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AN ANALYSIS OF THE LOUISIANA WORLD EXPOSITION: A CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

One of the problems with special event planning is the lack of social baseline data. Most feasibility studies for these events are based upon demographic data. What is needed is more micro information about the consumer and the outcomes and impacts of events to better establish guidelines for management decisions. This study examined the Louisiana World Exposition from an outcome and impact perspective so as to help in management decisions with other world's fairs.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been much discussion about the future of world's fairs, especially based upon the Knoxville and New Orleans experiences. There is little doubt that the nature of world's fairs is changing. Knoxville was more technical and New Orleans more educational and entertainment. Consumers are becoming more sophisticated and the premise that a world's fair will attract a large number of individuals is an erroneous assumption.(2) The individual in today's society has grown up in a technical/scientific atmosphere and the forum of a world's fair to exhibit new technology may be an outmoded form of dissemination of information. Theme parks have amused and entertained, and major events like EPCOT stimulated our future thinking. The question that has to be asked is, "What is the role of a world's fair in today's society and what will it be in the future for those who are planning such events?"

World's fairs are held by a host city or country for reasons of community development, increased retail business, increased tourism, prestige, willingness to demonstrate that they can put on a world class event, etc. The benefits of having a world's fair are indirect to the purpose of the visitor to a site. The primary dimensions of a world's fair are the individuals who visit the fair and the expectations and outcomes that they have as a result of their experience.(6) A world's fair is not a place but ideas that are generated out of the fair and are

intangible products which bring the world communities together to exhibit their products and services. The issue of success of an exposition is not necessarily the community impact but the impact that a fair has upon the visitor.

The type of information that must be collected from individuals is expectations and outcomes. It will help to establish base line data and guides for fairs. This type of data are needed to establish marketing guidelines, future projections, etc. The primary problem with some past fairs has been feasibility studies and the baseline data on which to develop accurate projections.(3) Many of the management decisions that have been made have been sound but the information basis of these decisions was woefully inadequate.

The base purpose of this study was to evaluate the New Orleans World's Fair to develop a method to establish baseline data and illustrate the importance of better feasibility studies and needs assessment processes.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Census data were used to establish three target market areas in which to collect data.(5) One was the greater New Orleans area because of its location in relation to the World's Fair. The other two were large cities that represented the demographic characteristics similar to those of the general population within nine hours (Houston, Texas) and 18 hours driving time (Dayton, Ohio) to greater New Orleans. The third area was a metropolitan area that was similar to the general population and was within 18 hours driving time (Dayton, Ohio) of the greater New Orleans area. The demographic characteristics that were used in this study were age and income and they are important in determining lifestyle characteristics. These elements were used to establish general population base information from the 1980 census data and the two communities selected were statistically similar, based upon the age and income structure, and were similar to the general population.

When these two communities were identified, along with the New Orleans area, the telephone directories were used as a sample source. One hundred individuals were randomly selected from each of the sample areas and telephone interviews were conducted to determine expectations and outcomes of the 1984 World's Fair. The survey was conducted one week after the closing of the Fair. The time period for the telephone calls were late afternoon and early evening. If a phone number was tried and no one answered, another number was selected at random to replace it.

INSTRUMENTATION

Telephone interviews were conducted using a prescribed list of nine questions if they had visited the fair, and seven questions if they had not. The average time of the interview was approximately 10 minutes.

There were three classification systems used throughout the analysis

process: (1) expectations-anticipations, (2) outcomes-impacts, and (3) reasons why. Expectations were classified using the following scale: educational-learning; cultural-understanding background of countries and sub-cultures within the United States; technical-explanation of the mechanics of the general theme of water; entertainment-activities presented for the purpose of diversion; commercial-those factors associated with promotion of a product for profit; and industrial-promotion related to a particular industry. Expectations were obtained to determine what the anticipation or the perceived nature of the experience was before attending the World's Fair. Anticipations are preconditioned outcomes.

A classification system was developed for outcomes using psychographic techniques.(4) This is a technique in which an individual's personality and value system directly makes a difference in the interpretation of the experience. There were four basic categories: (1) frugal-those aspects primarily related to expenses such as time and money, (2) traditional-primarily concerned with being ordered, regimented and the ability to feel in control, taking the necessary time to have a quality experience, etc., (3) innovative-those elements with the focus upon flexibility, creativity, or values and experiencing new ideas and interest in extending outward, (4) social pleasures-relaxation being with friends, escape, etc. All responses were put into one of these mutually inclusive categories. An example of each is: frugal-spent too much money and learned to use time to see so many events, traditional-prestige of attending such an event and coming away with many memories, innovative-learning about other countries and seeing new places, and social pleasure-new friends and family solidarity.

For each of the response categories a reason was sought to explain why an individual had a particular response. These reasons were classified into four base categories: personal, social, community, or environmental.(1) An example of each is: personal influence-a lack of self-confidence, social influence-peer factors, community influence-a desire for improvement, and environmental factor-noise.

ANALYSIS

Percentage distributions were used to describe significant relationships. Only those responses that had the highest percentages were utilized in the tables shown. A percentage larger than 20% was determined to be a significant factor worthy of description.

RESULTS

The analysis was divided into two basic information styles: (1) those who attended the fair and (2) those who did not attend. Of those who attended the fair, the primary ex p e c t a t i o n s / a n t i c i p a t i o n s before visiting the fair were diverse.(Table 1 They expected to see a diversity of events with the cultural, entertainment, and educational being being three of the most important. In fact, there were no categories below 20%. When asked why they had these expectations,

the two most important factors were previous experience relating to amusement parks and attractions and trips. Another important source of information was the newspaper media. When asked if their expectations had been fulfilled at the fair, 83% of those interviewed responded positively, and when information was sought about why their expectations had been fulfilled, most of the responses were "there should have been more" or "there should have been less of".

When information was sought about outcomes/impacts from the fair, the factors were primarily innovative and social pleasure outcomes.(Table 2) Personal and social factors were the primary influences of the outcomes. When asked about the outcomes in regard to the City of New Orleans the two largest types were traditional and social pleasure dimensions. (Table 3) The significant influences of the outcomes were personal and social. When residents were questioned about the impact of the fair upon the city of New Orleans, the important outcomes were growth and development and convenience.(Table 4) When reasons were sought about impact, the primary elements were social and community factors.

The best attractions at the fair were the international pavilions and the riverboat cruises. (Table 5) When information was sought about why these were the most important attractions, the individuals cited personal and social reasons. The least liked factors of the fair were the restaurants and food services and transportation.(Table 6) There were no major factors that influenced decisions in regard to the activities liked least. When questioned about how to change the fair, the three factors that the individuals would change were transportation/access, food services, and "too many things to see".(Table 7) If these items were changed, the primary outcome would have been improvement in the quality of the experience.

When information was sought about those who did not attend the fair and why, the primary factor was distance/time.(Table 8) When the individuals were asked how they heard about the fair, most heard about it through the newspaper and television media.(Table 9) Most of the individuals, when questioned about what they heard, said that financial and management problems were the primary items.(Table 10) When the residents of New Orleans were asked what the main impact of the fair was upon the community, the primary responses were financial and growth and development.(Table 11) When asked about reasons for the impact, the two common responses were social and community elements. When outcomes of the fair upon individuals who did not attend the event were sought, the primary ones were traditional and social pleasure.(Table 12) Of those who did not attend the fair, the primary expectations were cultural, technical and industrial.(Table 13) The impressions of those who did not attend the fair were of an event that is highly scientific in nature. When information was sought on what would have helped them make a decision to attend the fair, money and time costs were the biggest factor.(Table 14) The primary influences causing them not to attend were social and community factors.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings show that consumers who visited the fair and those who did not are demanding a higher quality experience and that an event like the world's fair in the United States will not attract large numbers of people unless they have a definite reason to attend. This places great pressure upon those doing the initial feasibility study to understand the target markets and how to attract them based upon uniquenesses of a world's fair experience. The lack of understanding of the audiences is the ultimate factor that will determine success at the gate. Results suggest that research is the backbone of a good feasibility study to determine the potentiality of a special event in an area. Essential to a good feasibility study or needs assessment is research, so that the percentages can be properly distributed in terms of mixing and matching the facility types and desires and programming. Individuals want to be stimulated and are seeking convenience services and information that would increase their understanding of the site. The site must not be viewed as just a facility but as a program. It has to be put together in a sequence to achieve maximum impact upon the client/participant. Understanding the individual client/consumer is the first step to development of a sound feasibility study, not only in terms of those who might attend but those who will not attend and why.

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TABLE 1

EXPECTATIONS

Expectations of Those Who Visited the World's Fair

Type	Percent	
None	7%	
Educational	37%	
Cultural	59%	
Inspirational	21%	
Technical	41%	
Entertainment	62%	
Commercial	17%	
Industrial	23%	
	Yes	No
Understand World's Fair Classification	18%	72%

Why

Do Not Know	4%
Advertisement	11%
Previous Experience	
None	7%
Another World's Fair	18%
Amusement Parks and Attractions	71%

Trips	62%
Newspaper/Media	43%
Family/Friends	21%

Expectations/Fulfillment

Yes	83%
No	17%
Why	
Not what expected	16%
Should have "more of"	68%
Should have been "less of"	43%

TABLE 2

OUTCOMES

Type	Percent
None	2%
Frugal	17%
Traditional	28%
Innovative	38%
Social Pleasure	43%

Why	
Do Not Know	4%
Personal	53%
Social	41%
Community	7%
Environment	3%

TABLE 3

OUTCOMES/NEW ORLEANS

Type	Percent
None	2%
Frugal	8%
Traditional	58%
Innovative	21%
Social Pleasure	43%

Why	Percent
Do Not Know	6%
Personal	41%
Social	58%
Community	9%
Environment	2%

TABLE 4

IMPACT OF FAIR UPON COMMUNITY/NEW ORLEANS RESIDENTS

Type	Percent
None	1%
Financial	11%
Growth and Development	33%
Attitude of City	8%
Image	21%
Conjestion	24%
No Cooperation>Now Cooperation because of disaster	5%
Future	18%
Why	
Did Not Know	3%
Personal	21%
Social	43%
Community	51%
Environment	19%

TABLE 5

BEST ATTRACTION

Attraction	Percent
Do Not Remember	3%
International Pavilions	51%
River and Cruise	41%
Entire Exposition site	7%
Inspirational Exhibits	8%
Commerical/Industrial	9%
Educational	18%
Entertainment	21%
Why	
Did Not Know	4%
Personal	31%
Social	43%
Community	13%
Environment	7%

TABLE 6

LIKED LEAST

Attraction	Percent
Do Not Remember	6%
Commercial Exhibits	8%
Industrial Exhibits	12%
Restaurants/Food Services	21%
Transportation/Access	31%
Rides	8%
Educational	7%
Entertainment	8%

Why	
Do Not Know	3%
Personal	16%
Social	19%
Community	7%
Environment	7%

TABLE 7

CHANGE FAIR

Type	Percent
Nothing	0%
Transportation/Access	37%
Food Services	31%
Price on Some Exhibits on the Inside	21%
Lines Too Long (Had to Wait Too Long)	9%
Too Many Things to See	27%
Not Enough Things to See	6%
Map	8%
Guides (Escorts)	7%
Should Have Been Cleaner	4%
Improve Experience	
Do Not Know	3%
Quality	27%
Quantity	18%
Understanding/Education	21%
Know What is There	14%

TABLE 8

WHY THE FAIR WAS NOT VISITED

Reason	Percent
No Interest	8%
Time of Year	6%
Distance/Time	46%
Money/Cost	21%
Personal	18%
Social	21%
Environment	16%

TABLE 9

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE FAIR

How	Percent
Did Not Know About it	6%
Newspaper	63%
Ads	15%
TV Programs	33%
Travel Agent	7%
Neighbors/Friends	5%
Family	6%

TABLE 10

WHAT DID YOU HEAR

What	Percent
Financial Problems	73%
Was Going to be Cancelled	21%
Entertaining Events	31%
Management Problems	54%
Worth Price Paid	18%

TABLE 11

IMPACTS OF FAIR UPON COMMUNITY/NEW ORLEANS RESIDENTS

Nature of Impact	Percent
None	3%
Financial	68%
Growth and Development	27%
Attitude of City	18%
Image	15%
Inconvenience	8%
Future	9%

Why

Do Not Know	6%
Personal	28%
Social	37%
Community	41%
Environment	15%

TABLE 12

OUTCOMES OF FAIR UPON INDIVIDUAL

Outcome	Percent
None	3%
Frugal	13%
Traditional	42%
Innovative	18%
Social Pleasure	36%
Why	
Do Not Know	4%
Personal	21%
Social	38%
Community	17%
Environment	19%

TABLE 13

EXPECTATIONS

Expectation	Percent
None	6%
Cultural	35%
Inspirational	15%
Technical	53%
Entertainment	14%
Commercial	18%
Industrial	41%

TABLE 14

WHAT CAUSED YOU TO ATTEND

Cause	Percent
Not Interested	11%
Money/Cost Lower	43%
Convenience Services	21%
Improved Content/Attractions	16%
Personal	21%
Environment	16%
Time Shorter/Cost Less	36%
Better Management	15%
Why	
Do Not Know	8%
Personal	23%
Social	48%
Community	25%
Environment	16%