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# MUSEUM MARKETING AND STRATEGY

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Designing Missions  
Building Audiences  
Generating Revenue and Resources

Second Edition

Neil G. Kotler  
Philip Kotler  
Wendy I. Kotler

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“In today’s world of global reach and enormous governmental and business ‘giantism,’ museums are small. Yet their impact in education, science, environmental understanding, and culture is enormous.”

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“This comprehensive treatment of mission-driven, market-sensitive, and strategy-based marketing planning and practice provides concepts, guidelines, and model practices to guide professionals and to help them enhance the ‘museum experience’ for all audiences.”

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*“Museum Marketing and Strategy* is a necessary tool for maturing museums that must succeed in confronting accelerating change, dramatically increased competition, and changing consumer values. The Kotler’s second edition accommodates these things and can inform not only museum managers, but also allied professionals such as librarians, archivists, and preservationists.”

—Ellsworth H. Brown, Ph.D., The Ruth and Hartley Barker Director,  
Wisconsin Historical Society

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The Instructor's Manual for the second edition of *Museum Marketing and Strategy* will include a model syllabus for a course of study. It will offer guiding questions keyed to each chapter, selected instructional activities, and guidelines for evaluation.

The Instructor's Manual is available free online. If you would like to download and print out a copy of the Instructor's Manual, please visit

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## MODEL MUSEUM PRACTICES

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To our mothers, Betty Kotler and Florence Abrams.

To the Chicago museums that inspired us as children  
and have shaped our sensibilities to this day.



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## PREFACE

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*The Museum can reach only those whom it can attract. This fact alone is enough to compel it to be convenient to all, wide in its scope, varied in its activities, hospitable . . . eager to follow any lead the humblest inquirer may give.*

JOHN COTTON DANA

Not a day goes by when newspapers and magazines report on a new museum opening, the spectacular architecture of new museums, and new cultural activities that museums provide. Some museums have seen an increase in attendance. Other museums have had a drop in attendance. Still others are overbuilt and face financial difficulties. Whatever their situation, museums are a highly visible part of the cultural landscape. They face opportunities and challenges: increasing visitorship, building relationships with communities, and building revenue as programs and activities expand.

*Museum Strategy and Marketing*, published in 1998, was among the earliest comprehensive and systematic books devoted to museum applications of marketing and strategic planning. The book explored mission and vision formulation, environmental analysis, internal strengths and weaknesses, visitor segmentation and targeting, strategic marketing goals and planning, tactical marketing, and implementation and control. A key concept was visitor experience in a museum—the array of museum offerings that meet the needs of visitors: learning, aesthetics, celebration, sociability, and recreation, among others.

This new edition, *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, provides the museum community a framework for examining marketing and strategic goals in relation to a museum's mission, resources, opportunities, and challenges. It examines the full range of marketing techniques and includes new material on positioning and branding; e-marketing; and relationship, integrated, and holistic marketing.

The following questions guide the discussion of museums and marketing:

- What is the exchange process between a museum's offerings and consumer value?
- What are the conditions under which a museum operates effectively in satisfying consumer needs?
- What is a consumer-centered museum?
- How does a museum differentiate itself and communicate unique value in a competitive marketplace?
- How does a museum find, create, and retain consumers?
- How does a museum convert visitors to members and members to volunteers and donors?
- What is the appropriate balance between social and community programs, on the one hand, and a museum's traditional core activities, including collections and exhibitions, on the other?
- How does a museum plan strategically and maximize marketing's value?
- How does a museum achieve financial stability?

In the late 1990s the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, exemplified the far-reaching changes taking place in the museum world. On a visit, youngsters were observed seated at tables as they worked with art and collectibles. High school students were docents, giving visitors a tour of a photography exhibition. Paintings by Willem de Kooning filled upper-story galleries. Large canvases of lyrical lines and pastel hues formed a continuous ribbon of color weaving through luminous exhibition galleries. A musical performance wound down in the auditorium. A storytelling workshop using museum collections took place nearby. Teenagers rehearsed a play in a studio.

It was Free First Saturday at the museum, a monthly event in which the Walker hosted a day of family activities devoted to creative expression.

Museums no longer are exclusively about collections and exhibitions. Multidisciplinary programs are more prominent. Museum programs such as behind-the-scene tours, social events, classes, and festivals are more numerous. The Chicago History Museum offers tours of Chicago neighborhoods, the downtown area, the Chicago River, and the well-known elevated transit lines. Web sites enable an enormous number of cyberspace visitors to enjoy a museum at a distance. Museum visitors spend time in the designed spaces outside the buildings, admiring the architecture, terraces, and gardens. An example is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, where many visitors spend as much time standing in awe of the building's architecture as they do viewing collections and exhibitions inside the museum.

Museums are engaging families, youth, young adults, and members of ethnic and cultural groups, as well as their core audiences. More activities and services are available to members, such as social events and e-newsletters. Museums have broadened their audience, offerings, and support. Like bandwidths in the digital and broadcasting worlds, museums can be thought of as ranging along a continuum, from “narrowband” museums at one end to “broadband” museums at the other. The former are museums that take a relatively narrow view of their missions, programs, and audiences. The latter are museums that have a broad sense of mission, an expansive identity to communicate, a variety of programs and experiences, and a large, diverse audience to serve. More and more museums are broadening their bandwidth.

Some observers refer to the explosion of programs and activities as “turning museums inside out.” A museum visit at one time focused exclusively on collections and exhibitions. Visitors today can use the Web, participate in interactive programs, dine in elegant restaurants, make purchases in shops stocked with high-quality merchandise, and enjoy outdoor pleasures. The walls of traditional museums, it is argued, that once separated the museum from the surrounding community have been scaled or torn down.

The most successful museums offer a range of experiences that appeal to diverse audience segments and reflect the varying needs of visitors. To engage targeted groups, the museum has to position itself in the minds of consumers and build a brand image that will reinforce a consumer disposition to visit.

Research has shown that museum visitors seek experiences that cross the boundaries of learning, doing, and recreation. They are capable in a single day of absorbing thrills and excitement, relaxing, and finding delight in aesthetic pleasures as well as in cerebral discoveries. Different visitor styles have been identified: the runner (who rushes through a museum gallery), the strider (who takes long steps moving through a gallery), the walker (who moves through a gallery at a relatively slow pace), and the observer (who views an exhibition with intensity and spends time in the galleries). Regardless of style, all museum visitors seek benefits, value, and unique experiences. To the extent possible, successful museums provide multiple experiences satisfying multiple needs.

Museums are as different from one another as a Picasso painting, a zebra, a lunar lander, a rare orchid, and the top hat Abraham Lincoln wore the night of his assassination. Indeed, the appeal of a museum lies in its individuality and distinctiveness. Regardless of their particular circumstances, museums have to compete for audiences, support, and resources.

Years ago opposition to combining learning, on the one hand, and “edutainment,” on the other, was widespread. Many museum professionals believed that incorporating entertaining experiences compromised museum missions. These

professionals were challenged by what they perceived as intrusive marketing methods. Increasingly, however, museum professionals have understood that a balance between traditional views of what a museum should be and responsiveness to competitive pressures can be achieved. In a competitive world, museums are measured by the experiences, benefits, and value they generate as much as by the collections, exhibitions, and other resources they possess. Competitiveness in the marketplace has made necessary the adoption of consumer-centered approaches. Marketing and strategic planning are the indispensable tools for museums to achieve their goals.

Over time, museums have come to understand the advantage of applying business-derived strategic planning and marketing. This coincides with the need to increase audience and income. Museums find that they can use these tools to reach their goals without compromising missions and professionalism. Professional concerns and visitor needs and interests commingle. High-quality marketing and strategy are instruments rather than ends; they are adapted to the purposes that museum leaders define. Their overriding goal is to reach the broadest possible audience that can gain inspiration from what museums offer.

No single marketing and planning formula is applicable to all museums, but every museum can benefit from one or another facet of marketing and strategy.

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## Audience for This Book

*Museum Marketing and Strategy* is written for museum professionals who deal daily with challenges, choices, and decisions. Museum staff in all areas and specializations can benefit from the concepts, tools, and techniques presented. So too can members of museum boards; professionals in the arts, cultural, and educational communities; and supporters of museums among foundation, corporate, and public sector organizations. This book is a text for museum studies and training programs as well as professional development programs in arts and cultural resources management and administration. The strategic planning and marketing concepts have relevance to professionals in the travel and hospitality industries insofar as tourism is a growing source of museum audiences.

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## Overview of the Contents

*Museum Marketing and Strategy* is distinctive for its examples and illustrations of museum practices, programs, problem solving, and organizational behavior. Museum examples appear in every chapter and illustrate every major concept

and theme. Eight museums are highlighted in features headed “Model Museum Practices,” extended discussions of innovative ideas and practices that appear toward the end of selected chapters. The model museums illustrate topics and themes covered in the chapter. Two additional case studies explore e-commerce and e-communications.

The museums identified in this book constitute only a small sample of exemplary museums and museum practices. The museum world is filled with a great many admirable organizations and approaches. Thus, the examples in this book should be regarded as illustrative only; it is our view that their ideas and practices will inspire adaptation to other settings and situations.

Chapters One and Two in Part One examine, respectively, the diverse world of museums and the role of museum marketing. Part Two (Chapters Three through Five) deals with missions, strategic marketing planning, targeting, positioning, and branding. Part Three (Chapters Six and Seven) examines museum challenges and opportunities. Part Four (Chapters Eight through Thirteen) deals with tactical marketing. The chapters explore marketing research (Chapter Eight), developing attractive offerings (Chapter Nine), distributing offerings and services (Chapter Ten), managing marketing communications (Chapter Eleven), setting pricing strategies (Chapter Twelve), and managing marketing operations (Chapter Thirteen). The book concludes with a discussion in Chapter Fourteen on securing the future of museums.

We offer this book to all people for whom museums matter. Our intention is to help build and manage successful museums and to meet the opportunities and challenges museums confront.

Neil G. Kotler  
Arlington, Virginia

Philip Kotler  
Evanston, Illinois

Wendy I. Kotler  
Arlington, Virginia



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