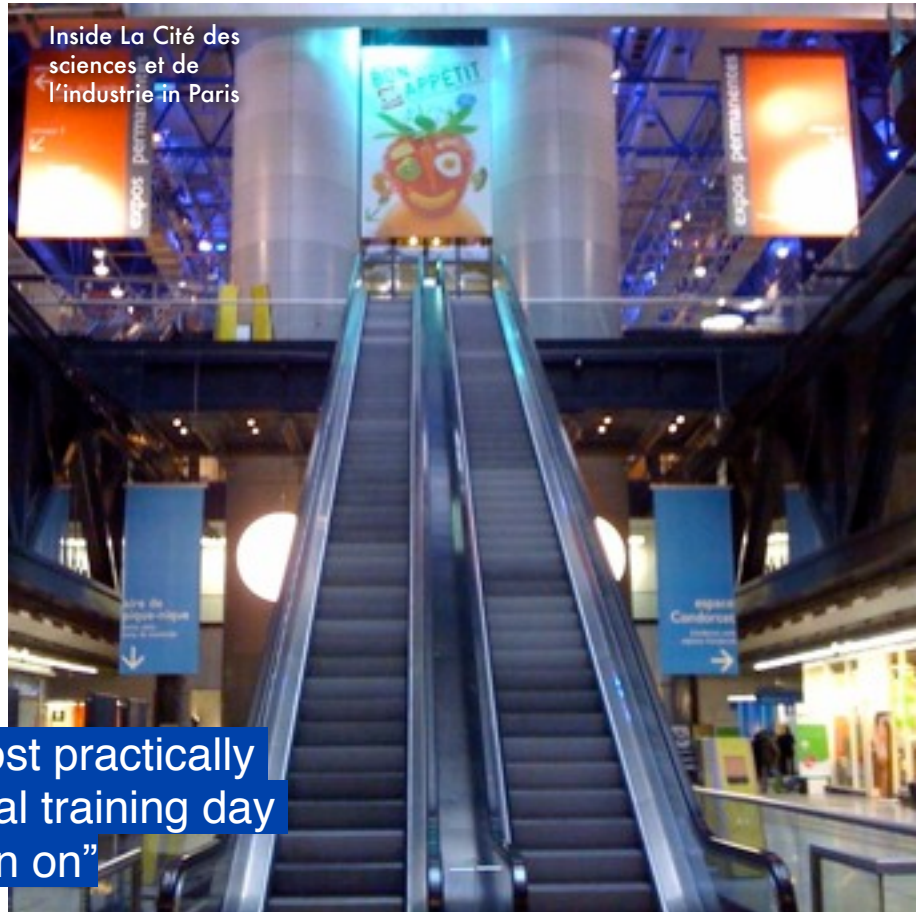


Captivate

TRAIN TO
CAPTIVATE
CASE STUDY

“The most practically
beneficial training day
I've been on”



Creating a compelling visitor experience from beginning to end

might sound straightforward but it depends where you think the experience starts and where it finishes.

As part of the **Train to Captivate** programme we took the participating organisations on a journey, quite literally, to explore the nature of visitor experience and what it means in the context of their own arts organisations. So in early February, the Train to Captivate team (**Theatre Is, The Junction, Colchester Mercury Theatre and New International Encounters**) embarked on a journey to La Cité des sciences et l'industrie in Paris.

A little background on Cité. To you and me it's a Science Museum, but don't think of The Science Museum in London which is brimming with a collection of objects. Instead, think of wide open spaces in a building not dissimilar to The Pompidou. Open plan exhibition areas on multiple floors, the spaces are designed for a genuine mix of ages and interests.

We chose Cité because we knew it would be unfamiliar both in subject matter and culturally. That certainly proved to be the case. So to start with let's hear from Michael Corley, Communications Co-Ordinator for Theatre Is, who speaks about his experience of the trip:

“The outcomes of the Paris trip for me seem simple; being reminded of the feeling of being a new visitor in a new environment. However, from this simple premise I have begun to explore the opportunities that THEATRE IS... has to influence our audiences' experience. Going though my pockets after I arrived home that evening I was struck by how worn the map/visitor guide had become, that simple device had enabled me to find the ticket I needed, locate the toilet and navigate my way round the building finding the places that I believed would interest me. Of course this doesn't necessarily mean theatres need maps, however there are opportunities that even visiting companies can utilise. We need to identify them and ensure we're well placed to take them.

As a company working with young

people and targeting our work to people who are likely to have limited experience of theatre, that we are able take every opportunity to make our audience aware of 'the rules' is particularly important. In some ways all of our projects are created to ensure young people are comfortable in accessing them: we use familiar art forms; we work with them in places they are already comfortable, yet some of this practice is not carried across to all our activities.

My key action coming from this trip is to de-submerge this practice, look for the gaps and the opportunities we are missing.”



The goals of the training day

The thinking behind the day away was to get everyone to experience something out of the norm.

1. What makes a great visitor experience?

Where does it begin, end, who's involved in delivering it and how does that affect the experience?

2. Creating cross-department visitor experience teams

How does everyone from the artistic director to the front of house staff or volunteers affect the visitor experience?

3. Discovering experience highs and lows

By examining and understanding differing audience needs and desires, how can an organisation craft an experience that provides adequate engagement for different audiences?

4. Customer Service

Thinking about how we might hire, retain and train to get the whole experience right.



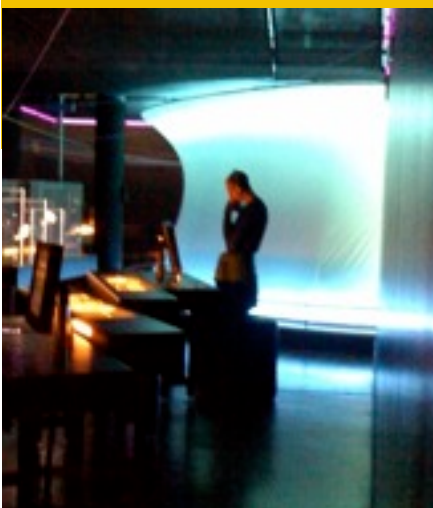
Tom Wormwell from
New International
Encounters

Let's hear from Tom Wormwell of NIE, "Going to a science museum in Paris was a great idea. I now feel I have a much better understanding of how people who don't attend the arts that much must feel when walking into a theatre or gallery and the ways in which we can make the arts more accessible and less unknown for them."

Helen Draper from The Junction reflects how it felt to be in unfamiliar surroundings "...The more I think about it, and the more I explain to people what we were up to, the more it occurs to me how useful the trip was. It really brought home what it felt like to be out of your comfort zone; how not knowing the protocol and what behaviour was expected could make one feel awkward and inhibited."

"This was particularly acute when we were exploring alone and we didn't enjoy ourselves nearly as much as when we had someone to share the experience with. This (and our subsequent discussions) made me think about how we take it for granted that everyone will feel comfortable entering our venue and will understand the procedure of watching theatre or a live event. Lots of little elements can add up to make a visitor feel awkward and not experience their time at our venue in the way we intend. It also made me think that we should be mindful of incorporating an element of familiarity when we're trying to encourage new audiences to attend.

I was interested in the variety of approaches to providing information in the various exhibitions. From the almost entirely interactive (the 'building with the earth' one I visited) to Michael's choice (about particles) which had a high proportion of panels to read and not a lot of things to monkey about with. This made me think about whether for some events (theatre and dance mainly) people might welcome an opportunity, before or after the event, to find out a bit more and the different ways we could make information available – things to download or interviews to watch on our website etc. This also links to my reasons for choosing Latitude Festival as the best visitor attraction I had visited as I felt that they provided masses of relevant information and left it up to you how deeply you delved. Obviously it would be rather time consuming to add lots of extra stuff to our website but I think it is definitely worth thinking about."





“Highlighting the benefits is always something that I have in the back of my mind that I *should* be doing, but our experience at the museum showed that it can be pretty simple to do. The day also made me think about the importance of directing people clearly to the things you want them to experience. When I went with Michael to visit the particles exhibition, apart from some smallish text there was nothing to encourage you to look at the cloud chamber and I would have walked straight past it if Michael hadn't pointed it out. And then I would have missed seeing the trails that different sorts of particles make when they move, which is pretty amazing really! I guess the importance of word of mouth comes into that too.”



As you can tell from the Train to Captivate Team, this particular topic and experiential training style provoked lots of thinking and generated insights relevant to their own organisations. The ideas everyone came away with can be used immediately to help them provide a better visitor experience. And of course, it was an enjoyable day out! Who would have thought learning could have been so pleasurable and meaningful.

By Rosalind Johnson and Sylvia Matiko - A Different View

Train to Captivate

The Train To Captivate programme is being delivered by consultants A Different View. It is part of the overall Captivate programme funded by Arts Council England, East. More information about the programme and contact details for the participants are on the Captivate website:

www.Captivateeast.org.uk



“It really took us out of our comfort zones and made us look at visitor experience from the outside in.”

Tom Womwell
Marketing and Touring Officer
NIE

