

## THE ONGOING ASTC "NEW MODELS" DISCUSSION

David E. Chesebrough

It has been the privilege of Dr. Per-Edvin Persson and me to be leading the ongoing discussion of looking to new models as we evolve our organizations to meet the needs of our changing society and local communities. In the previous issue of *The Informal Learning Review* (no. 74) I presented my current thoughts on how museums might position themselves to best serve their changing communities.

Our double session at the 2005 ASTC Annual Conference featured case study presentations. One session focused on new centers that have incorporated aspects into their new approaches that have not been common in the field, and the second session focused on existing organizations that are seeking to shift their approaches from where they have been.

Here are summaries of four of the five case studies: Ontario Science Center, Toronto; MOSI, Tampa; Buffalo Museum of Science; and the Science Center of Iowa, Des Moines.

We encourage you to visit the web sites of the organizations to gain further insights into their models. For example, the Buffalo Museum of Science web site includes the summary document for our Strategic Concept, which is guiding our model shift.

### Ontario Science Centre

Lesley Lewis

#### What Drove Our Change:

In 1999, it had been five years since there had been significant renewal of permanent exhibition spaces. Our "brand" of interactive engagement was no longer unique. Without a major transformation, attendance was projected to diminish with a related impact on revenues. We challenged ourselves on how to further engage the public. We began to speak to youth, to explore their interests. We learned that youth today are not so different from earlier generations, and that they want to make a difference in the

world. We met with corporations, universities, educators, researchers, and current visitors to understand how we were regarded and to discuss what roles we could play in increasing public engagement with science. We considered the focus of governments on innovation and the importance of innovation to global competitiveness. From these seemingly disparate threads, a vision for a new form of engagement emerged. The resulting "Agents of Change" campaign has successfully raised \$45.6 million.

#### What We Are Trying To Accomplish With Our New Model:

Our focus will continue to be on science and technology but our approach will foster creativity and innovation in a broad array of disciplines. Our goal is to move from being an attraction-based "place to visit", to being a leader in building relationships beyond the site, beyond the visit. We want to shift our audience from visitors to participants. We want people of all ages to gain confidence through our activities, to become creative problem solvers. We determined that physical exhibits rarely lend themselves to the type of flexibility required to address rapidly changing views in science, ongoing advances in technology. We are developing more open ended experiences for visitors of all ages that will contribute to a better understanding of research; ignite creativity; encourage problem solving, team work and collaboration skills; teach the importance of risk taking; and promote science literacy. Partnerships are fundamental to this new approach. Our goal is to help create and nurture a culture of innovation in which to grow the next generation of leaders. Through diverse activities and programs we will expose people to the attitudes, skills, networks, and tools that will enable them to become the drivers of a culture of innovation.

"Agents of Change," which will transform over 30% of OSC exhibition spaces, is one step toward a broader vision. Ultimately our goal is to significantly increase attendance and revenues and to reposition OSC's image, brand and offerings from being primarily a place for children and families to being a centre that engages all segments and ages of the public with science.

#### Key Elements of "Agents of Change:"

KidSpark (Phase 1 - Nov '03; Phase 2 - Dec '04); Weston Family Innovation Centre (Phase 1 - Mar '05; Phase 2 - June '06); Grand Central (summer '06); Telus "Exploration Plaza" (July '06); www.redshiftnow.ca (Mar '05); DuPont Knowledge Partnership (continuing).

#### Contacts:

Lesley Lewis, CEO  
Lesley.Lewis@osc.on.ca; Jennifer Martin, Director of Visitor Experience, Jennifer.Martin@osc.on.ca; Julie Bowen, "Agents of Change" Experience Project Lead, Julie.Bowen@osc.on.ca; www.ontariosciencecentre.ca; www.redshiftnow.ca

### MOSI

#### *A Polychromic of a Science Center Campus*

Wit Ostrenko

#### What Drove Our Change:

MOSI started as a 65,000-sq.-ft. science center across the street from a fledgling university (University of South Florida) in an area considered to be on the outskirts of town with a major Busch Gardens theme park one mile away. The population of Tampa Bay skyrocketed (45,000 new homes sold in 2004). The USF campus expanded to a major research university with 43,000 students. A one-hour drive from MOSI placed us between the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico on the west to Disney World on the east to Sarasota to the south and the fastest growing counties in the USA to the north. What drove the change was not being able to sustain these facilities with traditional audiences visiting exhibits and IMAX films.

#### Key Elements of Our New Model:

MOSI designed a 15-year master plan, which was just completed with five buildings in a campus setting on 74 acres: 1) Science Center, 2) Center for Learning, 3) Welcome Center, 4) Head Start, and 5) Kids in Charge!—children's science center. (A dynamic web location to view the campus is at [http://www.rbk-arch.com/mosi/mosi\\_2005/rinder-ing2005.htm](http://www.rbk-arch.com/mosi/mosi_2005/rinder-ing2005.htm)) A systemic—interdependent (polychromic) approach to the physical structures was established. Vice presidents were responsible for the success of the entire site in regard to programming, marketing, retail, and resources.

Connections were made through conversations, not only with the staff but the community and the guests visiting MOSI. The emphasis was solidly on the guests to maximize their experience and to maximize our return from the guests monetarily. The transformation occurred as the staff put an emphasis on "learning how MOSI learns." MOSI learned from Roy Shafer, from its guests, from each other, and from the community through the use of World Cafes ([www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)). The collective learning of MOSI grew exponentially as we learned in context to our situation.

#### What Resulted from the New Model:

The first thing we learned was how to develop more net revenue from retail operations, memberships, IMAX films, education programs, exhibitions, government - from virtually everything at MOSI. More net came from learning that doing things the same old way was not necessarily good. In some situations, "more" is better. We currently have 3 retail stores. Interactors began to learn from each other. Designers learned from guests. Families learned from each other and from interactors. Repeat visitors were increasing. Reputation was growing. Cooperation was the rule in working with the Florida Aquarium and the Lowry Park Zoo. We each grew in attendance and attention to 2.4 million guests among us. The New Model is situational learning in a polychromic way.

#### Contact Information:

Wit Ostrenko, President, 813-987-6304, [wostrenko@mosi.org](mailto:wostrenko@mosi.org); Vicki Ahrens, Executive Vice President, 813-987-6371 [vahrens@mosi.org](mailto:vahrens@mosi.org); Web site [www.mosi.org](http://www.mosi.org)

### **Buffalo Museum of Science The Science Learning Community**

Carroll Simon

#### What Drove Our Change:

A number of key elements drove us to abandon the "classic model" that had developed in the 1980's. With the museum located in the inner-city of a smaller community (300,000) we had taken to driving audience through traveling exhibitions while not reinvesting in either other parts of our museum or in our ongoing relationships. The last 10 years have seen: (1) the

return on traveling exhibitions declined to where most were money losers driving our accrued deficit up despite the improvement in gross revenues and attendance (we say it's all about NET now); (2) we had conditioned our audience to see us as an "attraction" only worth visiting when there was a new show; (3) we had let all our special assets, unique to us—our collections, scientists, and research become isolated from our users and community; and (4) we had failed to sustain or build relationships with our neighborhood, our potential partners, and the learners interested in our core topics.

Mounting deficit operations and lack of sense of fulfilling our mission drove us to "abandon" the old model and look for an entirely different approach.

#### What We Are Trying To Accomplish With Our New Model:

Tapping into colleagues whom we considered some of the best thinkers in the field, visiting many of the more successful museum, non-profit, and for-profit models over the course of three years we prepared, with the help of Gyroscope, Inc., an entirely new Strategic Concept. Our goals are: (1) to be a lifelong learning resource; (2) to expand our earned revenue by more repeat and deeper engagements by the audiences that align with our mission and offerings (e.g. driving our business model more through \$/learning partner/time rather than increasing number of one-time visitors); and (3) to become a relationship/partnership based organization throughout.

#### Key Elements Of Our New Model:

Create a *Learning Emporium* at BMS—reduce attendance fee for easy access to all; create many open ended, changeable environments and optional deeper engagements, mixed with integral retail, that would encourage a learner to come repeatedly; to spend money as they would like to explore a line of investigation (having many options for learning "up-charges"); and (2) Create the *Networked Museum*—where a network of Science Spots around the region would provide a distributed model of service; create new value for our learning partners by having a convenient program/retail/drop-in experience space

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in their neighborhood, and link the Spots and the Hub (the museum) for synergies back and forth. It is perceived that the Return on Investment with the Spots, and the flexibility will be superior to expanding the museum to try to increase its attractive quality (which would increase its overhead and limit our future financial flexibility).

Contact Information:

Carroll Simon, Deputy Director, 716-896-5200 x332 csimon@sciencebuff.org;  
David E. Chesebrough, President/CEO, 716-896-5200 x309 dchesebrough@sciencebuff.org;  
www.sciencebuff.org (select Master Planning from Home Page)

**Science Center of Iowa**

What was the impetus behind you looking to change (or design to change) over what is the general norm in the field?

With plans to construct a new facility we had a clean slate with which to begin looking at how the Science Center of Iowa could be more reflective of, and responsive to, the needs of Iowans. The project wasn't approached from the standpoint of what does the field do in general, but more from a standpoint of what process should we undertake to best meet the needs of Iowans in informal learning.

Is there some construct, inspiration, etc., which led you to the approach your organization has taken?

Our goal was to be relevant and sustainable. We spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to put a process in place that would be inclusive and responsive. It was really a melding of what we learned from our science center colleagues that were willing to share so much of what they learned and more of a for-profit approach of understanding the needs of the community and where SCI could meet those needs. The community had an incredible depth and breadth of direct input into the development of all major components of the new Science Center of Iowa – it was designed from the "outside in."

Provide an overview of how your

changes have been implemented.

We executed a comprehensive capital campaign that included pre-opening operating support, post-opening operating support, endowment, and future scenario change-out funds in addition to the traditional capital project. We have scenario changes funded through the year 2011.

We have several layers of change that occur from the most dramatic being scenarios, to theater pieces, IMAX films, star theater shows, large scale programs, pocket science, and monthly themed weekends and ongoing special events. On any given day a participant can experience upwards of 30 different programs in addition to the experience platforms.

What evaluation of the results have you been able to glean?

We have only been opened for five months, so any evaluation we offer here is but a snapshot at this point. However, we have performed limited intercept surveys and have also collected anecdotal information from key staff informants: participant services, group sales, and others who function as the first point of contact with visitors. The overwhelming majority of visitors enjoy the new experience platforms. Dwell time is impressive, both at SCI overall and in each platform. Participants who spend 3 or 4 hours are not uncommon.

We have greatly broadened our audience. SCI is reaching target markets rarely seen in the old facility: adults/seniors and senior groups, team-building corporate groups, church groups, bank clubs, teenagers and young adults are now common sights and they are coming in not just to see IMAX, but to enjoy the entire facility and attend the numerous special events that are audience specific.

Contact:

Mary Sellers, President, Science Center of Iowa, 401 S. Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, Des Moines, IA 50309, (515) 274-6868, www.sciowa.org

*Dr. David E. Chesebrough is President and CEO of the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, NY. He may be reached at dchesebrough@sciencebuff.org.*