

HERITAGE ATTRACTIONS FACT SHEET

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INTRODUCTION

North East England has a long, turbulent and vibrant history. In 2008, One North East commissioned research into how we can use our rich history, heritage and historical attractions to attract more visitors and customers to our region.

The report highlighted that, although many individual businesses and attractions were providing a very high quality experience, there are many ways we could better promote what we have and more successfully engage new and existing customers.

This fact sheet illustrates the key findings from the research together with feedback from subsequent focus groups and workshops conducted with potential visitors, particularly on forward marketing materials and the actual visiting experience.

If you would like to know more about the research, please [click here](#)



Picture 1: Hadrian's Wall at dusk

KEY FINDINGS

The research in 2008 looked at all historical or heritage attractions in our region, and the focus groups and workshops in 2009 worked with potential customers to discover what they want, what inspires them and how they respond to different marketing and interpretation approaches. The following key findings were discovered:

1. Consumers want a range of products

No single heritage attraction, however iconic, is enough to draw customers to an area by itself. Visitors need to be reassured that there is a wide range of activities and attractions they can enjoy across the period of their visit. Visitors like to know what is onsite and also the nearby, en route things to do that make up their day's itinerary e.g. cafes, restaurants, walks, cycle hire, activities, beauty spots and other attractions. They need to be satisfied that there will be something to keep every member of their party/group entertained.

Including this information on websites and in literature helps customers to plan, imagine their visit and commit to visiting. Providing information at the site itself, and encouraging staff to engage with customers and make personal recommendations, makes visitors feel welcome, helps them get the most out of their time and transmits a sense of regional pride – a very attractive quality that visitors respond extremely well to.

2. Historical detail may not be the primary attraction

Many heritage attractions sell themselves on the details of their historical theme, eg when something was built, the family history, the individual relics or exhibits etc, and use this extensively in their literature and website.

But for many customers the historical detail may not be the primary attraction. Instead their decision to visit is based on more emotive draws: the appeal of walking around a site, being in the outdoors, enjoying the beauty of the setting and the ancient buildings within it,

feeling the sense of history, seeing and touching some of the reality of life at that time.... This can be a much more powerful motivator than the minutiae of the historical details, and this should be strongly considered when putting together both marketing and interpretation material.

3. Save some secrets

Similarly, visitors strongly indicated that they are turned off by too much detail, especially historical detail, in forward marketing materials. Although visitors want to know the breadth of what is on offer at an attraction, and how they can turn this into a day/morning/afternoon, they **do not** want to read a history lesson in the marketing material. Too much text, history and 'background' in websites and literature makes the attraction appear too dry and academic. Instead visitors want to be 'tempted in' with images and intriguing snippets and teasers, but want a sense of discovery left for the actual visit.

This was particularly true of advance marketing materials for spiritual attractions such as Lindisfarne, Bede's World etc. Customers reported that too much religious reference and detail in the promotional material could be off-putting. Instead it is the setting, the sweeping sense of history and the connection to pivotal historical events that draw many customers.

This isn't to say that the interpretation actually at the attraction shouldn't explore the religious history, as this is a key part of the USP of those sites. But, as for all other attractions, this interpretation should do as much as possible to bring the site alive, rather than just convey dry facts.

4. A picture says a thousand words

The research showed how strongly and positively customers respond to emotive, inspirational images - especially in forward marketing materials. The focus groups and workshops, which examined promotional and interpretation material from a variety of heritage

attractions, demonstrated that customers always reacted to the images first, rather than the text. They were instantly turned on or off by the type of image and how strongly it resonated with the more ‘emotive’ draws described above. Consumers like stunning landscapes and atmospheric shots that draw them in instantly. In many cases, imagery on websites and leaflets is the first thing visitors see of an attraction - and it can be the difference between them visiting or going elsewhere.

5. Bring the experience to life

Attractions that are able to draw the visitor into the experience provoked much greater interest from the consumer groups. The research showed people want to feel part of the incredible history around them: they want to touch, hear, smell, see and *feel* what it meant to live through those times, in those places. For many people, history is about drama: the big dramas of sweeping historical events, or the small dramas of daily life. As a result, the attractions that can bring the history to life, and tell the ‘stories’ well, have a wider appeal.

As well as permanent interpretation material, the use of events, workshops, activity days, hands-on days, personal tours and ‘ad hoc’ stories told by staff - interesting facts and snippets, especially human interest stories - can make customers feel they are getting the ‘inside story’ and bring the history to life.

6. Know your customers

Tailoring your forward marketing and interpretation material to appeal to your customers is essential. As well as conducting your own research and running customer surveys and feedback opportunities, it helps to know that the research demonstrated that customers attracted to a heritage experience share some similar characteristics:

- They are Discoverers – they like to feel they are exploring, learning and progressing – but they are not pioneers
- They are Traditionals: older customers tend to be more traditional, with more traditional values such as rating personal attention highly, younger customers are more experimental, but still hold ‘traditional’ values
- They tend to be better educated and from more comfortable income brackets
- From leisure products they are looking for ways to widen their experience, and for ways to spend quality time with friends and families to create memories they can share
- Those with children are looking for stimulating ways to stretch their minds and bodies
- They tend not to ‘fall for’ traditional advertising, instead they seek quality, value, service and above all *experience*



Picture 2: Warkworth Castle and Hermitage, Northumberland

WAYS TO IMPLEMENT THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Below are a selection of practical ways to implement the research findings, based on successful practices by other heritage attractions and businesses.

Promotional materials

- Look at your adverts, leaflets, websites and all other promotional material and test it against the findings. Is the imagery strong and compelling, do you have too much focus on dry facts and historical detail, does it successfully convey a sense of what can be experienced, does it make clear how long the visit may take and how it could be linked to other things to do or see – even a walk, cycle ride, shopping or picnic – to create an ‘itinerary’?
- Visitors like maps of an attraction or site, so they can orientate themselves, work out how to explore and to make sure they don’t miss anything! If you can make your map quirky, appealing and suitable for the directionally challenged so much the better. Include titbits of information and consider the map a promotional as well as an interpretative tool.
- Visitors want to know in advance that there is something to satisfy the whole party/family during their visit, consider this in your marketing materials and test this out for yourself to ensure you are offering something for everyone.
- Get together with other complementary businesses to offer packages, discounts, offers, combined tickets and to consider joint marketing.
- Work as closely as possible with Area Tourism Partnerships and Tourist Information Centres and keep them updated with your new developments, any PR and events. Offer them first-hand experience of your attraction and ensure they have the right literature, materials, images and word of mouth recommendations to effectively promote you.

Interpretation and visitor experience

- Think about how you could improve the visitor experience to your attraction by considering how you tell its story and how you engage customers.

Try to involve all their senses and their imagination, rather than focussing just on conveying facts. Use things they can actually touch, smell, taste and hear as well as see. Use stories – events from a real person’s life that are historically grounded but dramatised – to help customers ‘connect’ with the history. Think about this interpretation from the perspective of different sorts of visitor to make sure it works for the whole party.

- Go over your whole site from parking to exit and consider where and how you can enrich the experience and bring it to life. Try to see it with a fresh eye, as visitors would, and try to imagine yourself as different types of visitor: young, old, disabled, overseas etc. Could you position or format maps, signage and interpretation differently? Could you create trails to follow, or put exhibits in unusual places and challenge customers to find them? Could you use sound, colour, smell, poetry, quizzes or unusual artefacts to liven up waiting areas, cafes, shops, toilets and car parks? Don’t forget to think about the leaving experience. What do customers see and feel as they go? Can you give them one last experience, quirky fact or ‘story’ on exit, so they leave with something unexpected?
- Consider how you display items in your attraction and try to include at least some things that can be touched and handled. If you are refurbishing, this is the ideal time to rethink how you position and showcase items. Where exhibits are too delicate or valuable to handle, try to find other ways to bring them to life and include information about their delicacy or worth to build a sense of reverence rather than distance.
- Remember visitors love feats of engineering or incredible achievements. Tell them how something was made/built/achieved, how many people it took, why it was built/attempted etc.
- Consider offering personal tours or talks. You might gear these to particular themes, ages or interest groups, rather than trying the one size fits all approach. For example, you could develop a range of talks or tours given from the perspective of different historical characters

connected with your attraction's history, such as a child, the lady of the house, a Lord etc. Or you could create a single talk that, at each exhibit or stage, uses the perspective of one of those characters to bring that part of the story to life, so visitors get a really rounded impression of the overall site.

- Visitors want to meet real people and participate in meaningful activities to make their visit special and distinctive so they take away treasured memories. Train key staff in ways to bring the building or site to life. Provide them with snippets of information, little facts and anecdotes, particularly human stories, that they can pass on to customers about what they are seeing. Undertake training with all staff, from the car park attendant to the coffee shop waitress, to understand the history and tell the story to visitors.
- Train staff to engage with customers, get them talking, find out how well they are getting on with their visit or holiday, and offer them further recommendations for things to see and do, both within the attraction or area and beyond.
- Consider the possibility of re-enactments or re-creations of specific events within your property. This could be an actual event, or it could be a permanent exhibit: one room or area of your site that uses real people or dummies, sound, lighting, costumed characters, story-telling, original artefacts, recreated 'smells', music from the period etc to literally bring it to life.
- Consider hosting special events so customers can experience the site in a different way or in a different light: opening very late or very early, candlelit tours, dawn tours, recreating a bygone Christmas, Easter or Michaelmas etc.
- Consider creating materials customers can take away with them, that continue the story... These are not 'dry' guidebooks in the traditional sense, but more snippets, facts and interesting

anecdotes people can pick up and put down, and share with friends.

Continued development

- Work proactively with your ATP to help them showcase the whole heritage offering of your county or area. Consider getting together with other sites or attractions to develop trails, maps, audio tours, joint tickets, joint promotions, regional events etc to raise the profile of the North East England heritage offering.
- Visit leading award winning attractions in and out of region, share best practice and evaluate what your competitors are doing.
- Take customer and staff feedback, both formally through surveys and informally by talking to people about what's good, what could be better and what else you could be doing.
- Pay attention to how you can win local customers and encourage them to bring friends and family, consider reduced entry or special deals for local people and build a database of customer contacts through events, competitions and feedback forms so you can regularly communicate with them.
- Consider partnering with other businesses to develop packages relative to your attraction: hot air balloon or glider flights over your site, gourmet dinners in historical settings, painting courses, cookery courses, music residencies, retreats etc.
- Emphasis on authenticity is important to visitors. Consider providing local, handmade goods in the retail area and in the restaurant, and offering space to local craftspeople to work or display.



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Picture 3: Dunstanburgh Castle, Northumberland

KEY CONTACTS - AREA TOURISM PARTNERSHIP STAFF

For further advice or information, please contact your Business Engagement Officer or Product Development staff within your relevant ATP.

Or find more at the online Tourism Business Toolkit:
<http://www.tourismbusiness toolkit.co.uk>

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