

Fabulous Failures in Museum Education

NAEA National Conference
Fort Worth, TX
Thursday, March 7, 2013, 2 PM

Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely.

Auguste Rodin

Below you will find presenters' contact information, a summary of their "failure," and the key lessons learned from the experience.

Amanda Kepner
Columbus Museum of Art
Columbus, OH
614.629.5947
amanda.kepner@cmaohio.org

Preschool Program Run by Interns

After successfully launching Artful Adventures, a preschool tour program, in the summer of 2008 the CMA education department was excited to grow the program the following summer. Unfortunately, we were unprepared for the amount of growth we experienced and had plenty of management problems along the way.

Lessons Learned:

- Never exceed your capacity to perform well. You can say no – even to paying customers.
- Always have a manager. Every program must have a managing staff person who really understands it and can run it.
- Every intern must have a clear mentor who they can turn to for help and assistance.
- Always have a training program in place. Training must match your expectations. Make sure that trainees clearly understand their performance expectations. Include a clear method for performance feedback.
- Clearly define roles. Make sure everyone involved knows what their role is and what they have to do to successfully fulfill that role.

Kaci Kelly
School and Educator Services Coordinator
The Columbus Museum
Columbus, GA
kkelly@columbusmuseum.com

Artist/School/Museum Collaboration

The Columbus Museum collaborated with an artist (who was having a solo exhibition at the Museum) and a high school art class to create a student exhibition inspired by the artist's work. After many failed attempts for meetings, student interviews, and classroom visits, the project completely fell apart leaving the student gallery walls empty.

What we learned:

- Have a set structure, timelines, and expectations in writing. This allows for accountability
- A project like this takes a lot of focused time and attention. Be sure to manage your time wisely.
- Build a strong professional relationship with the teacher before the collaboration starts to create a balanced partnership between the Museum and the teacher.
- Include expectations of the artist to work with a teacher and group of students in his/her contract with the Museum.

Georgina Goodlander
Web & Social Media Content Manager
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Washington, D.C.
GoodlanderG@si.edu
@bathlander

PHEON: The Alternate Reality Game that No-One Played

In 2010-2011, the Smithsonian American Art Museum ran an alternate reality game (ARG) called “PHEON.” Despite careful planning, defined goals, and a sophisticated game design – fewer than 100 people played over 12 months.

What we learned:

- Facebook is not an appropriate platform for meaningful engagement.
- People have clear perceptions about the types of games that are and should be on Facebook.
- Museum-based narrative games should have content that clearly connects to the museum and its collections/programs.
- Identify a target audience and develop a strategy for reaching out to them *before* you dive into game design!

Juline Chevalier
Curator of Education
Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University
Durham, NC
919-684-8071
Juline.chevalier@duke.edu

Docent Self-Evaluation

I implemented a post-tour self-evaluation form for all docents to complete immediately after they gave a tour. They hated it. I revised the form with their input and renamed it “reflection.” They still hated it. Ultimately I abandoned it, and replaced it with a “Pre-Tour Pocket Reference” so they could focus on the key aspects to a good tour BEFORE the tour began.

What we learned:

- Do not present a major change to Docent procedures immediately after they’ve returned from winter vacation.
- Involve Docents in planning any evaluation/reflection.
- Think carefully about WHY you want to implement any evaluation/reflection, and clearly outline what a successful implementation will look like.
- If you do not get the results you seek, revise the approach or try something new.

Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.

Sir Winston Churchill