

Key Note Address – Creative New Zealand – The Big Conversation

Wednesday 24 June 2015

DON'T COME, WON'T COME

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- Thanks for inviting me to join you in this Big Conversation. I hope it is going to be a conversation.
- Because the universal challenge for cultural organisations - how to reach those elusive non-attenders – is one we have all had a go at solving. Sometimes we get it right and sometimes we miss the mark.
- I haven't come here to give you the answer to this, and I hope you haven't come here expecting me to.
- What Andrew and I can do is share with you the WA Museum's recent experiences in grappling with this problem, in the hope that through sharing our insights and having a conversation about it - collectively we can be more successful in developing our audiences.
- I was so excited, terrified and humbled when I was asked by Creative NZ to attend The Big Conversation. Firstly, because no-one has ever asked me to do a key note before (!), and secondly, because it offered the opportunity to visit some of your cultural organisations and meet people working in them – as there is much to admire and that we can learn from.
- One of the things that I really admire is the recognition and respect for Maori culture which is clear from the bilingual nature of your society. I can't wait for the day that we see Aboriginal languages being used and shared in our everyday lives as Maori language is in New Zealand.
- From this and other examples, I would have assumed there is more I can learn from you, than you from me. But Andrew assured me this would be a useful two way conversation, so here I am.
- So, we've been asked to frame our remarks in response to The Big Conversation Reader. This wasn't difficult, because there is such a lot in those seven pages - all of it rich and universal.
- Andrew and I are going to focus on the first 3 provocations - Provocation 1 – learn to love infrequent attenders, Provocation 2 - relevant programming's better than clever marketing and Provocation 3 – Humans get Humans.
- In fact, through the work that Andrew and the WA Museum have been doing on our brand (and now you've seen our logo, thanks to Andrew, you'll understand why we're rebranding) we have

come to see that these three provocations are actually imperatives - serious challenges that working in the arts and cultural sector, we all share.

- And these three things – extending our reach beyond traditional supporters and visitors, becoming more relevant to more people and creating human to human connections - are inextricably linked.
 - our future is going to depend absolutely on our audience reach, and not the frequency of attendance by our traditional core visitors;
 - relevant programming is not just better than clever marketing, it is a key which can unlock the interests of those elusive infrequent or non-attenders – Many people don't come to Museums and they don't engage with us, because they don't see us as relevant in their lives and, I'm convinced, even if we could afford it, clever marketing isn't going to change that in any substantive way; and
 - these two things, reaching new or infrequent audiences and being relevant, happen when people experience that human to human connection. That's not to say that the virtual is not important, or can't be memorable, but experiencing the real objects, the real sounds, the real voices, seeing real bodies move, seeing how real things are made, experiencing the power of paint on a canvas - can move us. Sometimes that human to human connection can be as simple as a conversation with a volunteer who shares something we didn't know, or talking to a passionate curator, or even a Director of Organisational Development, who shares their love for their work.
- But why are these provocations so critical to us, why are we driven to develop our audiences?
- Audience development is a perpetual and relentless challenge for cultural organisations, whether big or small, whether you're a museum or a contemporary dance company. Clearly it's a challenge that crosses artform and national boundaries, otherwise we wouldn't be having this conversation. But why? Because we all share two needs - the need to:
 - 1) Justify our funding and demonstrate our worth or value to decision makers whether Boards, governments, sponsors, or benefactors; and
 - 2) We genuinely believe that there is value in culture and the arts to be experienced and shared by all.
- Interestingly, the first of these requirements is externally driven, sometimes its imposed and we don't get to frame our arguments in ways that feel comfortable of 'right';
- The second of these requirements is, on the other hand, a very internal conversation. The dialogue we have around the value of the arts and culture is often articulated in our mission statements. Unfortunately, these are often unintelligible or impenetrable to the people we're trying to share this value with. We're mostly talking to ourselves or the already converted.

- At the WA Museum, we have 428 million added reasons to develop our audiences.
- We have been fortunate enough to be presented with a once in a lifetime opportunity to argue for, and now deliver a \$428 million project to reinvent the WA Museum. This reinvention will manifest in the redevelopment of the Perth site.
- This level of investment in a cultural institution is unprecedented for Western Australia and is attracting international interest. If that wasn't enough pressure, the investment was committed to at a time of relative prosperity. Since then the State's economic fortunes have changed. With the plummeting price of iron ore, there is mounting demand to cut public expenditure and large capital works are easy targets.
- We believe the reason why the commitment was made in the first instance, and our best defence against being a budget casualty has been, and continues to be, to demonstrate our value to the community by doing stuff that's important to them – by being relevant. Things like the National Anzac Centre in Albany.
- In a very exciting and reassuring way, this has been confirmed for us through work that we have been doing with Andrew on our brand. Using the lens of brand, we have been able to gain some insights into how we might reach audiences we haven't been able to reach to date, and how we might build deeper connections with our existing audiences.
- But more than that, the process of gaining that insight into our brand and audience development began with our staff.
- To us this is equally exciting because from this work we now have this framework for organisational development and change that has allowed us to have really honest internal conversations about the change that is needed, to hopefully become more relevant to more people.
- I don't know about other arts and cultural organisations, but in a Museum the size of the WA Museum, about 250 people, we come from so many different backgrounds. We are incredibly multifunctional. We have world leading scientists, we have teachers, we have marketers, we have amazingly creative designers. We're all looking at the work we do from a different perspective. The danger of this is that we have been, and to some extent some of us are still very myopic, or siloed in our beliefs about what a Museum's purpose is.
- If we're looking at organisational change – significant change - when we look at things from our own perspective, it's easy to assume alternative perspectives are antithetical or in competition to our own. When you're talking to staff about what a Museum exists for, you are going to the core of people's commitment to their work, sometimes their life's work. The conversation can get a 'bit' emotional! People get defensive and some will resist change. How many curators or creative directors think that marketers are a necessary evil?

- What we have developed, the Spectrum of Audience Engagement has proved to be a very useful tool for reflecting the range of perspectives that staff have on the purpose of our Museum and for validating the work that all our staff and teams are involved in.
- Through the spectrum they can see that rather than their differing perspectives and contributions being at odds with each other, they are part of an important framework that meets the needs of both our valued existing audiences and our much desired future audiences.
- I'm going to hand over to Andrew, to explain how this framework, the Spectrum, came about, and what it actually is.