



Conference Fellowship Report for

ASTEN/ASPAC Conference: Come share, learn and grow together.

22 - 25 March 2010. Otago Museum, Dunedin

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The opportunity to be able to attend an ASTEN conference is always going to be a beneficial experience for delegates, but I think this is especially so for small regional centres like Discovery in Bendigo, given our somewhat limited opportunities to network with our peers face-to-face. Being able to attend the combined ASPAC/ ASTEN conference held this March was a doubly-exciting prospect!

Discovery is currently in the process of implementing a revised business plan that outlines a desire to overhaul our current exhibit line and develop our capacity as exhibit designers and manufacturers; enhance current and create new programs; and re-focus attention on staff development. As such, the three sub-themes of the conference: visitor experience; exhibition development; and growing people; were especially relevant to Discovery, given they reflected our own current strategic goals.

Listening to how other Centres and museums achieve within the scope of these areas provides inspiration and ideas that could be adapted to suit Discovery's environment and needs. This is particularly the case when the source faces similar hurdles to our Centre. For this reason, attending the presentation by Vicki Carman-Brown and Karl Meyer concerning the Imaginarium was very insightful, especially the ideas for how to capture passing tourists and draw them to the Centre.

The session presented by Dr Goéry Delacôte, *The 3 Es of Science Centres: Empower, Educate, Entertain!* was a motivating and informative beginning to the conference, especially in regard to creating a culture of learning within our Centre - emphasising the importance of first *being* a learning organisation in order to *promote* learning. Also of interest was Dr Delacôte's views on creating smaller, regionally-based centres, that share exhibitions in order to sustain variety in exhibitions. This concept is of particular interest to our centre, as belonging to a network or cluster of smaller centres that share exhibitions would allow us to have regular changes in exhibits – something we are currently unable to do as readily as we'd like due to limited resources. Since the conference, this is a topic that has been pursued through email discussion amongst some of the smaller centres who were at the conference – and will hopefully eventuate into a working model of what Dr Delacôte spoke of.

Sessions that were presented on capturing non-typical audiences, such as those given by Derek Williamson from the Powerhouse Museum and Craig Bloxsome from Scitech, were also fantastic in terms of providing novel and exciting event and program ideas to attract, entertain intrigue and inform new audiences, beyond the school-group market. This is an area that Discovery are only just beginning to focus on, and thus attending talks given by organisations that have already tried, failed and ultimately succeeded in this area, is motivating and very valuable. As a result, since attending the conference, discussions have commenced between



Discovery staff, the Discovery Marketing department and myself, to see how we could adapt some of these ideas and make them work at Discovery.

Beyond the aforementioned sessions, I attended:

- The road from big idea to big success (theme: exhibition development).
- Communicating science face to face (theme: visitor experience).
- The ASPAC/ ASTEN fellows session, which I gave a presentation at entitled '*On the road to re-Discovery: redefining relationships with our visitors, staff and volunteers*' where I discussed the journey Discovery has undertaken over the last 15 years: from being a struggling science centre that regarded itself a tourist attraction to being a treasured part of the local community that was providing education programs both locally and interstate to a diversity of demographics.
- Training and inspiring (theme: growing our people).
- What makes a good interactive exhibit? (theme: exhibition development).

My choices were based not on following a particular sub-theme, because as I mentioned previously – all three sub-themes were pertinent to Discovery, but rather I selected sessions based on the particular issues, and trends being discussed by the speakers, choosing those that were most relevant or similar in environment to Discovery.

Beyond the formal proceedings of the conference, there were the numerous consequential informal opportunities that were available to me. It was great to be able to meet with people from other organisations, both those that are alike and dissimilar to Discovery, and learn more about their centre/museum, their challenges, their successes, their future goals and the possibilities of how we could work together.

In summary, I was provided a fantastic opportunity through the ASPAC/ASTEN Conference Fellowship that I otherwise would not have had. As such, I would like to thank the ASTEN Committee for awarding me the Fellowship, and look forward to developing the skills, ideas and relationships that I gained from this conference.