

Feedback regarding the kiosk from Commercial Director, Stephen Munn

(Excerpt from Interview held on 18th July 2013)

Stephen But I think it's an attitude of mind as much as anything, and I heard at a recent ALVA meeting, they had a woman in from, I think it was the V&A, that's where Barry was recently, wasn't it? Yeah. And she was actually saying about the ten-year journey they'd undertaken for cultural change, and as she readily admitted, ten years ago, the Bowie collection wouldn't even have looked at them for it, but because they've moved on and part of that process was keeping the curatorial team clearly involved in the process, but getting them to think differently, that they're able to do the kind of things they did. And that's what it is, at the end of the day, it's educating everyone involved in the process and being willing to compromise, and seeing the bigger picture between what does the visitor really want, and yes we need to try and deliver that, because actually the only way that people will come and see your wonderful collections is if it's actually interesting to them. They don't care if it's interesting to you, it's got to be interesting to them because they're paying money to come in, at the end of the day. But in such a way that clearly it doesn't undermine all those really positive things about curatorial ownership of artefacts, etc, etc.

Debs Because I spoke – a long time ago now – to Ailsa Barry at the Natural History Museum, and she headed up digital media at the time, and I was asking her about the matrix thing with the different layers, and she said that would be really good, because most of their problems are you've got the professors and the scientists who are saying that, 'Yes but they need to know this information.' 'Yes, but they don't want to know that information.' So by giving the visitors the option to choose what level of information they want, she thought was good, and it's something difficult to do most often. Did you think that with the talking walls? I know we only ever did the one level, but did you think that was a good way?

Stephen Yeah, and ultimately that kind of device does help you to layer it between, on the one extreme, what I would term the dry and stuffy but factual information, which has got to be put there, and in the context of cars, how many miles to the gallon, when was it built, blah, blah, blah. And some of the other things we've been talking about: why was it black, why was Ford so successful, was this car used by a little old granny? Etc, etc.

Debs So it allows you to put that information in on those different areas.

Stephen Yeah, basic information, go to one. If you actually understand a bit about cars and want to know about Alpha Engine 5, go to two. If you're a PhD student and you're a really boring old fart, go to...' ((laughs))

Debs Thank you! ((laughs))

Stephen But you give people the options. My wife's uncle is one of those chaps, if you put him a museum, he will read literally every single word, whereas I'm more of a grazer, and if something really catches my mind, my imagination, I will go with it.

Debs Want to find out more about it, on the phone, Wikipedia!

Stephen That's it.

Debs So if you have a website that they can access with that information built into it, then they can go to you and they're constantly getting the Beaulieu brand with them, aren't they?

Stephen Yeah.

Debs That's what I thought anyway! Just very quickly, towards the end, the Beaulieu Abbey kiosk, the material in there, I don't know how much you used it or played with it, but did you think there was too much choice? Did you think there was too much? It was built as a website primarily, so there was probably too much information on the kiosk and I didn't expect people to be using or going into it in great depth there. But do you think visitors should have that amount of choice, or do you choose it for them?

Stephen I think the answer to that is that in an ideal world there is a mound of information which they can get in layers. I wouldn't want to advocate you stick one page up there, so to speak, it needs to be multi-layered. However, having said that, depending on where it is and what it is about, from an operator's point of view, you don't necessarily want all the information, because someone could stay there for an hour and you've got a whole queue behind you of people who also want to access that, so that gives you operational problems. So, as always, it's that fine balance, and I suspect what will happen in the future is we will layer it up to so much, but then it will be, 'There is more information available, please go to X, Y, Z when you get home and it's all there for you.' Or 'Send us your email and we'll give you access to,' or, indeed, because the National Motor Museum Trust doesn't get any core government funding, it may be, 'There's more information and pay us a quid and you can then download it.'

Debs Yeah, that makes sense.

Stephen So you can commercialise it.

Debs 'Friends of Beaulieu' kind of membership that you pay for and then you have access to that information and it can be tailored to your personal interests as well.

Stephen Yeah, but of course it's the huge cost of digitisation of the vast records they've got in the first place, which is the real difficulty for the Trust.