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**COSI Map Testing**

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As with most attractions, COSI relies heavily on the map it provides visitors to facilitate wayfinding, marketing, and promotion. As the map is of significant cost, the Marketing department determined that they needed answers to several questions about the visitor use of the COSI map. The overarching questions included:

Are people aware of the COSI map?

What do people use the COSI map for?

What are people’s reactions to the COSI map?

What do people want in a map/in a COSI map?

Do people intend to keep the map?

To answer these questions, during August 2009, the ETS conducted mid-visit intercepts with visitors.

**Findings**

One person/group was interviewed and a total of thirty-three interviews were conducted: sixteen were of females, and sixteen were of males; one interview did not identify sex. Group composition varied tremendously.

Partly into the data collection, the researchers realized that data from these members or individuals without maps was not useful. The ETS researchers began approaching people with visible maps. There were six interviews with members, and 27 who were not. Twenty of these non-members identified as first time visitors.

Six visitors did not receive a map: these were all members. Twenty guests received or were offered the map at the box office, one at guest services, and five at the door. One visitor declined the map at the door. All seven individuals who did not receive maps did know that COSI has maps. Fifteen individuals who received maps said no one talked to them about what was on the map; an additional individual responded “not too much.” None of those who were offered a map at the door were given an overview of what is on the map.

There were no clear patterns of use of the map in the group. When asked to point out or tell the things they used the map to find, the plurality noted they did not use the map (11 plus the six who did not receive a map). An additional three noted they had just arrived (although “just arrived” included visitors who were in COSI for .5 hour in one case and 1.5 hours in another.)

In terms of specific mentions, Gadgets had 6, Lost Egypt had 5, Progress, Unicycle, and restrooms had 3 each, and Café, Space, Big Science Park, WOSU@COSI, “find special exhibits,” and “general/browsing/where to start” had 2 each. Ocean, Extreme Screen, Rat Basketball, Prairie, and Labs in Life each had 1 mention. The number of responses ranged from 2 to 9 for those who did use the map to locate specific things at COSI. Two guests noted that they had looked at the website before they came and therefore did not need the map as much.

Some interesting comments reveal the different ways people prefer to explore a museum: “just walking around randomly” and “I ask people” were examples of how some visitors prefer to find things.

The visitors were then asked about the other side of the map and if they looked at it. Fourteen of the 33 visitors had looked at this. Two noted that they did this “while waiting for the movie” and “while my child was occupied.” A couple of individuals who had not looked at this side of the map commented that they wished they had as some information they had sought was on the map.

By far, the element most used was film and time information (7 of the 14) followed closely by special events. Other things that received comments were dates, special exhibits, age related activities, and membership information.

Those who used the map for these types of information did find the map useful, generally easy to find the information they desired, and logical. Only a couple of interviewees responded that they chose to do anything based on what they found on the map—a few referred more specifically to the “pink slip” of the day’s shows and events. Generally, people use maps in places like COSI to find restrooms (8 comments), obtain directions (5 comments), and basically learn “what’s going on here” (8 comments).

Most people found the map was user-friendly. Not surprisingly, there were few suggestions for improving the map, as most visitors are not cartographers or think much about maps. The most consistent suggestion for the map was related to color. Several thought the colors were not distinct enough to make things stand apart. Six people wanted more color/color coding.

There were many specific comments, but few trends. The specific comments were:

I want pictures and text

Cool stuff but films should be in color

Need a “you are here” of where you walk in

“Start here and go there…”

Hard to read for first time—not enough information

Too much stuff on it

More information on exhibits

Agenda for people to follow

Need to see it all at a glance (everything’s so big)

Distinct exhibit areas for families

Need to see age-appropriate information more prominent

Highlight restrooms

Clearly, what people want on maps depends on their preference for how they take in and process information—there is not one map that will satisfy all visitors equally.

Twenty-one of the respondents were planning to take the map home with them. Only three were definitive “no’s” and one was maybe/probably. One no was qualified with “so someone else can use it.” The reasons people take the map with them fall into three categories: keepsake/souvenir/kid’s memento book/scrapbook (6); sharing with others e.g. share with the children’s parents and maybe “encourage them to come” (2); and for information/upcoming events/reference (2).

Recommendations:

Maps are difficult to assess as different learning preferences and orientation skills alter significantly how and why someone engages with a map. It is apparent that a map is an important component of a visit, as 21 of 26 visitors planned to take their maps home with them.

This suggests that there is a souvenir quality to the map that is useful.

Not all people need the map for the visit or for taking home; alternative formats (e.g. lower quality map options) might work for this subset of visitor.

The map as currently formatted appears to function well, and the conflicting comments of too much versus not enough information suggests COSI is somewhere in the middle.

Color and color coding could more quickly simplify use of the map.

An overview of the map when it is distributed – or even a reference to the types of information on the map, would likely increase the use of the map.