

Tour Operator Workshop 2 - Wildlife Interpretation

Presenter/ Facilitators:

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Overview:

Providing interpretation that is informative, entertaining and stimulating is often critical to satisfying your customers. It can also play an important role in influencing attitudes and behaviour.

This workshop provided advice on how a wildlife tour operator/ guide can develop their interpretation program. It began with a review of key established principles of effective interpretation and how these can be applied to wildlife tours. This was supplemented by a brief presentation from a wildlife tour operator and group discussion on practical application of these principles. The workshop participants were then asked to think how, as tour guides, they would apply the principles to interpreting a fictitious creature. The exercise proved challenging to participants.

Interpretative communication Principles and Practice

(presented as powerpoint show)

1. The Communication Model – Sender-Technique-Message-Receiver-Feedback

Communication is an interactive process involving a sender and a receiver using a technique to convey a message and seek feedback about whether the message got through. We encode the message in our cultural paradigm and the receiver decodes it similarly.

Seek self, peer and participant feedback and evaluation of message imprinting. To do this you have to have identified your objectives and theme/message.

2. Communication strategies targeting different audiences in different settings to convey messages are:

- Interpretation – an interactive communication strategy targeting visitors to natural and cultural places.
- information, publicity, promotions - for potential visitors
- education - learning programs for community, special interest and school groups
- community involvement – activities for interested individuals and groups
- liaison, consultation and advisory services – professional and technical communication.

A communication plan that uses all 5 strategies is going to be far more effective than trying to do it all with just one strategy.

3. Communication planning synthesis

Analyze sites, stories, visitors and issues to establish means and messages

4. Story analysis

It's about relationships of landscape/seascape, plants, animals, people and the ecology of it all. Its about ecological and social concepts.

5. Communication process

Plan, design according to the medium of personal of media – print, electronic, signs, exhibits, facilities

6. Communication integration

Package your products, programs and facilities

7. Hand in glove

Site design and interpretive communication go together like a hand in a glove. Site design is the stagecraft and interpretation the choreography.

8. Whole person wheel

We need to design our communication to embrace the facets or intelligences of the whole person – concentration, senses, imagination, physical, speaking, listening, emotions/feeling, reasoning. And to consider the personal development through self awareness, expression, awareness of others, enrichment of others experience to self-fulfillment.

We need to appeal to the many facets of a personality. We need to consider a person's growth from self-focus to self-fulfillment and lifestyle.

9. Needs hierarchy

Not until the basic needs of food, drink and shelter; safety; security; social interactions; and self-esteem can be met can we reach self-fulfillment. Site managers need good site design that provides facilities and services to meet these basic needs before interpretive communication can really achieve its goal of message implanting. Guides need good design of experiences that address participants needs before enrichment of the experience can take place.

10. Retention 'wedgie'

We only retain 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 70% if we do something and 90% if we say and do something. So through this exercise you may retain 70% of it. If you show and tell others then you will retain potentially 90%!

11/12 Attraction

Our minds are stimulated by visual, auditory, dynamic and symbolic means. If we want to attract most people then we will need to use all of these means. Holding someone's attention is another thing.

13/14 Processing

We process experiences in 4 styles. Asking Why, What, How and What if... These are the motivators for mental processing. A good learning program should consider and present answers to all four styles to hold the attention of the broadest audience.

15. Tilden's principles of interpretive communication

Our interpretive communication needs to **Relate** to the personality or experience of the visitor.

Interpretation is **Revelation** based on information.

Interpretation is an **Art** which can be learnt.

The aim of interpretation is **Provocation** not instruction.

Interpretation aims to present the **Whole** rather than a part and must address itself to the whole person.

Interpretation for **Children** should be specifically designed for them.

16. Steve Van Matre's concept building Earth Education programs

use the head, the heart and the hands. Steve says learning is about taking something in, doing something with it and using it.

17/18 Sam Ham's thematic interpretation

Sam says interpretive communication needs to be **Erotic**. Enjoyable, Relevant, Organised, with a Theme = Interpretive Communication.

19. Guided experiences

It doesn't matter where you start as long as you consider every component in relationship to every other.

20. Guide Programs

A program is a group of inter-related guided experiences – it can be a tour, an event or a holiday program. Planning requires addressing the why, who, whom, what, how, where, when.

Example of putting these interpretive communication principles into practice

Dr Ronda Green, Proprietor, Araucaria Ecotours

Principles illustrated: themed interpretation, making it relevant, and using a variety of senses.

There were two activities I wanted for guests on the Thursday leg of our old version of the 3-day wildlife tour - a walk into the dry rainforest, which was up a long hill, and something to give the feeling of Australia's evolutionary history. So I combined the two, let each metre represent 1 million years over a 500 metre (=5my) climb, and had stations up the hill where we could see what was happening to Australia's and the rest of the world's (especially our guest's country of origin) evolutionary (especially appearance or disappearance of different animal groups) and geological (especially continental drift, also local volcanics and coastline changes), with Yowie and other models of the creatures found at the time, charts of Aussie dinosaurs when we reached the appropriate point, also plantings of cycads, ginkgos etc at appropriate points. At the end of the trail we'd look at the dramatic changes within the very small timeslot of the past 200 years, and then consider what the future ahead of us might be. The walk up the hill gave a good feeling of how long each era lasted (e.g. just how long the trilobites or the dinosaurs were around). On another part of the tour we'd also taste a lily pilli and I'd explain how this is related to guavas and also to the eucalypts, and tie this in with Gondwanan relationships and the rapid drying of Australia over the last few million (especially the last 2 million) years.