



Association of Independent Museums

The National Body Connecting, Supporting and Representing Independent Museums

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EXTRACTS FROM AIM E-News – June 2012 – Number 34

AIM CONFERENCE - Focusing on exceptional visitor experiences

'Passion' was the key word for speakers at the Conference, as that always led to great visitor experiences. Leeds Castle's Victoria Wallace said a museum's visitor experience was more to do with attitude and action than layout and architecture. People needed to be engaged from the beginning with great first impressions: all staff and volunteers needed to believe in their place of work. AIM president Sir Neil Cossons, keynote speaker, made it clear that bad visitor experience equalled closure. Many of the smallest museums had been the most successful, run by people with authoritative knowledge and skills and an engaging manner. People had high expectations of museums, and the qualities museums needed were, therefore, crucial. He listed '**3 R's**' which museums should follow for success – they should be realistic, resilient and resourceful. Other contributions on the Thursday were from Graham Black (Nottingham Trent University) who implored museums to adapt to the rapidly transforming digital world; Rosalind Johnson (A Different View) who said the visitor experience was not just about front of house or individual projects but the whole physical environment, including digital and the National Trust's Sarah Staniforth and Tony Berry who described how for the last three years the NT had been especially focused on the visitor experience, with considerable success. On Friday, Richard Evans described how Beamish had turned round a deficit by returning to its founding spirit and careful strategic planning; John Murden (Dorset County Museum) showed how the staging of a British Museum touring exhibition had changed the independent's fortunes and Anne Lord (Colne Valley Museum) explained how the volunteer-run project was immersed in a visitor experience which went the extra mile. We heard from STEAM's Alan Greer and Ian Surtees how partnerships had led to success with new retail projects and links with Lego had broadened the museum's profile, and in a contribution from Europe, Björn Stenvers described how a new brand 'I Amsterdam' was successfully marketing clusters of museums and heritage in the Dutch city for the first time.

And...

There were workshops on a range of topics, including visitor research, sustaining the 'smile' on the front desk, setting up a successful membership scheme, and good governance (AIM is currently working on 10 rules covering this subject). There were updates on legal matters, the Localism Bill, and a member consultation session to find out what issues are most challenging for AIM members.

New Gift Aid scheme welcomed

AIM has welcomed the proposed Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme in its recent submission to HM Revenue & Customs' consultation, following the announcement of the new scheme in the 2011 Budget. To be introduced in April 2013, the scheme will allow charities to claim a Gift Aid style top-up payment on up to £5,000 of small donations of money made without a Gift Aid declaration (in donations of £20 or less). AIM's view is that museums will mostly benefit by using money raised through donation boxes to qualify for the amount. Signage by the boxes to indicate that donations will attract Gift Aid might encourage more giving. AIM thinks organisations could be expected to detail the sources of qualifying donations, ie donation boxes, unsolicited donations etc. An annual claim would be appropriate, and providing the minimum of paperwork. http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=pageExcise_RatesCodesTools&propertyType=document&id=HMCE_PRO D1_031993. Members are reminded that they must ensure they are absolutely compliant in the existing Gift Aid administration, as HMRC will be able to disqualify claims for up to three years.

There's no money in it, but the **Adopt-a-Museum website** aims to encourage people to 'adopt' a museum they would like to champion. Organisers say, think of it in the sense of being an ambassador. If enough people get involved the site aims to feature a new museum each week, with people able to add their own stories relating to all those on the site. The entries will be plotted on a map. <http://adopt.museum140.com>

Two useful websites detailing **sources of external funding and advice** respectively are www.fundingcentral.org.uk (listing over 4,000 grants available to community organisations) and www.communitymatters.org.uk (information sheets and model leases and documents for charitable and voluntary organisations).

Volunteering England's Good Practice Bank is a useful resource for information and guidance on all things volunteering, with more than 40 guides. <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice/information>. The body has also joined with the Association of British Insurers to produce a code of practice for volunteers. <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/aboutus/news-releases/2287-working-group-publishes-code-of-practice-for-volunteers>