



Usually the exhibits with the highest “load” are the interactive ones that require mind and physical coordination – more thought process (and easier mental fatigue), and the low load exhibits are the more passive ones, such as flat work graphics, collections behind glass, paintings, etc.

When you are planning how your interpretive exhibits will work with visitors, here are some of the “exhibit contact steps” that occur:

First – exhibits must have ATTRACTION POWER.

This means that when a visitor walks into an exhibit gallery or room and scans the exhibits, there has to be something in the exhibit (provocative header, powerful graphics, interesting artefacts, etc.) that will draw or attract the visitor to that exhibit.

Second – comes HOLDING POWER

The exhibit has enough material (copy, artefacts, content, etc.) that once the visitor sees the exhibit up close, they are provoked or curious about it enough to stay and spend more time with it.

Third – ENGAGEMENT POWER

There is enough curiosity raised (holding power) that the visitor is willing to follow through and read label copy, do the hands on activity, watch the video, etc. These first three steps only take about 10-15 seconds to work through.

After the visitor has read or interacted with the exhibit, the next steps in the sequence are:

Understanding –

The material was presented in such a way (relate, reveal) that the visitor understands the main concept(s) presented in the exhibit. This then leads us to the final part of the exhibit communication sequence which is

Outcomes –

If the visitor understands the message or story that the exhibit presented, then the final outcome of the exhibit is that its Learning, Behavioural and Emotional objectives have been accomplished. This makes the exhibit “successful”

The Visitors and Exhibits – More rules of thumb.

Over the past 20 years of working with many different exhibit design and build firms, and looking at exhibit evaluation research, here are some things we have learned:

- Visitors do not really like to read labels. If a label is over 50 words long it probably will not be read. If the label uses small type size (most exhibit labels should be at least 30 point) there is an even greater chance it will not be read. If the label is put on glass, there is even a less chance of it being read.
- Provocative headlines and graphics will draw attention.
- If you can't get the main point or concept of the exhibit across to visitors within 15 seconds, you probably won't get it across at all.
- Visitors will be drawn to exhibits that have information or artefacts of intrinsic interest to them.