

ASTEN Exhibition Workshop
National Maritime Museum, Sydney

19th – 20th August 2013

Fellowship report

By Stuart Creal, Technical Manager, Science Centre and Planetarium, Wollongong

Having spent twenty four years working in the UK Science Centre network I was lured over to the warmer climate to join Glen Moore and the team at the Science Centre and Planetarium in Wollongong. Being new to the Australasian Science Centre network I am keen to extend my links with likeminded exhibit designers, developers and builders. This was always rewarding while living in the UK and I enjoyed and benefitted from the mutual learning. It was always good to share our experiences in the exciting environment of interactive exhibit design and development. Being able to attend the ASTEN workshop gave me some exciting opportunities – firstly to be set a brief to brainstorm without consideration towards budget or scale and secondly to further develop my links with other centres and organisations.

The workshop got off to a great start with an introduction from the National Maritime Museum team who briefed all the attendees on the new Darling Harbour developments and how the museum plans to carry out some serious changes. This set the scene before Stuart Kohlhagen our facilitator, guide and referee gave a fascinating presentation on how the Exploratorium has utilised the bay and pier with outdoor exhibits in its new home on the Pier. Following this he gave us our missions!

The tables were mixed up so to ensure people were brainstorming with people they perhaps had not met and then each table was either a 'innie' or and 'outtie'. Our table of innies then started to brainstorm ideas for indoor interactives to fill the space that we were working in. The space was a stunning location looking across Darling harbour to Cockle Wharf with Pyrmont Bridge stretching across. This helped provide some inspiration for how our ideas could connect to the water and wharf.

There was an instant buzz across the whole room and people started interacting with their ideas and scribbling words or drawings down on large sheets of paper. Following the initial session our better ideas were then presented to the main group. This was a fascinating process and of course those ideas sparked new ideas. There were also some useful opportunities to get refreshments which allowed for the more informal networking. This was interesting as it allowed me to meet a wide range of people from within ASTEN who were not necessarily exhibit designers. This perspective was interesting as it gave a different perspective to my approach and background as an exhibit designer.

The afternoons brainstorm continued in a similar, light hearted, melting pot of creativity where we each were given the opportunity to think about the outside exhibits. There were some weird and wonderful suggestions coming from the groups. It was a great opportunity

to be given a brief and not have to worry about many of the issues we face within our normal working environment

- Budget – normally we design to a budget or give serious consideration to how the idea would be funded.
- Space – we give thought to where the exhibit may go – here there were very few boundaries and therefore ideas of actually having exhibits in or on the water would be considered.
- Distractions – very often in our normal working space we have distractions– the phone, email that often breaks us from the creative process.

The day finished with a summary from Stuart and everyone ready for an early night to start fresh in the morning.

Day two kicked off with a tour of the extensive site and the brief was widened with consideration on bringing the site to life and getting the visitors to understand the museum was more than just the building – the wharf, pontoons etc. Also trying to get visitors past Pymont Bridge which was where they tended to turn was also seen as a challenge

Then we had two excellent presentations by the Exploratorium team – Clair Pillsbury talked about the relocation of the Exploratorium and exhibits, their exhibit design process and the challenges they and almost all exhibit designer have and then Denise King presented two of her most recent projects and the challenges they brought.

I really enjoyed sharing ideas and building on other ideas during the event and I came away with lots of other ideas and thoughts for future exhibits. I will also look forward to hearing news of the future developments at the NMM and look forward to seeing how many of our creations make it into the new development.

I also enjoyed getting to chat to other exhibit designers and builders and learning how they approach the challenge that is interactive exhibits. We all have similar goals, budgets, constraints and face the similar challenges that interactive bring.

I would like to thank ASTEN for their support in enabling my attendance at this excellent initiative and hope that is an event that will continue to flourish. I personally found it an extremely beneficial event and have returned to Wollongong with lots of ideas buzzing around my head.