

Visitor-oriented: A Study of the British Museum's Visitor-centred Operations Strategy

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Abstract: Today's era of global commercialization has made visitors the primary recipients of services and patrons of museums. The British Museum has chosen a visitor-centered operation strategy despite the challenges of inadequate financial investment and competitive market pressure. The British Museum has achieved "secondary development" and sustainable development, which is worth learning from, through four operational models: online exhibitions to build brand image, offline services to break even, cultural and creative peripherals to generate sustainable income, and multilateral cooperation among regional clusters.

Keywords: Operation strategy, The British Museum, Visitor-centred.

1. Introduction

As one of the world's four most famous museums, the British Museum has entertained more than 350 million visitors over the past three centuries. How has the British Museum been able to get sizable economic revenue in the face of technical advancement, economic slump, and competition from peers and even other industries? This paper takes this question as a guide, combines the British Museum's dilemma and solution measures, and summarizes a sample set of visitor-centered operation strategies for the museum industry to learn from.

2. The Dilemma and Pressure

The British Museum was first confronted with rising expenses and declining government subsidies. What used to be the most significant source of revenue, the financial allocation from the UK Department of Culture, Media, Sports (DCMS), has dropped from more than half of the total to less than 1/8 of the total in 2018-2019. On the expenditure side, the museum's total expenses are £24.0 million, and an increasing expenditure of infrastructure in 2020. Inadequate funding in the face of ongoing expenses has limited the British Museum's further development[1].

Secondly, the tourism market is very dynamic[2] and there is a constant flow of new things to attract visitors. A wide variety of other cultural heritage destinations and entertainment venues challenge the museum industry. Domestic and international tourists have fewer days in a single trip and less time left for cultural industries such as museums, where visitors have a variety of entertainment options to choose from such as watching ball games and outdoor excursions. The British Museum needs to enhance the visitor experience within a limited time frame and increase the likelihood that visitors will spend money while viewing the exhibition, so it needs to develop more diverse and achievable businesses[3].

Most importantly, the DCMS has included total museum admissions and total attendance as core performance assessment indicators in the 2016-2020 British Museum Management Agreement, the results of which directly affect the amount of state funding for the following year, further

highlighting the imperative of attracting audiences and improving audience satisfaction. As a result, the British Museum focused its operational strategy on visitors[4], expecting to transform and upgrade by increasing the number of visitors and improving their quality.

In short, the difficulties encountered by the British Museum are inextricably linked to its visitors. Therefore, to revive the visitors, it is necessary to take some measures around the visitors and close to them, which we summarize as the operation strategy with the visitors as the core[5].

3. The Visitor-centered Operation Strategy

The amount of money made from exhibits, consulting, selling, publishing, hosting events and providing training, as well as receiving donations from sponsors and other benefactors, has been continuously increasing in recent years[6]. These are directly correlated with museum attendance. Because of this, the British Museum has been working hard to attract more people and enhance the viewing experience and has implemented a number of successful revenue-generating projects. The following are the primary measures[7]:

3.1. Online Promotion to Establish Brand Image

Nowadays, with the popularity of the Internet, it is also essential to use the Internet to build a positive corporate image[8]. Utilizing the attributes of the Internet, which has a broad range of communication and widespread application among people, can quickly develop the image of the business and increase its influence and visibility.

As a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, 90% of museums worldwide close their doors in 2020 and more than 10% may never open again. However, The British Museum has developed an online exhibition website using Internet technology to operate "24 hours a day" during the special period. Visitors can participate in virtual exhibitions online through the Web site, and can also visit galleries in the closest way to the actual exhibition through Google Maps' Street View mode.

Most notably, the museum's social media platforms have

been tailored to promote the exhibition internationally. The British Museum has more than 5 million followers from around the world, a large proportion of whom are Chinese visitors. To better meet the needs of Chinese visitors, the British Museum has launched a MicroBlog and a WeChat Official Account, which includes "British Stories," "British News," "Gallery Tips," and "Special Exhibitions. Besides, the British Museum has launched the WeChat Official Account with five sections: "British Stories," "British News," "Gallery Tips," "Thematic Special Exhibitions," and "Special Blog Posts," to guide Chinese visitors to explore the wonders and treasures left behind by two million years of world history.

Excellent design, substantial material, and powerful interactivity are the three primary characteristics of the online exhibition from the British Museum[9]. It has been running for a while and has a large distribution channel. Its online content serves as a standalone display as well as an addition to the actual exhibition. It is not time- or space-constrained, can accommodate the greatest number of visitors, and enables two-way communication with them. It sets the way for additional lucrative promotions and aids in the development of a favorable global brand image for the British Museum among the broadest visitors possible[10].

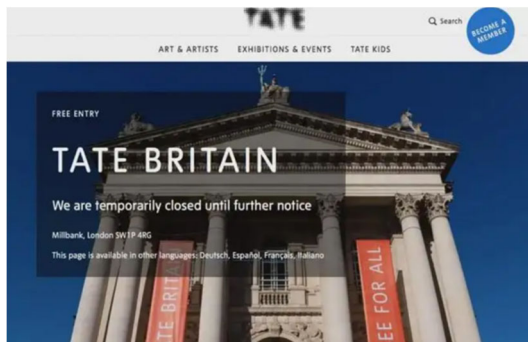


Figure 1. The British Museum online exhibition

3.2. Offline Services to Achieve Break-even

3.2.1. Extended Opening Hours to Promote Consumption

Extended opening hours are an effective measure to increase the number of visitors. Since 1997, when the first "Museum Night" began to appear in the Berlin Museum, the British Museum has also started to open and close various exhibitions, cultural exchanges, special events and other activities at night, and then combined with musical instrument performances, night explorations, night stays and other activities. But the extended opening hours bring greater costs, so the major British museums to find the entry point for the Friday evening museum visitors to provide two paid "privileges", one is to buy connoisseur level wine in the museum and drink wine while watching the exhibition, the second is to enter the normally closed areas (such as the terrace) to view the night. These two "privileges" have been well received by the public and have given people who are willing to pay to enjoy a higher quality museum experience the opportunity to spend money, and night tours of the museum have become a sophisticated means of socializing, sought after by white collar Londoners who appreciate a taste for cultural life.

3.2.2. Diversified Interpretive Services

The interpretation at the British Museum is primarily driven by volunteers. Its volunteers are divided into two categories: front-stage positions and behind-the-scenes positions. There are about 300 front-stage volunteers,

including guide volunteers, "hands-on" counter volunteers, event volunteers, etc.; there are about 200 behind-the-scenes volunteers, in almost all departments of the museum. In addition, the museum also provides free and paid guided tours at different times. Free guided tours are available on a first-come, first-served basis on the same day. Visitors with larger groups or higher expectations for the quality of the material and services can reserve paid guided tours online. Paid tours are still volunteer-led and can be scheduled in the morning before the museum opens or during the late opening hours on Friday evenings[11], depending on the needs of the visitors[12].

3.2.3. Other Paid Services

The British Museum also has a range of paid services, including performances, lectures, conferences, debates, training courses and craft workshops. Visitors can add to their sightseeing experience through these paid programs, for which the museum also receives a fee for venue hire and training.

3.3. Creative Products with New Ideas Generate Revenue Constantly

The British Museum's creative products can be broadly divided into three categories: permanent exhibits, special exhibits, and overseas creative products. [13]When you walk through the doors of the British Museum, you will see the Creative Shop, which sells a variety of everyday items: stationery and books, literary and ink treasures, and fashionable products. Special exhibitions are mainly derivatives of various short-term exhibitions, which can meet the different preferences of various people. The overseas creations, on the other hand, are developed in a localized way, combining with the characteristics of the British Museum to attract purchases from visitors from various countries[14].

In terms of expanding sales channels, the British Museum promotes and sells its cultural and creative products through online exhibitions and sales on its official website, WeChat public number and other major platforms. Consumers can search for many cultural and creative peripherals through a single keyword, which greatly stimulates consumption possibilities.

The British Museum relies on its large and diverse collection to design excellent creative products, which not only increase the economic benefits for the museum, but also reflect the "museum spirit" in the collection and enhance the cultural influence of the museum. The "educational" significance of the collection will encourage more visitors to come to the museum. Play the "educational" significance of the collection of cultural relics, to encourage more visitors to the museum.



Figure 2. The British Museum's Online Creation Store

3.4. Unleashing a Strong Regional Cluster Effect

The regional clustering effect increases the likelihood of "repeat visitors" and further increases the British Museum's revenues[15]. The Bloomsbury area, where the British Museum is located, has seen a series of well-connected, co-prosperous businesses. The British Museum has also benefited from the participation of these companies and has received more attention and support from them.

Within 0.5 miles of the British Museum, a cluster of cultural, entertainment and educational industries has formed, greatly increasing the retention rate of visitors. While providing visitors with a great travel experience, the industries within the business district have also been able to grow.

4. Reflections and Conclusion

Overall, the British Museum, utilizing the four-in-one strategy of online exhibitions, offline services, cultural and creative peripherals, and regional clusters, has effectively developed a new model for the museum sector based on its long-standing cultural qualities. With the visitors firmly in the center, it has created a distinctive operational path. Provide high-quality, multifaceted museum services based on high visitor traffic to generate positive revenue creation, resulting in the "secondary development" of the British Museum.

The museum industry in China has been growing steadily as of late, yet there are still several glaring problems. Such as structural imbalance, weak cultural connotation, a lack of innovation in the use of technology, and a lack of development of cultural entrepreneurship, all of which could benefit from lessons learned from the world's most developed cultural and museum nations.

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