

Customer Focus in Design and Communications in a Major Project



Quality
The New Zealand Way

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Abstract

Te Papa, New Zealand's new national museum has enjoyed phenomenal public success since opening in early 1998. For the last five years, of the ten-year development, an evaluation programme has supported management decisions and recent findings indicate that the public are delighted with their experiences as visitors. In a city of some 350,000 residents, Te Papa drew more than a million visits in the first six months.

This paper summarises the evaluations carried out at Te Papa during its development and focuses on the Post Occupancy Evaluations, which were commissioned to learn about customers' experiences through their eyes. They enabled priorities to be developed for fine-tuning building features, visitor communications and museum operations.

Three Post Occupancy Evaluations were conducted at Te Papa. The first study brought visitors through the museum two months before opening and resulted in 32 fine tuning modifications, which were implemented before opening day. After ten years of development, this study gave the first glimpse of customers' reactions to the full Te Papa experience and the study was described as being "... central to the success that followed the opening day." The next two Post Occupancy Evaluations examined front-of-house and back-of-house areas some 6 months after opening day. These studies also led to recommendations for further fine-tuning, particularly in visitor communications, management and for planning changes to an off site facility.

Evaluation has been instrumental in delivering excellence in visitor experience at Te Papa.

Introduction

The development of New Zealand's new national museum building and exhibitions spanned more than a decade and incorporated a programme of evaluation for the exhibitions. Two months prior to the opening of Te Papa, a Post Occupancy Evaluation was conducted. The Post Occupancy Evaluation gave the Te Papa Senior Management Team their first glimpse of customers' reactions to the entire museum experience. The results indicated that customers enjoyed positive visitor experiences and had strong appreciation for the museum exhibitions. In associated surveys 98% said that they would revisit Te Papa and 98% said that they would recommend Te Papa to friends. The Post Occupancy Evaluation report included 32 fine-tuning recommendations, which were all implemented by the opening day.

Six months after opening, customers participated in the second study was carried out for a team that was set up specifically to look at visitor communications. The second evaluation drew an even more positive reaction. In one gallery (which displays geological and natural environment exhibits) participants made no negative comments whatsoever. It was indicative of the staff commitment to quality that they made several suggestions for improvement beyond this extremely high standard perceived by customers. This second Post Occupancy Evaluation contained recommendations for improvements to a café, changing expectations about wayfinding and helping customers understand museum policies and practices.

Post Occupancy Evaluation was implemented a third time eight months after the museum opened. It was a review of the back-of-house accommodation aimed at making fine tuning adjustments to the building and the way it is used. The evaluation was also commissioned to help co-ordinate with some changes to an off-site storage facility highlight for repetition and weaknesses to be avoided.



Te Papa

New Zealand's first national museum was the Colonial Museum in a small wooden building, in behind Parliament. It was established by the government do document the resources of the newly (re)discovered land and opened its doors in 1865. In 1929 the government passed legislation that provided for a National Museum, Art Gallery and a carillon as a memorial to the dead of World War I and the building to house these institutions opened in Wellington in 1936.

The Project Development Board for Te Papa (the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) was established in 1988 and former New Zealand Prime Minister, Sir Wallace Rowling, led the team. His vision was that the museum should reflect the spirit and life of the nation, and that the exhibitions should collect and preserve the images of the past, because New Zealanders should be proud of their history, which forms a foundation both for the present and for the future. Cheryl Sotheran was appointed as the first chief executive in 1993. The architectural firm, Jasmax was selected from an international competition to design the building. With a floor area of 33,000 m² and cost of \$317,000,000 Te Papa is one of New Zealand's most significant public buildings. The old museum closed in April 1996 and on 14 February 1998 Te Papa opened.

Te Papa Aims

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa is a forum for the nation to present, explore and preserve the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order to better understand and treasure the past, enrich the present and meet the challenges of the future. Te Papa has the following corporate principles:

1. Te Papa is bicultural: Te Papa provides an environment where both Maori and Pakeha cultures can work co-operatively to achieve the Museum's mission.
2. Te Papa is customer focussed: The needs and expectations of the customer are put first and Te Papa will earn an international reputation for services and visitor satisfaction.
3. Te Papa speaks with the authority that arises from scholarship and matauranga Maori: all of Te Papa's activities will be underpinned by scholarship and matauranga Maori, [knowledge and understand founded on tikanga/Maori custom, culture and protocol]
4. Te Papa is commercially positive: Te Papa will offer a range of charged-for experiences and products designed to enhance the visitor experience and contribute to the financial viability of the museum. All activities will be conducted in a business -like manner.
5. Te Papa is a Waharoa: Te Papa is both an entryway to New Zealand and a catalyst for New Zealanders to explore and study their cultural identity and natural heritage through stories and objects.



Te Papa Evaluation and Visitor and Market Research

An evaluation and visitor and market research team was part of Te Papa's integrated development programme to deliver the optimum visitor experience. The evaluation function of this team played an important role in exhibition development; balancing customer focus with other corporate aims. As well as developing exhibitions, evaluation is now employed to better understand the total visitor experience.

Exhibitions for the new museum went through seven prescribed stages of development, each of which was subject to review and approval. The Exhibitions Committee of the Senior Management Team gave final approval for each exhibition. All exhibitions were subject to audience evaluation and value management. The exhibition development process and selected exhibitions under went periodic international peer review.

Exhibition teams worked to an exhibition planning manual, which broke the planning process down into seven planning stages. Evaluation was incorporated into this planning process:

1. Concept Description

Initial ideas are developed and a concept description document is produced.

2. Concept Development

The concept description and storyline for the exhibition are developed and front-end evaluation occurs.

3. Preliminary Design

Concept developers, interpreters and designers begin to make decisions about how the exhibition story will be presented. Formative evaluation tests initial design ideas.

4. Developed Design

The exhibition team develops the details of decisions made at the Concept Design stage. Formative evaluation can also be applied at this phase.

5. Documented Design

Final documentation of the exhibition design is completed.

6. Construction and Installation

The exhibition is built and tested using pre-opening trials.

7. Post-opening Remedial and Summative Evaluation

After the exhibition opens to the public remedial evaluation is used to guide fine-tuning of the exhibition experience and summative evaluation is conducted to test the exhibition against its stated objectives.

In addition to this exhibition evaluation programme, Te Papa management decided to consider visitors' experiences prior to opening and commissioned the Post Occupancy Evaluation.



Post Occupancy Evaluation

The Government Architect established a Post Occupancy Evaluation programme for public buildings in the late 1970s before his Ministry of Works and Development was dissolved in major state sector reforms. The initial effect of the reforms have been associated with a reduction in building evaluation but customer service attitudes in the early 1990s generated a requirement for accountability for the quality of design. Post Occupancy Evaluation was refocused on the quality issues it addresses (Mulligan and Watson 1990). During the 1990s C Watson Consultancy Ltd developed the methods and applied them in a wide variety of government and commercial buildings in Australasia.

Te Papa Post Occupancy Evaluation

Te Papa commissioned three Post Occupancy Evaluations in support of its aims to be customer focussed and commercially positive. The evaluations were:

1. Two months before opening to check that a decade of planning and construction would generate the intended customers' experiences.
2. Six months after opening for the front-of-house Post Occupancy Evaluation commissioned for fine tuning in general and particularly for visitor communications.

3. Eight months after opening for the back-of-house Post Occupancy Evaluation involving staff and it was commissioned for fine tuning the building and co-ordinating briefing for design of another off-site storage building.

The evaluations incorporate the views of visitors and staff. They evaluate the building in touring walkthrough interviews and their findings become the basis of recommendations to improve influences on the visitors' experiences. Improvements include communications and interpretation, facilities, services and design. The results of the Post Occupancy Evaluation confirmed and expanded on other visitor research conducted, such as exit interviews and focus groups. The evaluation information is in a form that both identifies the perceived strengths and weaknesses and stimulates action to make any adjustments to the subject buildings.

In accordance with the general requirements for accountability, Post Occupancy Evaluation recommendations are been presented with "transparent" logic. Participant comments are recorded verbatim or paraphrased and are treated as "evidence" from which recommendations are developed. The report format provides for review of the full basis of recommendations and further inquiries with the participants if necessary. Any opinions about the building offered by the evaluator are made explicit and recorded with participants' findings.

Recommendations developed from Post Occupancy Evaluations are generally of three types: firstly, for fine tuning minor items immediately; secondly for deferred changes; and thirdly, for focused study of complex design and/or management issues.



Conclusion

Te Papa positioned itself to deliver outstanding customer experiences. A key to delivering these experiences was informing managers about potential visitors' reactions to exhibition concepts within the social and spatial context of a museum visit.

Te Papa's evaluation programme guided exhibition development and influenced the culture of Te Papa to make staff more aware of the diversity of the potential audience, their needs, their attitudes and opinions and their likely responses. The impact of the in-house evaluation team has changed attitudes towards evaluation: from resisting evaluation to initiating it.

The Post Occupancy Evaluation enabled senior management to open Te Papa with confidence that customers' would react very positively to the museum experience. In Te Papa's first year, it has made further improvements on the basis of Post Occupancy Evaluation, customer satisfaction and visitor profile monitoring. While customers already enjoy their experiences, evaluation provides a tool for Te Papa to identify further opportunities to delight their customers.



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