

A black and white photograph of the Port Macquarie Historic Museum. On the left, a tall signpost holds a sign that reads "PORT MACQUARIE HISTORIC MUSEUM". The building is a two-story brick structure with a prominent chimney. A sign above a doorway on the right reads "PORT MACQUARIE M... r Place, Our St...". The foreground shows a paved area with a manhole cover and a metal fence.

PORT
MACQUARIE
HISTORIC
MUSEUM

ARTS MID NORTH COAST
SMART ART TOOLKIT

MARKETING YOUR MUSEUM

IDEAS TO INCREASE VISITATION
AND ENGAGEMENT FOR SMALL
MUSEUMS

BY KEVIN WILLIAMS

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Introduction

In February 2019, Arts Mid North Coast delivered a Strategic Plan for the Bellingen Historical Museum, the result of months of workshops and consultations with the assistance of a Projects Grant from Museums & Galleries NSW.

While this detailed Plan reflected the individual circumstance and potential of this one community managed museum, there is much within the Plan of relevance for **all** community run museums.

This Information Kit highlights 10 ideas any small museum could consider to increase visitation and strengthen the role their museum can play in their local cultural tourism landscape.



Idea 1.

Embrace Marketing!

Marketing is more than just selling and advertising. It is about doing what you need to do to **attract, capture and over time, retain your customers**, in this case visitors to the Museum.

It is no longer enough to simply open the door of the Museum, expecting visitors to arrive. The characteristics of the market are changing and heritage institutions are competing against many other experiences for time and attention.

There are numerous ways of marketing any product but the goal for this project is to identify strategies that are going to be owned and driven by a community group of volunteers with limited financial resources.

A range of opportunities can be developed simply by gaining an understanding of:

- what experience you offer;
- how the Museum is perceived by visitors, and;
- how they find out about it?

The goal is greater sustainability through increased visitation. You don't need to be an expert to think of opportunities. A brainstorm with your volunteers will surprise you with marketing ideas.



Idea 2.

Make your museum accessible

An important part of the visitor experience is the simple question of **when is it open?** An audit of the majority of museums on the Mid North Coast indicates:

- Museums are open on average 4.5 days a week for 25.2 hours a week
- 72% open Saturday. 60% open Sunday. 52% closed on Mondays

These facts give an indication where your museum may fall in the overall scheme. We are not saying which days and hours you should open, as we know this often depends on your availability of volunteers.

However, we suggest if you have not reviewed your opening hours for some time it may well be worth doing and assess when your visitors are most likely to visit.

Consider opening additional one off times especially if there is a major event happening in your area. Participants in such events are often staying more than a day and are always looking for something to do. They may also bring partners, family and friends, or be attending as part of a group.



Idea 3.

What are you selling?

To grow and be more sustainable in the future the Museum needs to focus on **telling unique stories**.

In the past, museums have mostly focused on their collections, and is mainly the case for many community museums. Indeed, the overwhelming impression for any visitor is just how many objects they contain.

However when one begins to look more closely there are many stories being told by these objects. Find those that are unique or special and that may be of interest, to either your visitors or those you want to encourage to visit.

Case Study

In Bellingham, the Historical Society are researching one of the town's previously untold stories - the role of alternative lifestyles and hippies and the growth of its arts and cultural events. This project has generated new interest and potential new audiences for the Bellingham Museum.



Idea 4.

First Impressions

The visitor experience is not just about what the Museum has to see but equally important - how the visitor is treated. As the old saying goes, you only get one chance to make a first impression, so it is important to make the most of it!

There is anecdotal evidence and concerns that the entry to many museums sees some people just stick their head in (or toe!) and then leave. The entry area needs to be an uncluttered and welcoming space, inviting visitors to come in and discover.

Central to this is the need for there to be a volunteer on the desk. Ideally someone who is happy to be the 'face' of the museum. We recognise this is not always feasible until more volunteers are secured.

If you can't have a volunteer at the desk all the time then very simple solutions can be used such as a welcome sign that lets visitors know how to get the attention of a volunteer who may be elsewhere in the museum. An old fashioned bell might help and you may even have one in your collection!



Idea 5.

Value your volunteers

There is no doubt that devoted volunteers are the lifeblood of community museums. They are passionate about celebrating history and sharing their museum's collections. Harnessing this energy and enthusiasm with some simple marketing ideas can bring some positive outcomes.

Volunteers have mastered the fine art of listening pro-actively to their audiences, and compared with larger institutions, smaller museums are more able to 'break the rules' and do things a little differently:

"[small museums] often innovate in nimble ways which are fully attuned and receptive to their audiences. The best ones have a confidence about their place and their meaning... they don't over worry about the latest currents in museology."

Tristram Hunt, Director of Victoria & Albert Museum
Former UK Museum of the Year judge

Volunteers are a valuable marketing tool so let them know by defining that importance with a Statement of Intent relating to volunteers such as:

"To increase the numbers, skills and capacity of its volunteer members to the benefit of the Museum, and for the enhancement of their own enjoyment".

And consider enacting other actions or policies such as:

"To incorporate strategies to recruit more volunteers with any Museum public program or activity or campaigns with local media".



Idea 6.

Who is visiting?

Knowing who is visiting, who is not and who could be, will better inform you on what marketing you can undertake, and what programs, exhibitions and displays will best engage and attract visitors.

At its simplest, ask visitors for their postcode as they come in and to rate their visit at the end. This can be done through a questionnaire or in casual conversation.

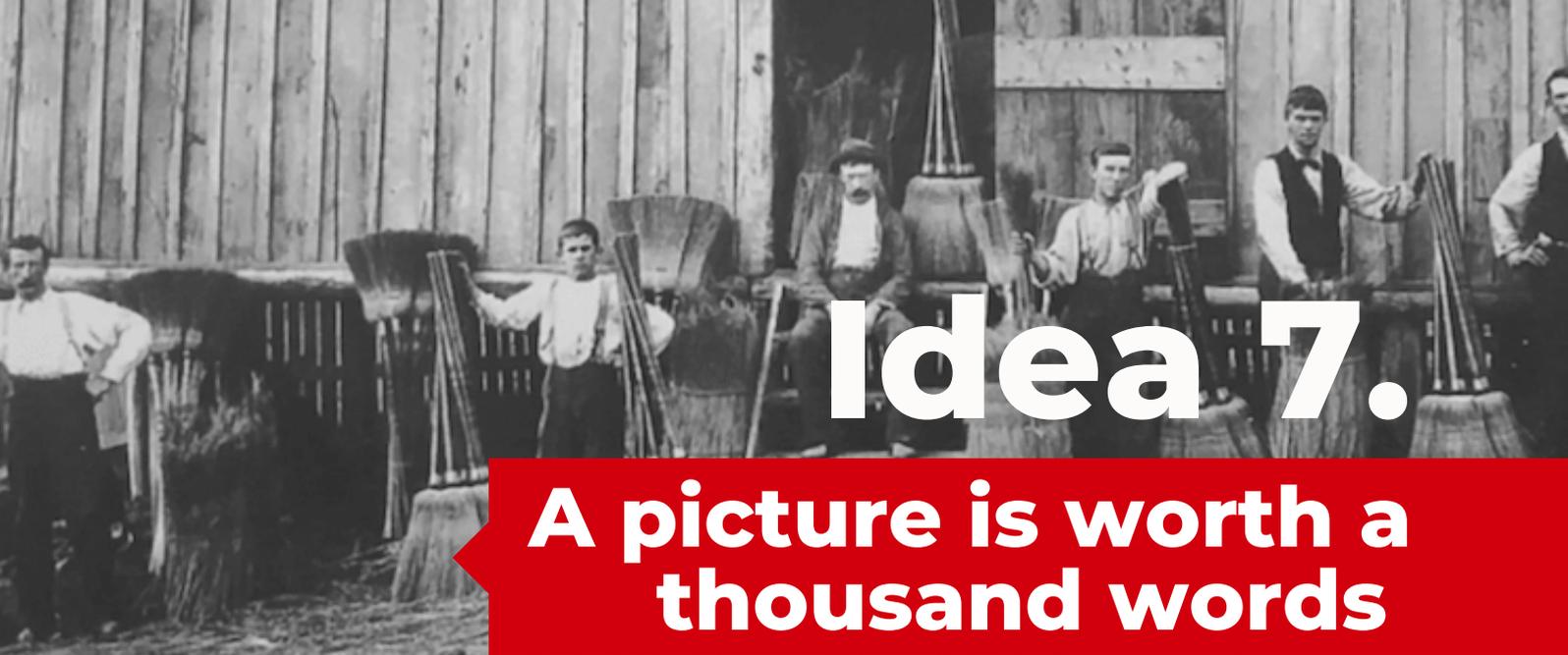
Observe and make note of approximate ages, whether they have come as an individual, group, family etc. and use the information you have on any booked school or tour groups.

If you cannot survey every visitor then sample certain times/days or, better still, a week every month. Your local High School or TAFE students may be able to help with more detailed samples.

See how you are placed against major target markets for the Mid North Coast and Museums. At its most basic these are: Locals; Schools; Other Groups; Tourists.

If you want to better link to tourism you could consider tourist groupings such as: Family holiday; Wanderers (Seniors); Daytrippers.

The advantage of the latter categories is the availability of other information and insight from [Destination NSW Annual Snapshot of Cultural Tourism](#) and the [MGNSW 2015 study: Guess Who is Going to the Museum?](#)



Idea 7.

A picture is worth a thousand words

As we start to move into how you advertise or sell your museum, the most important and essential first step is to have great images to use on various marketing platforms. These need to be of a high quality in two ways:

1) Don't just have a photo of the outside of the Museum or a static photo of objects. Try and have images that convey the experiences offered by the museum and people engaged with your objects and displays.

2) They should be in full colour and high resolution for good quality print. This means they need to be at least 300 dpi (dots per inch). You can check this by clicking on the image 'properties' and looking under 'details'. If the image is too small it may appear stretched and blurry.

Make sure your own or have rights to the images. If you are hiring a professional photographer, make sure you buy the images and have permission to use them.

One of your volunteers or their families may have an interest in photography that can help. Otherwise, contact a local photography group. You can also see if your local paper would like to do a story on the museum. They may be able to send their photographer to take shots you can use.



Idea 8.

Working with Local Media

Local media is always looking for stories to run especially those relating to their community. However they need to have new angles to stay current.

Consider writing a press release in a range of situations from calling for new volunteers, acquiring a new significant object or staging a special exhibition or event.

In between such stories you should make a point of establishing a good relationship with your local media. You could think about inviting them to openings, special events etc. or just to see the museum if they have not done so before. For the latter this may extend to an invitation to their family or friends.

You can get more information on how to write a media release and who the media is by checking the **SmartART** section of our website. Our online toolkit has lots of information of value but that relating to the media can be found at:

http://artsmidnorthcoast.com/toolkit_category/marketing



Idea 9.

A brochure is still a valuable marketing tool!

There is a growing view that paper based flyers and brochures are no longer relevant in tourism - **Don't believe it!**

Yes, it's true more and more people are booking and planning their trips online, including older travellers. However, a well positioned and well designed print collateral can help jog people's minds or give them an idea of what to do "in town" once at their destination.

Printing services have become much cheaper and many offer design services. You may only need a double-sided DL flyer. Partnering with nearby museums or attractions can save on costs. Essential are the great images you have already obtained and a strong simple design.

Traditionally, brochures have featured at local Visitor Information Centres and Highway Service Centres. They are also useful for:

- Trade shows and events, both industry and community;
- Display at other museums or galleries in the region for cross promotion;
- Display at related retailers' e.g. antique shops, furniture restorers;
- Accommodation providers (include AirBNB hosts!);
- Display stands at airports, petrol stations and other commercial operators;
- Event organisers for their local goodie bags;
- Distribution through Local Council offices, libraries and events.



Idea 10.

Places to be seen - online

Having a website is like having a volunteer on duty 24/7 to answer questions about everything people may want to know about your museum. Today most museums and attractions have a website. If you don't, there are things to think about.

There are costs involved in establishing and maintaining a website, such as domain name and hosting. It is also essential that you have someone to keep it up to date especially with basic information such as opening times and admission prices.

A basic design should be clear and concise. You can also use your website as a means of communicating news and events and/or with members. An excellent local example is the website of Port Macquarie Museum at <https://portmuseum.org.au>

Alternatively, you can set up a **Facebook page** for your museum. More people are proficient at setting up a Facebook account and increasingly use this platform to exchange news and views. As a 'Local Business or Place', you can fill out options such as your opening hours, parking options, and entry fees.

A final option (but less preferred) is to depend on someone else's website to provide the most basic information. Options include the Museums & Galleries NSW website or a listing with your local Council or local tourism association. However, having your own website can actually make more positive use of these options.

Image Credits

Front Image: Entrance to Port Macquarie Museum. Courtesy of Port Macquarie Historical Society

Back cover: Bellingen Museum display. Image courtesy of Museums & Galleries NSW.

Pg 1: Interior of Bellingen Museum. Image courtesy of Museums & Galleries NSW

Pg 2: Trial Bay Gaol - After Dark Tour. Image courtesy of NSW National Parks & Wildlife

Pg 3: Wingham Museum frontage. Image courtesy of Manning Valley Historical Society

Pg 4: Port Macquarie Museum Inclusive Tour. Image courtesy of Port Macquarie Historical Society.

Pg. 5: Interior of Coffs Harbour Regional Museum. Image courtesy of Coffs Harbour City Council

Pg. 6: Volunteers at Douglas Vale Historical Homestead and Vineyard. Image courtesy of Douglas Vale Historical Homestead and Vineyard.

Pg. 7: School group tour at Port Macquarie Museum. Image courtesy of Port Macquarie Historical Society.

Pg. 8: Broom factory workers, Tinonee. Image courtesy of Tinonee Museum and Mid Coast Stories.

Pg. 9: Heidelberg Press demonstration. Image courtesy of The Bellingen Courier-Sun.

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