
A sense of place

Planning for success at National Maritime Museum Cornwall



Robin Barker's involvement in tourism started in 1981 as an overseas resort manager, followed by some six years as Head of Direct Marketing at Saga Holidays. In 1992, he set up his own consultancy in Cornwall and has since been instrumental in drafting the Cornwall and Devon Tourism Development Plan, the investigation of Cultural Routes in the South West, the creation of VISIT (the UK's largest tourism information network) and many other projects. He became Head of Marketing at National Maritime Museum Cornwall in February 2001. Here, he explains the market-focused philosophy he has brought to the project, the emphasis on regional identity that has informed all aspects of planning, and the preparations that are being made to ensure a successful launch.

'The fastest growing industry in the world' is how tourism is increasingly being recognised, and alongside this are seen the inevitable new entries into the sector and the introduction of new 'buzz' words and phrases that are said to provide the key to success.

Prominent amongst many contemporary reports is the growth in 'cultural tourism', along with the introduction of 'niche marketing', both often portrayed as the panacea for success in the industry and essential for any new project, especially if it is to gain external funding. Alongside this, we increasingly hear simplistic comments about the death of mass tourism and 'bucket and spade' holidays. Media coverage has become dedicated to the growth in new products - wine tours, activity holidays, extreme sports, health farms, food and drink holidays and so on - many dedicated to offering healthy distractions from the stresses of twenty-first century existence.

Yet what is culture? Some see it as an exclusively upmarket concept, closely aligned with art and heritage, but today's wider definitions lead to a far more all-embracing interpretation. In much the same way that Ibiza is now largely associated with clubbing, late nights and sun, and Newquay with surfing, youth and a relaxed lifestyle, so culture is now largely associated with a region's whole way of life, its mood, ethos and in marketing terms its Unique Selling Point or USP.

From the tourism marketing perspective the USP of a destination has been at the centre of its marketing for generations, increasingly at the core of targeted communications to the niches that will appreciate it most. Saga Holidays is about to celebrate its 50th anniversary and has been a leader in the niche marketing concept since inception. From birth, the company has stuck to its central marketing philosophy of identifying the aspirations of a market segment, developing a product to match, and communicating appropriately. Fifty years on the formula is proven, yet it is nothing new, merely a reconfirmation that in tourism, as in all market sectors, the principles of marketing are consistent, notably to:

- understand the market, its potential, segmentation and nuances;
- develop a product that will satisfy the market demand; and
- communicate effectively.

Within the attraction and museums sector these fundamental principles are too often forgotten, with product development frequently based on what is perceived to be right for a particular audience and predictions of demand based on an actuarial analysis of market sectors and historical conversion rates. All too often these principles result in forecasts that take little account of the fundamentals of marketing, leading to inappropriate product development, inaccurate predictions of market demand, and new museums and attractions that, put simply, struggle to hit their launch targets.

Regional roots

Pre-planning and predictions regularly seem to ignore a proven fact underlined every year by the ETC's *Sightseeing in the UK* reports, which state that the most frequently cited reason behind an attraction achieving an increase in admissions is 'Improved Marketing'. I may have a vested interest in pointing this out, but the all-too-frequent disregard of this essential factor is something that drives me to distraction!

To take two examples, both from the South West of England:

- The Goss Experience opened in 1999 in Totnes in Devon. Consisting of a factory in which a boat was being built, along with a small visitor centre and retail outlet, few would have predicted its impact, yet within its first 18 months it had welcomed over 1.2 million visitors and become one of the most visited attractions in the South West. Interestingly, some 70 per cent of visitors had never sailed!



Aerial photo of the Museum site nearing completion, April 2002 © Crown

- The Eden Project opened fully in 2001. In the run-up to opening, experts had forecast annual visitor numbers ranging from 450,000 to 1 million, with a healthy dose of scepticism poured over the latter figure. Yet in its first year of operation Eden saw just short of 2 million visitors.

What had these two examples in common? They both ignored the 'actuarial' approach to product development and followed marketing principles (whether knowingly or not) to create something that 'belonged' to the region in which they were located, that showed a deep understanding of the psychographics of the potential audience, and which - essentially - had a 'sense of place'.

Neither attraction could have reasonably been anywhere else, and nor - as is the case with the next world-class attraction opening shortly in Falmouth - could National Maritime Museum Cornwall.

A brand new multi-million pound development on Cornwall's Falmouth waterfront, National Maritime Museum Cornwall is perhaps the region's best example of an attraction with that sense of place - the link between an attraction and the culture of the region in which it sits.

Cornwall is an extraordinary county - an ancient Celtic kingdom with an extraordinary heritage, a unique culture and a remarkably mild climate. For decades it has been simplistically seen as a summer tourism destination, a place one visited as a child and an economically deprived county at the periphery of the South West peninsula. Yet Cornwall boasts some extraordinary features. Along

with its Celtic history and rugged individuality it boasts three unique assets.

Firstly there is Cornwall's renowned 'quality of light' a combination of the seascapes, coastal scenes and landscapes that has inspired artists for generations. No wonder, then, that Newlyn and St Ives have seen the development of their own artistic schools, and no wonder that Tate St Ives has proved to be such a success as Cornwall's artistic flagship since its opening in the early 1990s.

Then there is Cornwall's mild climate - not too cold in winter and not too hot in summer - resulting in the claim that more plants grow in Cornwall than anywhere else in the world. Hence the county's riches in outstanding gardens (there are said to be 52 open to the public) and the successful opening in 2001 of the Eden Project - our horticultural flagship.

Finally there is Cornwall's coastline and maritime heritage. Nationwide qualitative research carried out by the Regional Development Agency in 2000 showed that more than anything Cornwall was appreciated for its outstanding coast, its fishing harbours and maritime heritage. To date there has been little to celebrate this unique combination, but opening shortly on Falmouth's harbour front will be National Maritime Museum Cornwall, a cultural icon which will build on the region's assets, but which more importantly has that essential sense of place. After all, Falmouth was once at the centre of global communications and remains the world's third largest natural deepwater harbour, so where better to create an icon of this stature?



Artists impressions of the 'Set sail' and 'Flotilla' galleries (courtesy Land Design Studio)



Project evolution

National Maritime Museum Cornwall is a fully independent new museum, the result of collaboration between the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and the former Cornwall Maritime Museum in Falmouth.

The National Maritime Museum had an impressive collection of small boats - some 120 craft of historical significance from Britain and overseas. For many years the Trustees of the NMM had been seeking a suitable waterfront location in which to create an imaginative and dynamic showcase for the boats, many of which can still be sailed. Falmouth, offering a waterside location and its own nautical heritage, represented an ideal site.

The Cornwall Maritime Museum evolved from a collection reflecting Cornwall's rich maritime history gathered over 150 years by the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society. In 1981 this collection was brought together as the Falmouth Maritime Museum, later changing to the Cornwall Maritime Museum. Since then the collection has grown and prospered.

Both museums applied separately to the Heritage Lottery Fund for assistance in developing their ideas. At the Fund's suggestion the two began talks that culminated in the formation of a joint venture to create a single entity. Although owing a great deal to both sponsoring museums, the new undertaking was to be independent, with its own governing body, financially self-supporting, and most importantly with displays to reflect its location and market. A new Charitable Trust was created to oversee the project. In addition to

the HLF, funding for National Maritime Museum Cornwall has come from the South West Regional Development Agency, the European Regional Development Fund (5b funding programme), individuals and corporate sponsors.

Located at the eastern end of Falmouth's harbour front, the new landmark building, designed by architects Long & Kentish, is part of a larger project to redevelop an old dock area in line with its maritime origins. The exhibitions inside the Museum have been master-planned, designed and developed by Land Design Studio. Both architects and designers were appointed at a very early stage in the project and have worked closely together throughout the development, resulting in a building and exhibitions that are sympathetic to each other's needs, the local environment and marketplace.

Telling stories

Essentially, it was agreed at an early stage that the development had to 'fit'. To quote the architect, the building could not appear as though it were 'a piece of Mars plonked here in Falmouth'. It had to have that 'sense of place'.

Once open, visitors begin their journey in *Set sail*, a totally immersive, audio-visual, walk-through experience that introduces some of the themes of the Museum. Film footage, including archive material as well as recent interviews with famous designers and sailors, is spliced with images and effects to provide a stunning

introduction to the world of small boats and the people who use them. **Flotilla**, the largest gallery in the centre of the Museum, will contain up to 30 boats. Some are situated on the ground floor, with the rest suspended through a large void up to third floor level. Visitors will be able to view this flotilla of boats from all angles, via a series of walkways that span the building. For the opening of the Museum the boats have been selected to illustrate the extraordinary variety of the collection, ranging from racing dinghies and powerboats to craft used for exploration, rescue and work. There are vessels from the UK as well as overseas, many representing the finest standards of design and boat building. And behind each there lies a story.

Boat building looks at the different methods and tools that have been used through the ages to construct vessels. Interactive displays allow visitors to explore the principles behind boat construction - buoyancy, shape and stability, propulsion and control - while other displays look at new materials and techniques that are used in boat construction today. **Nav-station** is a hands-on area where interactive displays have been developed to enable visitors to understand the principles of navigation and meteorology. Linked to the **Learning Centre**, this area will have staff on hand to support both enjoyment and learning. The **Waterfront** provides further hands-on experiences. Here a large pool with fans to generate wind, and remote controlled sailing boats allow visitors to put the theory into practice. Visitors can also go outside onto the Museum's pontoon and see some of the boat collection on the water.

At the top of the tower, the **Look out** provides a unique viewing point across Falmouth Harbour. Exhibits in this area explore the development of the town through the ages and provide visitors with

further information about the landmarks that they can see through the windows, binoculars and telescopes. At the base of the tower the visitor experience continues underwater. The **Tidal zone** is one of only three natural tidal galleries in the world. Visitors can watch the rise and fall of the tide through two windows, each over five metres in height. Displays in this area explain the forces that create the tides and illustrate the diversity of fauna and flora that exists in the Fal Estuary, designated as an area of Special Conservation.

The **Cornwall Galleries** complete the experience and reinforce that all-important integration with the local community. Here the displays highlight the impact that the sea has had on the lives of the Cornish people. A reconstructed sail loft and a pilchard cellar show some of the industries associated with the sea. Further case studies look at the impact that the sea has had on the region: famous sea rescues that have taken place from the Cornish coast; emigration of Cornish people across the sea; the important role that Cornwall played as a base for both offence and defence during times of war; the development of the boat-building industries and the impact this had on the local population; and the lives of the people who have grown up and lived with the sea. The **Robertson Packet Gallery** also tells a unique Falmouth story - it is here that the first British global communications began at the end of the seventeenth century, when the needs of trade and colonial expansion made a reliable overseas mail service essential. In 1689, Falmouth was chosen as the base for a scheduled government mail route. Mail and cargo was carried on the packet ships in and out of Falmouth, until steamships took over in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Museum also contains a library, a lecture theatre, a shop and a café with some of the best views over the Falmouth waterfront.

The Royal party departs from the Museum at the start of the Golden Jubilee tour (courtesy Apex News and Pictures)





NATIONAL MARITIME
MUSEUM CORNWALL

Getting the message across

The vision of the Museum is to promote an understanding of boats and their place in people's lives, to inspire new boat design and to promote an understanding of the maritime heritage of Cornwall – a vision that will be effected through welcoming visitors from all regions, backgrounds and interests and through working closely with schools, partnerships, business and media to effect a high degree of community ownership of the project.

The Museum brochure refers to the community spirit behind the project. Plans are for this cultural association to strengthen, to encourage partners to regard the Museum as 'theirs' and to achieve a high degree of synonymy between National Maritime Museum Cornwall and the culture of the region in which it sits.

Already local schools are proud of having their own national museum here in Cornwall. This sense of local ownership is central to the future because, whilst international and new national markets are essential for the Museum and for Cornwall's prosperity, visitors can't be relied upon to come to the region in numbers to see something that could be just anywhere. Sense of place is key.

We're confident in our cultural links, we know our USP, have identified our key markets and have developed a product and marketing plan to match. Now we just need to roll up our communications to ensure that everyone else knows too, because despite our close affinity with the community, we also acknowledge that we are in the tourism business and that tourism is essentially a numbers game. Bucket and spade holidays are not dead, mass tourism is alive and kicking and, even in the fastest growing industry in the world, we know that we'll have to work hard for our share.