

History Museum Vampires

How to Suck the Life Out of Your Museum

Is your museum too popular? Do you have to beat visitors off with a stick?

This how-to session will explore the best ways to suck the life and fun right out of your exhibits, facilities, and programs in order to drive away annoying visitors and pesky history lovers. An expert panel has combed the world to discover sure-fire methods for making history's most compelling stories and objects bland, museums and historic sites difficult to find and navigate, living history die, and programs guaranteed to make participants run screaming from your doors. Panelists will use images of actual museums and visitors.

Our panel of experts will also demonstrate tried and tested ways to keep the lines to your museum café to an absolute minimum, avoid bothersome gift shop restocking and bank drops, and how to make certain newspaper reporters and other media steer clear of your museum and leave you in peace.

Participants will be encouraged to share their stories and ideas for sucking the life out of museums.

This tongue-in-cheek title is really just the set-up for a panel of experienced history museum professionals that will use photos and stories from real museums (the names may be changed to "protect the innocent") to explore a different way of looking at best practices by examining what we're doing **WRONG**—from our audience's point of view.

**Please contact Andy Masich
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or Jim Vaughan (jvaughan@pa.gov)
if you would like to share strategies
on how to suck the life and fun out
of history museums.**

Nip That Visit in the Bud—Discourage Museum Visits Before They Begin...

Wonky Websites

- Hard to navigate
- Hard to read
- Unappealing
- Mis-information

Frustrating Phones

- On hold forever...
- Long messages and complicated directories
- "I just want to talk to a real person."
- Cheerless receptionists

Signage

- "You can't get there from here"
- "Missed exit!"
- "Are we there yet?"

Parking

- No parking
- Expensive parking
- "Where's my car?"

Admissions/Orientation

- Confusing entry experience
- Sleepy staff
- Cheerless greeter
- Punishing prices
- "You are here" maps, models, and getting lost
- Where do I start?
- Which way do we go?
- Block Access / Physical Barriers

No Fun—Keep 'Em on the Run...

Exhibits

- Unenticing titles and uninspired graphics
- Keep them in the dark
 - Low light, no light
- Labels
 - Book-on-a-wall
 - Too small type and funny fonts
 - Dizzying backgrounds
 - Dark shadows
- AV disasters
 - "How long is this video?"
 - Bad sound, bad narration
 - "Out of order"
- Don't relate to people
 - Offend their sense of self-worth by word and example

Collections

- Let the collections deteriorate
- Reinforce the dusty, musty stereotype
- Old stuff under glass
- "Where are the weenies?"
- Terrible tours
 - The art of droning
 - TMI
 - No escape!
- "I'm tired!"

"Just say no!"

- Glowering guards intimidating visitors and terrorizing children
- "Don't touch," "No photography," "No fun!"
- Wayfinding—always mislead, confuse, and mystify the enemy (Stonewall Jackson's Principles of War)

Deadly "Living History"

- Un-authentic outfits and attitudes
- Anachronisms: crimes of fashion

"I'm hungry!"

- Bad, overpriced food
- Unrelated to mission and overall experience
- Unappealing dining spaces, poor housekeeping

Divide and Conquer

- Separate families whenever possible
- Make certain kids are bored (they're your best allies in keeping families away)
- Don't let "geezers" sit down (they'll get comfortable and never leave!)

"Don't come back!"

- Don't ask for feedback
- Gouge 'em in the shop
 - Sell souvenirs they can get anywhere
 - Unrelated to mission
- Shove 'em out the door at the stroke of 5:00
- Don't help them find other interesting things to do in your area (keep dining, recreation, and other museum opportunities a secret)