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Monograph

Title: Batteries Not Included exhibition evaluation

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Batteries not Included Exhibition Evaluation

“Brings back so many memories. Makes me laugh”

“Great place for the kids to play and learn”

“It kept me very happy! It was awesome”

Batteries not Included was a two part exhibition housed in Gallery 2 and 3 from 20th July to 5th October 2014. One half of the exhibition explored the history of the toy industry in Northamptonshire, one of the largest industries in the region during the 2nd half of the 20th century. The other half dealt with the history of toys in general and specific topic such as gender specific toys, building toys and role playing toys. Toy Town about Northamptonshire was housed in Gallery 3 allowing this part of the exhibition to be considered as a stand-alone exhibition whilst still being part of the exhibition as a whole.

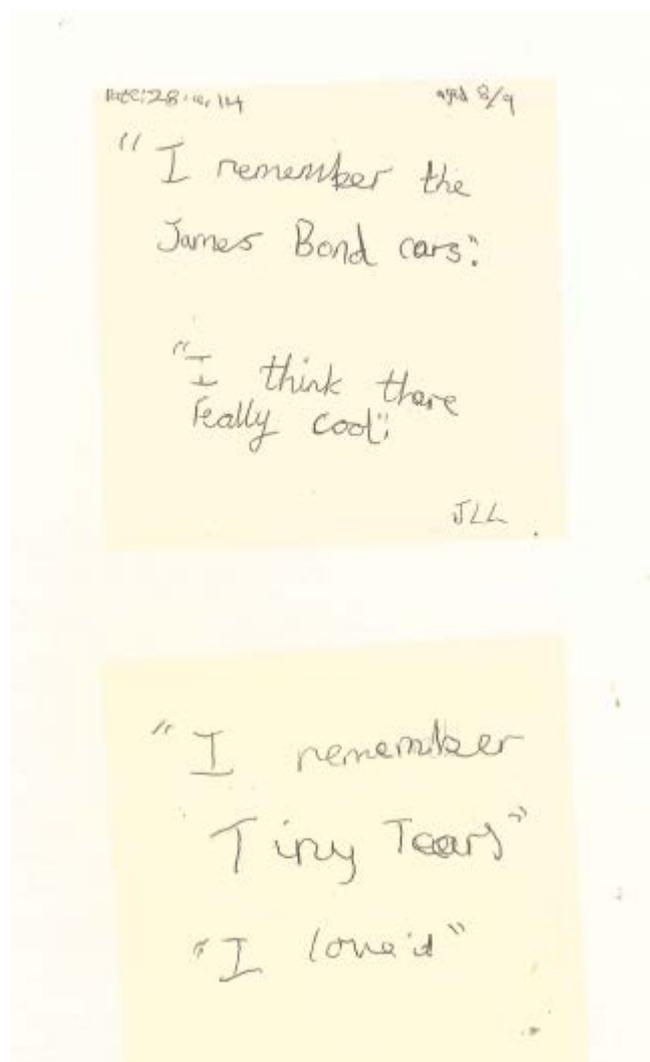
1. Create a fun educational interactive environment for children by including objects that children can relate to with accompanying games and interactive non passive elements that are rewarding and exciting.
2. Create an exhibition that families will want to return to throughout the holidays by pitching text and objects at all members of the family.
3. Engage schools in learning create a school pack and new Key Stage 1 workshop.

4. To dispel idea that museums are stuffy quiet places by including lots of fun activities, games that inspire the imagination of visitors.
5. Work closely with the University of Northampton Product Design Tutor
6. Work closely with members of the community who have toy industry links and through interviews and loans create relationship and ultimately archive of material relating to the Northampton toy industry.
7. Locate and loan/buy toys made in the local area to be displayed in exhibition.

During the period of the exhibition 19308 visitors attended the museum as a whole, unfortunately more accurate numbers pertaining to specific visitors to the exhibition cannot be given as the gallery counters are not functioning.

Evaluation methodology

Questionnaires were left in the gallery allowing visitors to make a choice to fill in a form, this method of course has the proviso that the visitors who completed the forms are only those who are motivated to complete one and the results must be seen in this light. Questionnaires in full can be seen in Appendix 1. 111 questionnaires were completed. Visitors were also requested to add post it notes to a notice board stating their favourite toy. 246 Post it notes were filled in (post it notes in full can be seen in Appendix 2.1 and 2.2). Some pictures were also added.



Visitor Profile

79% of visitors attended with their family
17% of visitors attended with friends
1% of visitors attended with an organised group
3% of visitors attended on their own

Under 16	167
16-19	12
20-24	2
25-34	18
35-44	51
45-54	28
55-64	11
65-74	14
75 and over	3

Visitor geography

Northampton	53%
Northamptonshire	19%
Regional	5%
National	5%
International	5%
No answer	13%

Visitors were asked if they had visited Northampton Museum and Art gallery previously

Yes	66%
No	32%
No answer	3%

Visitors were asked if they would visit the Shoe Collection after visiting the exhibition

Yes	85%
No	10%
No answer	5%

Visitors were asked what they liked about the exhibition

Various themes emerged from the questionnaires which are summarised below

Interactive toys	38
History	22
Interesting	18
Memories	17
Everything	12
No answer	11
Funny	4

Nothing 4
Shoes 4*

*Some visitors answered the questionnaire with reference to the whole museum rather than the specific exhibition.

Some visitors' comments are worthy of repeating in full:-

"Seeing the toys from my childhood and showing my daughter. Letting her relax and play with toys without worrying about being noisy etc."

"That it is not about walking round it's about having fun"

Everything. My 18 year old son loved it too. It was great showing him the toys that I had as well all those years ago, especially as I had a Rosebud doll at home"

"That my children could experience toys from their parents' childhood. Liked the fact my children were free to explore themselves. This is my 6th visit!"

Visitors were asked what they disliked about the exhibition

Various themes emerged from the questionnaires which are summarised below:-

Nothing	55
No answer	23
More	8
Information	3
Not interactive enough	2
Badly behaved children	2
Messy	2
Could not touch the toys in the cases	2
Pens	2
Cases too high for children	1
Too many objects	1
3 rd floor	1*
Like a playroom	1
Too dark in shoe gallery	1*

*Some visitors answered the questionnaire with reference to the whole museum

Some visitors comments are worthy of noting in full

"Not enough detail and some of the captions are written by someone too close to the topic. If you didn't know Mettoy was a Northampton company, there is not much to tell you about it"

"That some children were too crazy especially with the football"

"Video about teddy was very repetitive! Perhaps as well as videos about how toys were made you could also play old classic TV programmes"

Visitors were asked if they learnt new things from the exhibition

Agree	80	
Neither agree nor disagree		15
Disagree	5	

No answer 13

“I had no idea about the Toy Town connections- thank you”

Visitors were asked if the exhibition changed their attitude to the topic

Agree	47	
Neither agree nor disagree		33
No	5	
No answer	14	

Visitors were asked if they intend to learn more about the topic

Agree	59	
Neither agree nor disagree		29
Disagree	8	
No answer	12	

Conclusion

The exhibition was very popular and visitor figures for this period were over 800 higher than the year before. Much of the feedback expressed that the adults in the visitors' groups enjoyed looking at the toys that they had when they were children and reminiscing about their childhoods and passing that information to their children, whilst the children were very happy to learn and to play.

Whilst we have only a small amount of evidence about repeat visits we do have feedback from one visitor that they visited the exhibition 6 times!

I worked very closely with Vicki Thomas, Product Design tutor at University of Northampton. I utilised contacts she had and she produced a number of information panels for the exhibition. In addition the museum also borrowed display cases from the university.

A large number of visitor stated that they had learnt information from the exhibition that they did not already know and that they would improve their knowledge of the subject after their visit.

The exhibition created memory experience for many visitors as they could easily relate to the toys in the exhibition. Before the exhibition, after a public appeal, members of the public who had been involved in the toy industry in the region were interviewed in depth about their experiences; this engaged another group of the public. Their stories have formed the basis of a database recording an important industry for Northamptonshire. The database has been made available to the public on the internet and will inform work for displays in the new museum extension.

After the public appeal a large number of people agreed to loan their precious toys to the museum, this established very solid relationships with the lenders, who enjoyed being part of the exhibition.

Feedback was minimal about the design of the exhibition, but the large visitor figures could be taken as an indication that the poster, the design of which was echoed in the exhibition, attracted the attention and lured visitors to the exhibition. One visitor did comment that they did like “Layout, colours, interactive”.

Lessons to be learnt

There were many positive practices in this exhibition that can be continued and improved upon in future practice, however there are number of negative comments that can be used to enhance future exhibitions. There was two comments about the pens provided to fill in the questionnaires, this may seem like a small lesson, but we cannot

expect visitors to give us their opinions if we do not provide pens, so more attention to this small matter is needed. Summer exhibitions are always very popular and interactive features create messy elements in the exhibitions, we need to be more vigilant in checking these areas for mess, although they cannot be kept completely tidy. One comment regarding the way in which the subject was tackled, namely that the author was too close to the subject and did not fully explain the role of Mettoy in Northampton can be addressed by the participation of more members of staff and volunteers on checking the copy before the exhibition opens. A number of visitors stated that the exhibition was not big enough; the exhibition filled two galleries and could not be expanded further and showed over 100 objects. Further objects could not be shown due to the constraints of the display system (i.e. not enough display cases). This problem will be addressed in further temporary exhibitions in the new museum extension, as the temporary exhibition galleries will be larger.