview consists of all those who, what, where, when and why questions you want to ask your visitor about their visit.

Key features of this kind of visitor survey are that:

- it is standardised (you ask everyone the same questions)
- interviews takes place after the visit (exit interviews)
- it is representative (based on a random sample).

See *Introduction to Visitor Surveys* (Te Papa National Services Resource Guides Issue 4) for an example of such a questionnaire.

A representative sample

To ensure that the final sample is as representative as possible, the interviews need to be done randomly. For example, you might decide to choose every nth (say, 20th) person leaving the museum. Or it might be the first person who leaves at regular set times, say, every half-hour.

A comment on comment cards

Comments cards can provide useful information from your visitors, but you cannot guarantee that the results will be representative. Only people who are motivated to fill them out will participate. The best information about your visitors will always come from a representative sampling procedure such as described above.

Putting it all together

COMBINING YOUR VISITOR NUMBERS AND VISITOR PROFILE INFORMATION GIVES YOU THE BEST ANALYSIS AND PLANNING INFORMATION POSSIBLE.

For example, if you know that 10,000 people visited your museum in July, and your visitor profile tells you that 25% of your randomly sampled visitors in that month were in a family group, then you know that approximately 2500 of your visitors were in that category.

Visitor information such as this informs and drives decisions about:

- better communications and marketing
- enhancement of your museum experience
- enhancement of your products and facilities
- enhancement of the ways in which your museum experience is delivered (for example, through better customer service standards, better exhibition design standards, better interpretative strategies and better pricing policies).

Accurate visitor information will put you in a much better position to meet visitor needs. It can help remove barriers to people visiting by making it more desirable for them to visit and easier for them to do this.

Using your **visitor**

information

- examples

Good research opens your eyes.

Research and decision-making

Put your audience at the centre of your decision-making. You may find it opens your eyes to all kinds of new opportunities. Here are examples of the ways in which accurate information from your visitor research can contribute to decision-making.

Timing

When should you present an exhibition, event or programme? At what time of day? What days of the week? In what weeks or months? Will the length of time required to view it fit well with your target audience? How could you increase your visitor numbers during your quiet times and in your off-season? With school groups or locals?

Target audience

What sort of visitor or group will most like the exhibition? Why? Should it be targeted to appeal to school groups, and if so what curriculum and age? Does the target audience head your way anyway, or will it take a lot to bring them in?

If the emphasis of the exhibition is changed, could it appeal to a larger or more constant stream of visitors - or an entirely different sort of visitor? Could it be made to appeal to the sort of people who visit other tourist attractions in the area, or who will be coming to a large event?

Exhibition content

Will visitors be interested in what you would like to present? What aspects of the topic will fascinate them most? Could your content be linked to an external event that will be bringing people to your area?

Presentation, style and interpretation

Should you use a slide-show or a video? Should you have an lecture or a more interactive programme? Is the content too simplistic - or too complex - for your main audience?

Services and facilities

Would tour operators be attracted by a café or a larger bus parking area? Should your signage or labels appear in different languages? If so, which ones? Do visitors want inexpensive snacks? Should they be greeted and shown where to go?

Marketing and communication

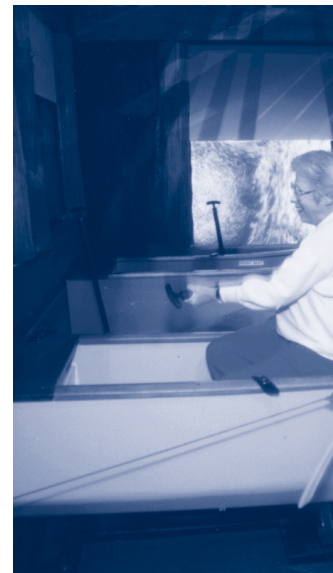
Does your target audience read the local newspaper? Do they make their choices at the local Visitor Information Centre? What do they know of your museum? Are you listed in major tourism publications, pamphlets, on the internet? What's the most effective way to reach the target audience you have in mind? Have you asked tour operators and your competition what they're planning, so can you work in with them?

Value for money

How much value are you providing for your visitors? Is your exhibit unique or the same as everyone else's? What benefits are visitors getting apart from the exhibits themselves? How much time does the typical visitor spend with you? How does your museum stack up against other entertainment options? What do they charge?

The best market may not be the mass market.

'It's ages since this was last displayed' is not a good reason to develop an exhibition.



Building your visitor numbers

Look again at your attendance graph. Where are the peaks? Can they be increased even more - or sustained longer? What are the low times?

Here is one example of a sequence of things to think about in boosting your attendance.

- **Events and highlights**

Are there any big events in your area at the time you wish to promote your events or exhibition? Any public or school holidays? What season is it?

- **The best target**

Who is most likely to want to visit you at those times? What is a key group you would like to target? Adjust your timing as required.

- **The interests of your target**

Now you've identified your target, what sort of content or activities would interest them most? Who can you ask to learn more about their interests?

- **The content**

You don't necessarily have to develop something new. You might just target groups and communicate with them differently - perhaps by highlighting different features for different people or putting a new spin on an existing exhibition or programme or product.

You may choose to develop something entirely new - an exhibition or programme or product that reflects the skills, collections and knowledge you have at your site.

Once you may come up with a feasible exhibition or event, how then can you check that the idea will work for the groups you are aiming at?

- **Promotion**

How will you tell the key groups about this great new show? How do they pick up on what's worth visiting? In ways that need a special approach from you?

Broadening your opportunities

Here is an example of how to use knowledge of your visitors to tune an event to a wider audience.

Native Flora and Fauna: A Lecture Wednesday 16 February 3.30 - 5.30pm

This event has been advertised by an A4 flyer on the noticeboard at the museum's entrance and enthusiastically promoted verbally by information desk staff. You have some questions about it.

Who is this for?

- Who is available on Wednesday afternoons, 3.30 - 5.30pm?
- Who is being communicated with?
- Who is interested in native plants and insects?
- Who would enjoy the delivery in a lecture format?

How could you broaden the potential audience?

- Change the timing?
- Change where and how it is promoted?
- Change the delivery format?
- Change the content?

Put a bump in place of that slump.

If most visitors are locals, perhaps you should change exhibitions and organise events more often to keep them coming back.



Using your **visitor**

information

- case studies

Seeing a 'win' in winter

In winter - especially on weekdays - things were much too quiet at the New Zealand Marine Studies Centre and its aquarium at Portobello. Domestic and international visitors are scarce in the Dunedin winter.

But the NZMSC saw an opportunity in this. Mothers' groups could bring toddlers and almost have the place to themselves. The kids wouldn't be crowded out as they reached into shallow tanks to touch sea anemones. Entertainment could be provided. Mums could have coffee together. The message went out on desktop-published A4 sheets.

At the same time, the NZMSC reached out to the seniors' scenic drive market. They joined up with the nearby Otago Peninsula Museum, the Royal Albatross Centre and historic Fletcher House to produce a pamphlet called 'Brighten up Your Winter'. This pointed out how there are few crowds in winter, seniors' groups would get more attention from staff, and these attractions are all indoors. The pamphlet suggested a day-trip itinerary, with an estimated time spent at each stop.

Even in the first few months of this promotion, the NZMSC was surprised at the increased number of group bookings, which extended beyond the winter season too. They believe the flyers contributed to their local profile and provided an added incentive for local visitors. The Centre also sent out a letter with the winter field trip brochure to walking groups and had two groups come as a result.

An unexpected benefit of the cooperative marketing was the way barriers were broken down between the various Peninsula attractions - they all started to exchange information and gather ideas from each other. The network is now planning further joint promotions and revenue generation initiatives, supported by National Services.



Museums ask the community

Hutt Valley's Dowse Art Museum and Petone Settlers Museum decided to find out what local people really wanted from their museums. In 1999, they joined forces through a partnership project with National Services and asked locals directly - in all eight wards of Hutt City.

Eight community-based discussion groups, including two representing the local Māori and Pacific Island communities, each met for two hours with an experienced researcher. These focus groups led to the development of a questionnaire. This was then used to interview 293 people face-to-face throughout the city. Each interview took about fifteen minutes.

The museums asked about peoples' ethnic origins, age, income, spending on entertainment, awareness of and expectations of each institution, barriers to visiting (for example, unsuitable opening hours, lack of parking, ignorance of what's on, expensive refreshments), and levels of interest in a range of potential experiences in museums. They asked how people decided to spend their leisure time - what was the relative importance of fun and entertainment, or doing things with friends and family, or cost, or personal interests. Some questions were open-ended: 'If you were planning an exhibition, what would it be?'



The Hutt community made plain how keen it was to be involved in the process of developing exhibitions. New shows are now aimed at new community audiences - especially youth.

Some results

The Dowse noted that many people wanted outside events for the family rather than the more conventional static gallery and museum exhibitions. In 1999, they ran the Respect Festival with hip-hop, local graffiti artists and local musicians in an event that drew 7500 people to a Saturday concert - and 3500 people through the Dowse in a single day (compared with usual Saturday figures of 350). It was a whole new audience and it won a Creative Places award. It was repeated in 2000 and the Dowse linked it to exhibitions and workshops by a young Samoan painter, and work by a Samoan carver and traditional Māori weavers.

Throughout 2000 the Dowse ran Dob in an Artist - encouraging local people to supply names and addresses of local creative people. Then in October 2000 they opened The Home Fire - an exhibition of local artists, ranging from those known across the nation to those known only to a street of their Naenae neighbours. The Home Fire included work from Cloud 9 and Avalon Studios in the Hutt and from prison and mental health facilities. It was linked to an outdoor event - King Toyota Wild Wheels - which saw local people decorating vehicles. Director Tim Walker was delighted at the way it engendered huge pride and interest across the community.

Working with community groups

Two hits for the price of one

As in the above case study, working with others in your local community can help you increase your visitation. There may be groups or organisations already working with your desired target audience. They have access to the people you want to come to your museum.

These groups or organisations may have a better understanding of the issues important to your target audiences. They will help you approach issues from a different, often broader, perspective rather than the perspective of your particular collection. Other groups have their own marketing networks. You get two hits for the price of one.

Glossary

Demographic A statistical characteristic of a human population

Exit interview An interview that takes place as the respondent leaves the site

Focus group A group brought together for discussion of an issue being researched

Representative sample A range of survey respondents which accurately represents a particular audience

Standardised interview An interview in which the same questions are asked in the same format

Further reading

Dickman, S. (1995). *The Marketing Mix: Promoting Museums, Galleries and Exhibitions*. Melbourne: Museums Australia. (An easily-read, practical 130-page book, available from National Services.)

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (2001). 'Introduction to Visitor Surveys'. Te Papa National Services Resource Guides 4. (This describes methods of conducting and processing a visitor survey, and includes a sample visitor questionnaire.)

Statistics New Zealand (1995). *A Guide to Good Survey Design*. Wellington: Department of Statistics. (A good reference guide which takes you through the nuts and bolts of a survey project.)

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