

**Four unforgettable musings and action plans
... from ASTEN 2011 conference**

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Musing No. 1 “Thinking about ‘Futures’ changes the way we act today.”

This insight came from the workshop entitled, *Musing on the future(s): Experiencing Science and technology Futures; an interactive foresight workshop in which the participants experience thinking about and communicating possible futures of Australian society and its artefacts in multiple ways.*

Held by, Tim Mansfield and colleagues from QUT, ‘Sciences 2020’ project, a Government initiative on the future of the service sector.

Shortly before my departure to ASTEN the new exhibition to be developed for MV’s Scienceworks campus was announced to be themed around the notion of the ‘future’. And days before my departure it was announced our science communication unit would be involved in the development in the near future. The synchronicity was deliciously perfect.

The workshop started with fathoming the future in that it should not be thought of as a singular railway track of “we will all...”, after all the future is really a spectrum of possibilities; it is a plural notion and best referred to as ‘futures’.

The research group had identified 7 types of Futures.

<<http://vimeo.com/21138367>>

Preposterous – thought of as impossible, it won’t ever happen

Possible – with futures knowledge, it might happen

Plausible – with current knowledge, it could happen

Projected – Business as usual, default model

Probable – with current trends is likely to happen

Preferable – with value judgements we want it to happen or it should happen

Actual – what did happen!

We discovered that when thinking about futures it’s inevitably anchored by perspectives (a street view, a map view, a satellite view) That is, from the standpoint of individual concerns, local community interests, current world issues, trends as described by facts and stats, and from cultural sensitivities. All of them are necessary to formulate a plan of action and a plan of communication. The group work involved divergent thinking (brainstorming) and then convergent thinking to come up with communication actions for particular audiences. The group presentations on themes of food, transport, and energy futures were entertaining hypotheticals and useful communication ideas.

Still on the theme of futures, another presentation by Fran Dorey and Lynda Kelly, from the Australian Museum spoke about evaluation of the travelling exhibition *Climate change: our future, your choice*. <Link: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/BlogPost/Science-Bytes/Thumbs-up-for-climate-change-exhibition>> In this case study the 3D exhibition design led the content (in a good way). It resulted in the “Do nothing” & “Do something” pathways for the public. Lynda’s evaluation of the exhibition in all 3 domains, the physical exhibition, online and the mobile (social media) was comprehensive and informative. This exhibition’s approach clearly resonated with multiple audiences. <Link to evaluation: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/BlogPost/Audience-Research-Blog/What-did-visitors-think-about-the-climate-change-exhibition>> Other feedback was solicited through a *Postcards to the Future* section of the exhibition, where visitors pledged what they would do about climate change. This was a welcome result and a successful shift from Museum as the sole commentator to public as ‘co-communicator’ of ideas.

I couldn’t wait to share these insights with the Futures team here at MV and our action plans are in line with contemporary thinking that it’s important to ‘think ahead’ in more ways than one.

Musing No. 2 Overheard in a Museum/Science centre foyer (a non science-y 20-something talking on their mobile phone), “Yeah we all are going to meet up here at the < insert Museum or Science centre name > ... it’s a really cool thing”.

This may seem like wishful thinking or an impossible scenario for many ASTEN venues as they are not the ‘hang out’ of choice for late teens, the tertiary student age group or young adults. However presentations by Chanelle Moss from the Australian Museum Sydney about their *Jurassic lounge* event, and Helen Oke from Scitech Perth who spoke about the *SciTech evenings* demonstrated it can be done. Not the 18 to 35 year old ‘hipster’ market be attracted to the venue but they will engage with what is there. The concept is museum or science centre as set dressing for band venue first and curiosity cabinet second. This is what works for highly social orientated audience who use social media to spread the word. This market loves having a beer with T- Rex after dark, dancing in silent disco (wearing headphones) next to Victorian artefacts and munching on a canapés whilst hearing the Scientist chat about their ornithology specimens, is a great night out. Congratulations to these two organisations for showing how it can be done safely and sensibly and making an ASTEN venue a place to be seen.

My action plan is to access our PhD student's body and find out more about possibly evening events for them and their friends. I have a meeting with programs next week.

Musing No.3 "Social media for Museums"

Here is my musing in less than 140 characters (pretend we both have i phones)...

Tweet voice of Museum – one voice, group speak, or many 'real voices'? Long as it's an authentic voice and a shared resource for announcements, feedback & community

I'm not a tweeter (not yet anyway), I imagine as with email and SMS there are useful conventions and nuances that make the communications work and I have yet to learn these so apologies for an awkwardness in my first tweet attempt.

As an online content provider and podcaster, I have witnessed the online presence for Museums and Science centres evolve beyond the broadcaster of information to becoming an interactive venue. The presentation from Australian Museum's Michael Hugill on Facebook and Twitter reinforces the essential function social media has for Museums and Science centres.

I was so inspired to hear this session that when I returned home, I started investigating who was doing what in Social Media for Scientists and Science communication. ASTEN, you will be pleased to know I am now running an internal Museum seminar called "Social media for Scientists". I have found some extraordinary external and internal speakers to inspire effective social media for museum scientists and science communicators. Thanks you for setting me in the right direction.

My short presentation to ASTEN was inspired by my students who ask questions like "what makes a good radio interview or documentary so good that I can't get out of the car until I hear the end of the interview"? In other words what makes it compelling? My reflections are summarized in three concepts 1) mission, 2) passion and 3) community of both the interviewer and interviewees. The audio medium captures the authentic 'passion' in people voices. We are often drawn into the interviewer's audience advocacy and mission to clarify ideas, as well as the mission of the interviewee's work. Podcasting discussions also have to build a connection between communities or provide insights into a community you are not a part of but are momentarily given access to. MV's Access all Area podcasts travels into laboratories, gate crash exhibition openings and goes on field trips inside and outside the museum.

<http://museumvictoria.com.au/accessallareas/podcastadventures/>

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Socrates said good communication has; logic (logos) pathos (an emotional element) and ethos (the relationship and connection the author builds with an audience). So the communication medium or channels may change with technology but the essence of good communication is human.

Musing No. 4 “ASTEN gives good camaraderie!”

I'd like to thank the ASTEN committee and organisers for providing the opportunity to attend and contribute to the stimulating 2011 conference. The insights I have gained and the strong sense of camaraderie of this conference are second to none. ASTEN is now on my list of 'must go' conferences.

I also wish to congratulate the ASTEN members from the Queensland Museum and Canterbury Museum for their moving stories about managing the devastation from natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. The disaster planning and response session was a testament to fortuitous forward thinking, insights into communication chains, storage design and dedicated Museum staff.

I look forward to meeting up with my ASTEN colleagues again.