

West Kootenay Power Building

A Mining Heritage Interpretive Centre

MARKETING RESEARCH REPORT

“If we build it, will they come?”

Today, the customer’s needs and values must become the primary focus, if museums and interpretive centres want to attract visitors and therefore the new mantra needs to be

“Know them and they will come”.

While crystal-ball gazing is an impossible task, it is possible for the Committee to develop plans for marketing the Centre based on some well-known facts. Firstly, people visit museums, art galleries and interpretive centres because they want an authentic experience, but more important than that, at least from the Centre’s point of view, they want an experience that creates a “Wow!” One that will lead them to revisit the Centre and to tell all their friends about it.

In order for museums, art galleries and interpretive centres to ensure that these “Wow!” moments happen it is important that the marketing planning understands who the client is and what will attract and claim them as customers.

Customers are not stationary in their wants and needs, and therefore the Centre will need to keep a constant watch on how the market is changing and how other events may be impacting their market share. This can be done through professional assistance or through community focus groups and town hall meetings. It will also be accomplished by focussing on visitor satisfaction by listening to customers, by surveying the locals, tour operators, and by honestly evaluating all their responses and be willing to make changes based on the results.

THE CUSTOMERS

The customers of the West Kootenay Power Building - *A Mining Heritage Interpretive Centre* will mainly be made up of four distinct groups: Local residents, which will include the people in a surrounding area of up to 60 kms; school students, generally those of the Boundary School District; visiting family and friends, a market that is often overlooked, yet with target marketing, family and friends of local residents could make up a significant portion of the summer customer; the traveler along Highway 3; and finally Tour Operators.

It is important that the market plans look at Generational Marketing as well. Today, the kids are richer, the Generation Xers are looking for an “experience” and have the resources to pay for one, the Baby Boomers are better educated, healthy and wealthy and looking for cultural and heritage experiences, and the 64+ Generation is renowned at spending money on grandchildren. Tourism for all these age groups can be as long as a trip around the world or as short as a trip around town. When a recent US poll¹ regarding the motivating factor in travel asked the question:

“What is important when planning trips?”

The results were:

Getting off the beaten track	45%
Visiting cultural, historical and natural treasures	50%
Gaining a new perspective on life	72%
Understanding culture	88%
Going to a location with natural beauty	73% ⁱⁱ

Armed with these facts, the Committee will want to plan displays, activities, events, and especially marketing and advertising that focuses on the wants and needs of a broader base of customers than those previously used in the history of museums.

Some other upcoming trends in the field are:

- The public is demanding accessibility to institutions, physical, economic, cultural, and intellectual
- There is more concern for mission-related and financial accountability
- Institutions are becoming more visitor-centred.

A museum/interpretative centre based on visitor-centred principles impacts all areas of the institution, from programs, architecture to site plan. Cultivating visitor satisfaction is essential to ensuring the Centre is successful. This means polling visitors, subscribers and members to measure the level of satisfaction or conversely dissatisfaction.

Another trend the Committee will need to be aware of is the need to strike a balance between government subsidies, contributions and self-generated income. This means that exhibitions and programs for which there is a demonstrated popularity will need to be developed in order to increase self-generated income all the while recognizing the impact they may have on operations, such as staffing and budget.

THE CUSTOMER PROFILE

GENERATIONAL MARKETING

To target the marketing of the Centre to the generations that make up the potential visitor to the Centre is essential. To marketers a “generation” is defined as a group of people who share formative experiences. These experiences bind people that are born in continuous years into “cohorts” -- groups of individuals that have a demographic statistic in common. This means that brochures, articles and even advertising has to be written with the target audience in mind. To elaborate, there are four distinct generations who will make up the customer/visitor of the Centre.

While there are many “labels” for these generations, in this report they are referred to as:

1. The Civic or (Senior) Generation - born before 1925
2. The Silent Generation - born between 1925 and 1943
3. The Baby Boomers - born between 1943 and 1964
4. Generation X - born after 1964

Even though all generations have much in common, there are enough significant differences that require marketing plans to understand these differences to ensure the focus of programming meets all needs.

The Civic (Senior) Generation: This generation values freedom, democracy and justice. They are known to be loyal and dedicated to their country, their community and their friends. Marketing to these people is most successful when focused on the history of the artifacts at the interpretive centre and the changes in equipment that took place over the years. As well this generation, many with time on their hands, offers an opportunity for the Committee to develop programming that involves them directly in the operations of the Centre. Involvement such as volunteerism that mobilizes the time, talent, and experience of these older adults in service to their community. They are dedicated grandparents, who like to buy for the younger generation and also be in close contact with them. Therefore, they should be recruited as volunteers with varying roles as half-time, part-time and episodic-time being asked of them. They could work with the student visitor, assist in the Gift Shop, give lectures to visitors on their own mining, electrical, etc., experiences, as well as act a tour guides for those who do not wish to participate in a self-directed tour of the Centre.

The Silent Generation: This generation respects the opinions of others, particularly experts. It is ingrained in them that there someone out there with the expertise to solve their problems. So, if the Centre wins praise, awards, grants, etc. this generation will need to know. It will be important to highlight successes, choose a spokesperson who is truly credible, and to ensure they are aware of statistics that show the Centre is successful. This generation is made of up of voracious readers, but unlike the previous one they have less free time, so keep the message short and well written, yet in a conversational way. Like the Civic Generation they too are dedicated grandparents and planning “grand-travel” (for grandparents and grandchildren) excursions to the Centre would be a good marketing tool. They are healthy, financially stable and wise and like to travel in their leisure time.

The Baby Boomers: Numerous, powerful and highly motivated to have a quality of life as they grow old this generation has a busy lifestyle. Therefore, it is important to promote convenience, flexibility and ensure they are made to feel they are “special and important” customers. All communications need to be honest, straightforward and sincere. Boomers are also nostalgic, so some artifacts, programming and activities should be targeted to the artifacts from their generation.

Generation X: This group is made up of survivors! They have survived divorces, one-parent families, stepfamilies, both parents working, razor blades in their Halloween candy, violence on TV, the streets and even in their schools. Xers are group oriented...going in groups to malls, group dating, etc., are all very natural to this generation and Xers are very protective of their groups. They are great shoppers! They have shopped for their working parents, shopped over television and the Internet, and they’ve shopped at the malls as part of their social life. Growing up in this advertising mecca and their constant exposure to media hype, advertising to them needs to be visual, dynamic and not “phony”. They respond best to multidimensional marketing, such as colourful brochures, one page promo-sheets, magazine articles that emphasize the environmental aspects of the Interpretive Centre, and most importantly on the Internet. This generation is almost entirely made-up of environmentalists, and therefore Gift Shop items, artifacts and exhibits will need to include objects that are recycled, reused and restored.

THE TARGETED CUSTOMER

SCHOOL STUDENTS

Schools and other educational institutions will need to be advised, over and over again of the educational programming available. This programming will need to be fun, yet in an educational way. The activities, designed to enhance the museum experience, should include demonstrations of skills and crafts that inform, entertain, enlighten and instruct. Education programming will add a dimension to the visit that makes it more memorable. As school students can make up a significant portion of the Centre's visitors, it would be helpful if there was a "teacher's manual" to prepare the students for their visit, and ensuring that Volunteers are in place to help to interpret the exhibits they see.

VISITING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

An often overlooked group, these visitors to the area offer a potential that cannot be ignored. Residents of the communities surrounding the Centre will always be looking for something interesting, meaningful and fun for their visiting families and friends to do. The Committee can meet this need by offering many different incentives to make them consider the Centre as a place well worth attending. Such incentives could be discounts in admission prices, small mementos of their visit, guided tours with short lecturettes given at specific times and only for such visitors --- the list goes on and on.

THE TRAVELER

A very important part of the customer base of the Centre will be made up of people who are travelling on Highway 3. As the Centre itself sits immediately adjacent to this busy link from the Coast to the Rockies, the Committee will want to focus on stopping "the rubber tire" visitor and making their visit memorable enough to tell others of the Centre. There are many and varied methods used by businesses, other museums and attractions, from advertising in travel periodicals, such as the BC Travel and Accommodation Guide to ads in newspapers.

However, while this type of advertising will be important, unlike other tourist attractions in BC such as Chemainus, Barkerville or Whistler, which are all well off "the beaten track" the Centre will only have to develop something that will immediately attract the travelers attention in order to get them to stop and visit. For example an information and tourist booth at the Highway edge of the property. This booth could be built in such a way that it replicates a piece of equipment used in mining or electricity and be staffed by volunteers in the three warmer seasons. Signage will also be important. This signage should be located up and down the highway from the Centre and be such that it entices the driver to stop and see what the Centre has to offer.

THE GROUP AND BUS TOURS

Most motor coach tours are found through mailing lists specifically made-up of Tour Bus Operators. These mailing lists are very important and useful but advertising through direct mail campaigns are expensive and rarely worth the investment or effort. Therefore it is better to utilize resources already on hand to build a good list of leads. Some resources that can be used are:

1. Keeping a log of phone inquiries regarding group tours, including full contact information, that comes into the Centre.

2. Put out visitor evaluation forms and group tour flyers in the entrance or gift shop. If people have enjoyed the visit, take advantage of their enthusiasm by asking for their help. Perhaps a flyer stating, "If you enjoyed your tour of the Centre the groups you belong to will too!" And on the flyers and evaluation cards ask visitors if they know of any groups that would be interested in hearing about your group tours. Include space to add group name and contact information.
3. Ask the Committee, the stakeholders and the volunteers for help to build the group tour list. Pass out group referral forms at meetings, along with group tour flyers and ask people to suggest a group tour to at least one group they belong to.
4. Consider adding a "group news" column to the newsletter to keep readers up-to-date with tour offerings.
5. Add a group tour page to the Centre's web site.
6. Send press releases to group tour industry trade magazines. Many of these are on the Internet, and if submission guidelines and deadlines are not listed on the web site, call and request that information.

Finally, while building a list of leads is an important step to developing a successful group and tour bus marketing program, it is also important to nurture these leads and turn them into repeat bookings.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING STRATEGIES

Once the Centre has successfully come to fruition, the continued success will be dependent upon the development and maintenance of open lines of communication between the Committee/ Management and the community and the customers. As stated above, it will be important for the Centre to ensure that the programs/exhibitions offered are available to all as the success of the Centre will be based, in large part on the level of public acceptance and community input into the Centre's objectives, values and programming.

It is at this point that the difference between communications and marketing should be explained. Basically, marketing is a process -- the planning, and as such it never ends. True marketing requires an outside-in approach. In simplest terms, it's the process of finding out what people want, how they want it and giving it to them. Communication is the tool(s) used to ensure the Centre is effectively "getting the word out". The Committee will need to ensure policies and guidelines are in place so that people are aware of the activities, programs and services that are offered.

All communications should be of the "good news" type. And in some cases communication will need to be specifically targeted to the targeted customer or special groups.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

In promoting a positive image and fostering the goodwill of the community the Centre will need to use many different communication tools. Advertising (a paid for, controlled message) and Publicity (which is not paid for and usually generated by media) are the two most prominent methods used to get a message out to the community. However there are many more "tools" that can be used to publicize the Centre and to draw paying customers.

Some of these “tools” are

- Brochures - which are colourful, full of pictures and with vary little writing
- A web page - with links to other area attractions, and one that is kept updated regularly
- 1-800 telephone number - which is well advertised throughout the catchment area, in the beginning this would be BC and the bordering US states.
- Business cards for Committee members, staff and volunteers - a very inexpensive way to advertise the Centre
- Presence at trade shows for tourism -
- Press Releases - that are developed in such a way as to be used ‘as-is’ by the newspapers and magazines
- Magazine articles - developing feature articles for trade and tour magazines.
- Handout Sheets explaining specific programming - one page sheets that explain particular exhibits, programs, lectures etc.
- Newsletters - although difficult to find time to produce, the newsletter could be developed in such a way that it would only need to be updated twice, or even once yearly. One important reason for having a Newsletter is to keep local communities apprised of what is happening at the Centre and to ensure they are aware of the need for them to be involved by inviting their input.
- Calenders/pens/posters advertising the Centre for sale in Gift Shop - as well these items could be used as small “give-away” gifts during promotional activities
- A Video of the Centre - to be played on community television and at Trade Shows
- Car door magnets for staff - another very inexpensive way to advertise throughout the community. (only used when staff on “company” business.)
- An Annual Report shared with the community - yet another way to ensure the community is up-to-date with the activities of the Centre.
- Committee members, staff and volunteers speaking at community meetings - a very inexpensive way to advertise the activities and programming of the centre.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

CENTRE MANAGER

Research has shown that the most successful museums/interpretive centres started “small”. Staffing was kept to a minimum, generally hiring only one staff, a manager, and utilizing volunteers to work with the public. It is also very important to keep the community in the picture through the continuation of a Committee or Board of Directors made up of community representatives. This Committee/Board of Directors would be responsible

for the governance of the Centre, for setting policies, procedures and guidelines and for the recruiting, selection and hiring of the Manager.

The Manager will need many skills such as planning, organizational, and decision-making, however more importantly this person will need excellent oral and written communication skills that combine with a high level of marketing skills. S/he will need the ability to negotiate, encourage teamwork, and be customer oriented. And, finally it would be desirable if the person had some previous experience in working in an interpretive centre or museum type of organization.

VOLUNTEERS

The other sections of the Centre (outside of Management) would be operated by Volunteers. With the skills and energy that they have to offer, volunteers will be extremely important to the success of the Centre.

Finding volunteers to meet the Centre's needs requires careful thinking and planning before an appeal is made.

Some steps that need to be followed in the recruitment process are:

- A clear identification of volunteer needs and position descriptions** - a volunteer program that is well planned and executed and offers meaningful work lays the groundwork for successful recruitment.
- Knowing what the Centre has to offer the volunteer** - letting the volunteer know in advance the "costs" and benefits of volunteering.
- A recruitment plan based on volunteer needs** - through the position descriptions.
- Implement the plan.**

Once the groundwork has been laid, it is time to implement the plan and to make the appeal. Volunteers would be drawn from the communities of Rock Creek, Midway, Greenwood, Grand Forks and Christina Lake and some ways that they could be identified are:

- Contacting local volunteer centre** - people who want to volunteer often register in these centres.
- Survey are companies** - many companies/businesses will be willing to advertise the volunteer requirements of the Centre.
- Ask current volunteers to help** - most businesses will respond favourably when one of their employees, who is currently a volunteer, ask if they can speak to the rest of the staff regarding volunteering at the Centre.
- Organize volunteer events carefully** - by being prepared prior to the arrival of the volunteer, the Centre will be more likely to attract a repeat volunteer and new volunteers.
- Involve the Committee/Board and Management's families and friends** - ask the committee/board and manager for their families and friends to help recruit volunteers.

Meeting the needs of today's volunteers it is important to take into consideration the realities of today's volunteer workforce. There will need to be wide variety of opportunities available. Different pieces of work or types of service attract different types of people. Some volunteers will be looking for positions that use their creativity or present a challenge or provide the opportunity to learn new skills. Others may want to support the Centre's cause, and need a break from the demands of their "day" jobs. By identifying a range of positions requiring different skills, abilities, inclinations, backgrounds and levels of commitment, the Centre will appeal to a wide array of potential volunteers.

Some opportunities and trends that should be considered when designing volunteer services could be:

❑ **Short-term or Episodic Volunteering** - research recognizes the demand among many volunteers of today is for short-term or *episodic* assignments. Episodic volunteers include both positions that are short-term in duration and positions that occur at regular intervals such as annual events. Short-term volunteers - with a definite start and end date - provides the volunteer the opportunity to see how they like working at the Centre.

❑ **Family Volunteering** - increasingly adults are looking for opportunities to perform meaningful volunteer work while spending time with their families and teaching them the value of service. Family Volunteering can involve children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles or any other members of an extended family.

❑ **High School, College Volunteers and Interns** - Many institutions of learning assist in the coordination of volunteer and intern programs for their students to work in community organizations.

❑ **The Virtual Volunteer** - Many people are looking for opportunities that they can complete via their home or work computers and the Internet. Virtual volunteering allows them to contribute time and expertise and still meet their other commitments. Some ways in which the Virtual Volunteer could help is through sending email messages advertising special events at the Centre; helping to design web pages, newsletters, brochures and keeping web pages updated; and, conducting on-line surveys and research.

❑ **The Conservation Volunteer** - This volunteer would be one who has previous experience or expertise in the restoration of artifacts and exhibits in the Centre.

MEMBERS

Members will be made up of residents of the community who have been offered the opportunity to buy memberships that provide free admission to the member and their immediate family to all the Centre's activities. Other benefits could be the museum's newsletter and discounts of up to

10% off on regular priced merchandise in the gift shop. It would also be advantageous, in building membership, if the Centre could provide tax receipts for donations exceeding the basic membership fee.

As this membership is "yearly", one successful method of ensuring that people renew their membership year over year is to let them know you appreciate their support. This can best be done through personal contact, via the telephone. For example, the calls could be made, by the Committee and the Manager, close to a holiday (instead of sending a card or letter) such as Thanksgiving or Christmas, and would thank the member for their support, and that this support allowed the Centre to provide even more programming for the

community. This call tells the member that the Centre noticed they gave, that it mattered and that they are appreciated. This is what donors need to know to keep giving year after year.

DONORS

A very important participant in successful museums/interpretive centres is the Donor. These people are those that donate or loan artifacts particular to the exhibits and in some cases are willing to volunteer their time and knowledge of history to explain how and where the artifact was used. It is imperative that the Centre lets the public know what type of artifacts they require and have a plan in place to assure the safety and to what extent treatment or restoration will take place so that all Donors or potential Donors will feel comfortable when contemplating the donation of their precious artifacts. Finally, the Centre will need, with permission from the Donor, make public their thanks through the publication of Donor Lists.

CONCLUSION

“If we build it, will they come?” It is the premise of this research report that by knowing the customer’s needs and values they will in fact come. In order to meet these needs further information needs to be gathered, such as surveys of school and college students, teachers and administrators. As well, there needs to be further information gathering throughout the residents of the neighbouring towns to ask those people what programming, projects etc would meet their needs. Another important step in researching steps to meet needs would be to invite people who were or are involved in mining, electricity generation, and other programming planned for the Centre to participate in developing plans or becoming a Centre Donor for exhibits and projects.

Having said that, it is also very important to note that the strength of the Committee - including the wealth of experience and the breadth of representation of the members means that through careful planning the *Mining Heritage Interpretive Centre* will be successful and sustainable.

¹. Harris Poll, as reported by The Philanthropy Nonprofit Leadership Centre, Orlando Florida
