

**ACM LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE CALL NOTES**

**Pricing in the Current Economy: Maintaining & Increasing School Group Sales  
Wednesday, July 28, 2010, 2:00 p.m., ET**

**Moderator: Bill Schlageter, Director of Marketing, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh**

**I. Welcome & Introduction**

Korie Twiggs, program officer, education at ACM introduced the call, which continues previous conversations about pricing and programming in the current economy. The call specifically focused on the impact of school group sales for children's museums.

**II. Moderator Welcome**

Schlageter welcomed participants and stressed the importance of the call as schools continue to face budget cuts that directly impact school group visits to children's museums. The challenge for children's museums is to serve and grow this important revenue source. Schlageter invited participants to share their experiences specific to agenda.

- **Weekly Group Visits** Schlageter shared facts from the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh's school group program.
  - One time groups represent 56% of total group visits
  - Top Frequency visits are by Pre-schools and elementary schools.
  - 95% of school groups come from a 50-mile radius.
  - Pricing structure for school visits:
    - unguided visits: \$7.00;
    - guided visits: \$8.00;
    - focus field trips: range from \$9.00 - \$12.00
    - chaperones are complimentary when accompanying at least five children. (General museum admission for adults is \$11.00 and \$10.00 for children.)
  
- Nora Moynihan shared information about the 50-50 program at Port Discovery Children's Museum (Baltimore, MD). A decision was made to introduce the 50-50 program to compensate for lost funding from the state. Through the 50-50 program, school groups can take advantage of a buy-one-get-one-free admission discount. Admission fees for a two-hour visit are \$3.50 per child and \$5.00 for a three-hour visit. (General admission is \$12.95 per child.) Port Discovery will extend a 2- or 3-hour visit for school groups for an additional fee. If a school cannot afford to pay, the museum will waive the fee. Port Discovery used the following methods to market the program: calls to schools, visits to schools, participation at school conferences and meetings, targeted and blast emails and fax communication. The museum is designing a general school group programming guide that can be tailored for schools and easily updated. The programming guide is offered online, minimizing the need for and expense of producing hard copies and significantly decreasing the museum's carbon footprint. To date the museum has increased school group visit revenue by \$65,000.

- Mandy Jo Euresti provided information about the Children’s Museum of Brownsville’s (TX) admission structure for school groups and teachers. Teachers and children pay a \$5 admission fee. The size of the group dictates the price per child. For example, groups of 50 or more pay a discounted rate of \$4.50 per person. To compete with the local zoo’s school group program, the museum markets the educational value of the museum visit and includes online programming features as a bonus for school groups.

### III. Overnight Visits

- Schlageter mentioned that Museums in the Pittsburgh area have seen an increase in the parent per child ratio for overnight visits. In recent years, the museum hosted an average of two-three overnights per year. Recently there has been a decrease in overnights at Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh.
- Faun Guarino reported that the Long Island Children’s Museum (Garden City, NY) has hosted Girl and Cub Scout overnights for the past six years. Heavy marketing goes into the overnight program — distributing brochures and email blasts, maintaining strong relationships with scout councils and pitching for earned media placement. The program runs from January-April of each year. The museum has not increased overnight program prices for the last three years.
- Anna Depies added that the Betty Brinn Children’s Museum (Milwaukee, WI) Girl Scouts overnight program is in its sixth year. Price per girl is \$28; \$10 per adult. The event is staffed, but only a handful stay overnight to reduce overhead.

### IV. Preschool/Preschool Programs

- Michele Schilten provided callers with an update on the status of the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis’ (IN) new preschool program. As of the date of the leadership call, the majority of students are non-members and only one admission space remains open. The program serves children ages 3 to 5 and follows curriculum backed by Indiana’s early learning guidelines. Staff includes a pre-k coordinator and three early childhood educators. Classes are offered 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and parents may choose to register their child to attend one, two or three days per week. Rates for a student attending one day per week for a 19-week semester are: \$280 for members; \$380 for non-members.

**Question:** Did revenue influence the museum’s decision to develop the preschool?

**Answer:** No. The executive director wished to expand the museum’s existing pre-k programming into an actual preschool program as a means to extend the museum’s mission to offer unique family learning opportunities.

**Question:** Is certification required for preschool staff?

**Answer:** Certification is not required because the program runs a half-day and does not include daycare. However, certified, experienced teachers were hired to guide each child’s hands-on learning experience.

### V. Afterschool Programs

- Schlageter shared information about the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh’s YouthALIVE! afterschool programs. This 15-year-old after-school program provides activities for youth between the ages of 10 and 18 that help students explore their interests, discover their potential, develop their talents and abilities and enhance their skills through meaningful experiences. Serving up to 50 disadvantaged youth from Pittsburgh’s Northside and other economically distressed neighborhoods, afterschool activities include job training, employment exploration, volunteer and community service opportunities and mentorships. The program provides a secure and nurturing environment for youth to explore fields such

as teaching, writing, mentoring, performing, working in the creative arts and more. For the past twelve years this program has been funded by United Way contributors.

- Susan Bonk from EdVenture Children's Museum (Columbia, SC) provided information about the museum's Club EdVenture afterschool program. The program is operated at an off-site location to accommodate the large number of children served. Weekly pricing is \$48.00 per child. Families with more than one child attending the program receive a discount. Scholarships are provided to families in need through state and private funding. Club EdVenture registration fees also cover a one-year museum membership. Although the program is extremely popular, Bonk explained that the museum typically just breaks even. Several organizations in the area host low-cost afterschool programs. As a result, EdVenture keeps its pricing down to remain competitive. To keep overhead down, the museum assigns one staff person per 15 children.
- Moynihan reported that Port Discovery Children's Museum partners with the local Baltimore school system to provide afterschool programming for children. The school system writes the museum in as an enrichment partner in 21<sup>st</sup> century grant proposals. Through resulting grant support, the museum provides multiple afterschool programs, including ArtVentures Passport to the World.

## VI. Teacher Development Programs

- Schlageter opened the conversation with an update on the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh's Arts Education Collaborative. The museum issues professional development credit for teachers who complete workshops and classes.
- Garrett Riggs introduced participants to the Portland Children's Museum's (OR) Art Workshops for Schools program. The museum received an IMLS grant to create a five-part program that supports educators to become comfortable using a variety of art media to enrich student learning. Launched in September 2009, the program has reached teachers in more than 20 schools in the Portland area. IMLS funded scholarships help secure teacher participation.
- Karen Kelly touched on the teacher programs at Imagine It! The Children's Museum of Atlanta (GA). The museum offers programs for preschool and kindergarten educators. Both programs are currently funded by the state; however, Imagine it! is considering charging a fee for participation. The fee would be refunded to participants upon completion of the program. The goal is not to make a profit but to engage educators so that they will continue to use the museum as a resource.

**Question:** What does a museum gain from hosting a teacher program?

**Answers:** It is a way to get teachers through the doors, so that they will see first-hand the value of children's museums. It reminds the community that children's museums provide essential educational resources. It gets the word out to educators, raises their interest level and gets them involved in museum activities.

**Question:** How can museums get teachers through the door to participate in programs?

**Answers:** Adjust program hours to fit into teachers' schedules. Partner with universities.

## VII. Home School Programs

- Jan McKenzie described Omaha Children's Museum's (NE) science series for homeschooled children. The program fee includes the cost of the series and a discounted museum membership. Revenue is divided between the museum and an outsourcing company that manages the program. Currently, the program is not a profit generator for the museum.

### VIII. Outreach in Schools

- Schlageter reported that for the past eight years the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh has focused on marketing both in-house after school workshops and outreach programs to school groups. Its in-house and outreach programming has traditionally been marketed via direct mail. New this year, the museum decided to market its in-house after school workshops and outreach programming solely on its Web site. Interestingly, revenue from outreach programs decreased 36 percent from the previous year while revenue from in-house after school workshops have remained the same.
- Karen Kelly listed two styles of outreach programming offered by Imagine It! The Children's Museum of Atlanta (GA): *On the Go*, which includes a school assembly performance and up to six workshop sessions; and *In depth* outreach sessions, which feature theme-oriented programming and giveaways. Additionally, the museum offers outreach programming to in-home and community child development centers. The museum breaks even from its outreach programming. However, the museum continues to earn respect and goodwill from the community and has been extremely successful in creating partnerships.

**Question:** How does Imagine It! decide which schools to serve?

**Answer:** The museum makes decisions regarding which schools to serve according to neighborhood.

### IX. Partnerships to Promote School Visits

- Anna Depies commented that Betty Brinn Children's Museum's (Milwaukee, WI) received a grant from the Herzfeld Foundation to service Milwaukee schools and educational centers.
- Schilten reported that The Children's Museum of Indianapolis (IN) works with local school districts to partner on grants for busing.

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