# ASTEN Fellowship Report - Professional Development

**Imaginarium Science Centre and Exhibitions Studios (ES)**

Workshop Timing Week 8th-12th February 2010

**Primary Participants**

**Vicki Carman-Brown** - Manager - Imaginarium Science Centre

**Karl Meyer** – Managing Director – Exhibition Studios (ES)

**Regan Forrest** – Interpretation - ES

**Eddy Rinna** - Industrial Designer - ES

**Contributors**

**Brett Chandler** – Lead Graphic Designer - ES

**Mia Prerad** – Junior Graphic Designer - ES

The Imaginarium Science Centre, in Devonport, Tasmania, after nine years of operation, is at a critical funding juncture. Major decisions on its future are currently being made, including a change of venue and a change of direction in its operations. For nine years the Devonport City Council, of which Imaginarium is a valued community facility, has fully funded the centre’s operations. Future funding sources are being considered within the NW Tasmania region’s industries.

ASTEN member organisations, Imaginarium Science Centre, TAS, and Exhibition Studios (ES), SA, were keen to use this scenario as a professional development opportunity and partner to investigate methodologies for securing corporate sponsorship that complement the regional industries, through the lens of innovative science and technology communication.

Both parties shared knowledge on effective exhibit design, marketing and sponsorship approaches and possible funding and sponsorship sources.

Through the processes involved, the parties investigated creative approaches aimed at challenging existing community preconceptions and extending the funding beyond local government sources. Possible exhibit and exhibition ideas that would attract corporate sponsorship, whilst maintaining the integrity and value of Imaginarium’s visitor experiences, were identified; especially those pertaining to increasing Imaginarium’s ‘sense of place’ in its community and region.

Four full days were given to the task of maximising the input of different Exhibition Studios staff, with the Imaginarium Manager, by providing their perspectives, skills, experience and talents in the brainstorming, planning and concluding sessions.

Also, opportunities to observe and discuss relevant public programs on offer at the Royal Institute of Australia (RiAus) and the South Australian Museum were organised to be included in future innovative public program content.

**Background**

* Imaginarium has been operating for 9 years, operated and funded by Devonport City Council. This funding arrangement is becoming untenable for Council and in the long term Imaginarium’s best interests would be served by securing corporate sponsorship from within the region, firstly, in the form of Foundation Sponsorship to off-set Council’s full support.
* Devonport suffers from declining tourism visitation: due partly to many Spirit of Tasmanian ferry visitors preferring not to visit the Devonport City Centre on arrival or only spending the departure day in the Devonport City region, (Imaginarium is perceived locally as a tourism attractor but under 2% of overnight visitors go to Imaginarium)
* In the past five years most interactive exhibition content has come via a 5-year agreement with Questacon for the hire of their travelling exhibitions. However, other travelling exhibitions and exhibits had been sourced from Scitech and Discovery science centres. Additional interactive experiences and displays have been produced on-site or sourced locally and from interstate.
* Imaginarium has considerable community support and its transformation could be a catalyst for re-positioning Devonport in the region
* Given the need to change premises within a year, as well as the need to reduce expenditure and increase income, a ‘Business as Usual’ approach is untenable



## ES Boardroom (L-R) – Regan Forrest, Karl Meyer, Vicki Carman-Brown, Eddy Rinna

**Workshop Vision Statement**

During the workshop it was identified the core vision for the centre had not been articulated in a public document. It was understood a vision is currently being investigated by the council and operational team. In the interest of idea generation and possible future direction a premise for the Imaginarium’s vision was workshopped by the team.

**Vision Development**

Key aspects:

* Distinctively Tasmanian (not necessarily constrained to Devonport alone)
* Imaginarium as a community resource: up-skilling and capacity-building for the local population, for which socioeconomic factors are below State and National averages
* Promoting and linking within the centre to innovative practices in local industries, with a focusing on the underlying science, technology and innovation.
* Local industries include those dedicated to renewable energy sources, agriculture, etc
* Change of governance model so that the Council role changes to being one of 2 or 3 foundation sponsors (each supporting Imaginarium for approx $250,000 pa). This will have the benefit of reducing the Council’s financial obligation while still retaining the community role of a key supporter of the Imaginarium and giving, the Imaginarium more flexibility with regard to its funding streams.

**Proposed Vision Statement**

*“To inspire the community to embrace technology, innovation and knowledge within a uniquely Tasmanian context, thereby invigorating the Devonport region’s resources and people for a sustainable and vibrant future”.*

**Branding**

In a recent report “Imaginarium Science Centre – Review of Future Models” it was identified the largest opportunity for visitor growth was in the tourism sector which currently accounts for 11% of the centre’s visitation.

The current education sector had minor variations in visitation and actively embraced the centre as an annual excursion destination. Ensuring a managed transition was implemented in re-naming and branding this sector would continue its patronage.

The workshop team investigated methods of attracting the tourism sector, initially focusing on perceptions surround the naming and brand. The following is a summary and response aimed at increasing the perceived experience offered:

* Brand and theme should support Tasmania’s identity as a naturally resourced landscape – linking science, technology and innovation within a distinctly Tasmanian context is likely to increase the appeal for the tourism market and for many industries that link to those natural resources, either directly or indirectly
* Identity could be outdoors-y in nature and reminiscent of a “scientist-as-adventurer” archetype for greater across-the-board appeal. “Dora the explorer meets Lara Croft”
* Re-position Imaginarium under a brand, such as - ***‘Wild Science - Tasmania’***
* Create an exhibition environment which is more themed than current on offer: eg ***Bioscape*** as a unifying theme
* It also presents an opportunity for local industries, by showing what it is about the locality that makes Tasmania an attractive place for their business activities. ***(Included in with tourism sector above)***

**Re - Naming**

The brainstorming sessions focused on re-position of the centre into the future with possible ideas for re-branding/re-naming. A larger pool of word association was reduced to the following list specifically aimed at a tourism offering.

**WILD** – nature, excitement, exploration, wilderness, challenging

**SCIENCE** – Structure, knowledge, innovation, technology, interesting facts in a regional context

**TASMANIA** – Relationship to wild, green, environment, tourism destination, location

**Concept Logo generation**

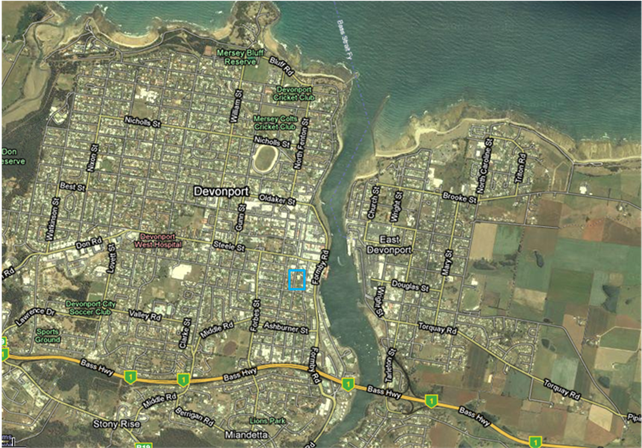
The following are concepts developed around the word association and graphical interpretation. Additional concepts are included as an attachment.



**outreach and Extending the hours of engagement**

The working session focused on opportunities to increase tourism visitation, outreach and extend operational hours. The key to achieving many of objects required taking the Imaginarium beyond the building by focusing on promotional activities and elements imbedded within the greater city of Devonport.

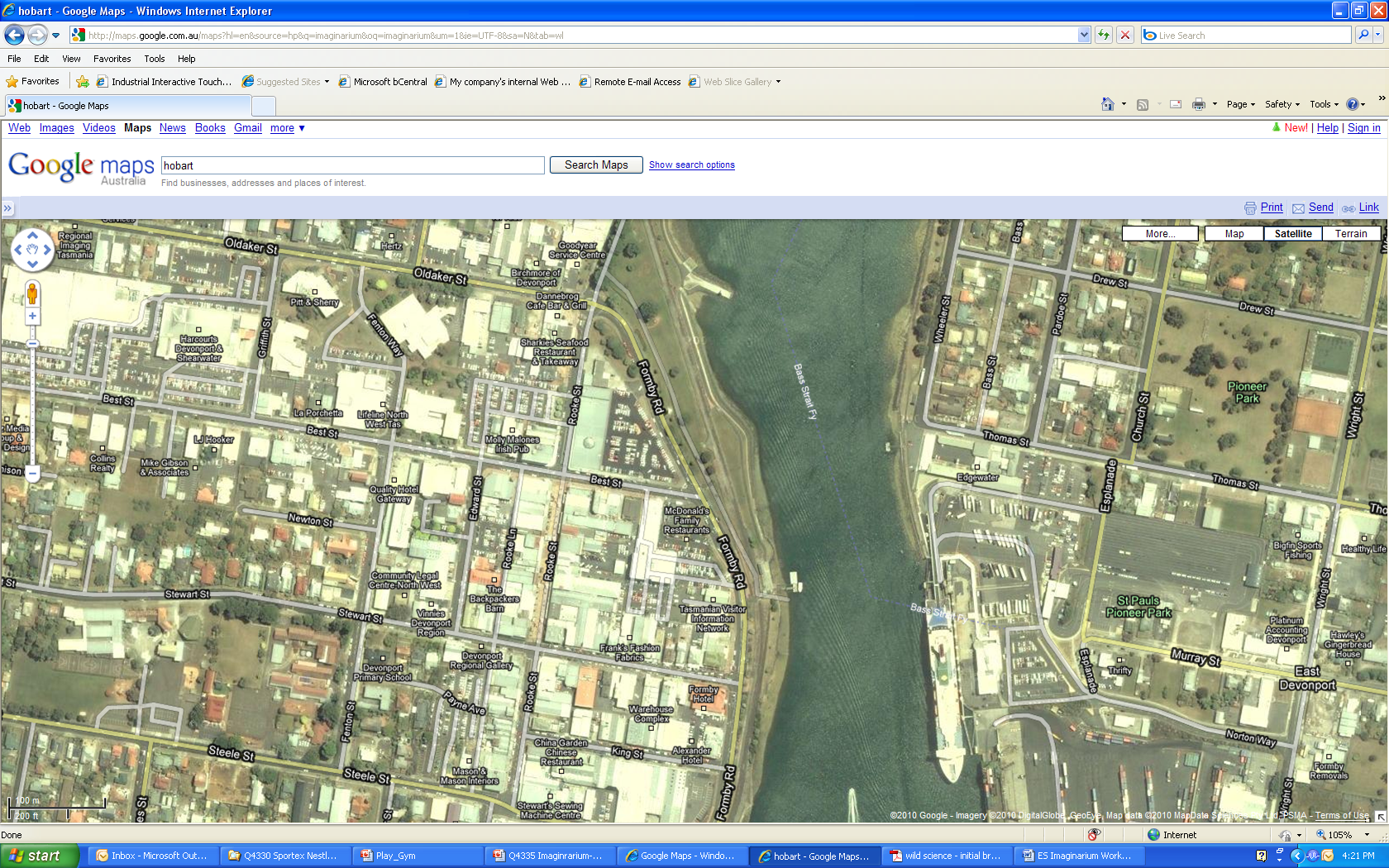
Areas highlighted included the town mall and the road leading to and from the Spirit of Tasmania ferry terminal.



Spirit of Tasmania Terminal

Current location

Proposed Re-location



Devonport Mall

**Promotional activities and elements**

The requirements of the activities and elements included:

* Provide educational arts/science content through rewarding activities and experiences
* Promote and reinforcing the value proposition of the Imaginarium venue experience
* Extended the Imaginarium beyond the building with no staffing requirements
* Add value to Devonport as a destination with diverse offerings
* Seek to involve the community in the development of the elements.

A promotional element targeted at the tourism sector was envisaged being located on the road leading from the Spirit of Tasmania ferry terminal prior to the highway. It was envisaged to provide a rewarding, eye catching experience from a moving vehicle. Initially conceived as a scaled optical illusion it would also allow for photo opportunities, promotional and directional signage. Examples discussed included inverted faces and distorted house.

The mall outdoor exhibits would incorporate art/science based activities that would provide outcome based learning through active prolonged engagement (APE). The activities would target tourists and local residence using sculptural elements that would be dynamic and thought provoking.

**CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

The Imaginarium Science Centre and Exhibition Studios would like to thank the ASTEN Executive on awarding an ASTEN Fellowship for this unique professional development opportunity. It was a supportive and rewarding experience for the Imaginarium Science Centre and a creative professional development opportunity for the staff of Exhibition Studios. The report was compiled by Karl Meyer, Regan Forrest (Exhibition Studios) and Vicki Carman-Brown (Imaginarium Science Centre).

Vicki Carman-Brown, ASTEN Fellowship recipient, 2009-2010

**ATTACHED DOCUMENTS**

Additional Conceptual Logos