



Museum of the Riverina

Promoting your collection to remote audiences.

Good morning. In speaking to you today about promoting your collection to remote audiences the main point I would like to emphasise is the importance of the holistic approach the staff of the Museum of the Riverina have in regards to our work roles. Whilst I am talking you'll see behind me some images from some of our exhibitions and programs over the past six years the Museum of the Riverina has been in operation both onsite and out in the community.

I'd like to first start by giving a brief history of our museum.

The Historic Council Chambers site of the Museum of the Riverina opened in 1999. The Botanic Gardens site, formerly operated by the Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society was opened in 1965. A formal lease agreement between the Wagga Wagga City Council and the Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society was formally signed also in 1999. Wagga Wagga City Council now operates this site and manages the permanent collection. The BGS was renovated and reopened in September 2001.

In addition to operating two Wagga based sites it services 38 museums that reside in 20 individual shire councils through the employment of a Regional Museum Officer. This outreach service is predominantly coordinated by, but not limited to the Regional Museum Officer, with myself and the curator also developing programs and providing services to both museums and community members throughout the Riverina.

Working in a regional institution the term 'remote audience' is difficult to define. Those people who may live in your region but not near your collection are not the only remote audience we deal with. A researcher in Hay, some 3hrs away may have more access to the Museum of the Riverina's collection than some residents of Wagga.

One limitation in regards to accessing the Museum of the Riverina's collection for many is geographical. The Museum of the Riverina in conjunction with the Wagga Wagga Regional Gallery regularly holds Cultural Services for Schools presentations. This provides an opportunity for teachers to visit the museum after school and staff from the museum, gallery, library and theatre conduct presentations on services offered, forthcoming exhibitions and also discuss in general, the needs of the schools.

One such need that arose was the geographic isolation of a lot of teachers which made it difficult for them to even attend the Cultural Services for Schools presentation. The dilemma was that if the presentations are held too early in the afternoon, say 4 pm which suits many of the Wagga teachers, it is impossible for many of the teachers who work in the schools surrounding

Wagga to get there in time. By offering a later session in the evening, neither the Wagga teachers or 'remote' teachers found this appropriate as a session that late in the day was just not feasible, no matter where they were based.

Seeing this issue needed to be addressed, we sent out a flyer to all schools in the region offering for myself and the Public Programs officer at the Wagga Art Gallery to visit schools on Wednesday afternoons and address staff meetings. This has proved successful with Urana Central School planning to send their entire school to visit the museum in the coming months.

By actually visiting the school, meeting the teachers away from the hundreds of students away on a field trip at the museum and discussing the services and facilities that we as a museum can provide, teachers are very open to spending the time to arrange a visit. A flyer in the mail addressed to "The HSIE Co ordinator" doesn't really motivate a teacher to visit your facility.

A lot of the Wagga schools are centrally located and it is possible for many of them to bring students to the museum on foot, eliminating the need for buses and thus making it a completely free activity. Obviously schools in outer areas of the region do not have that luxury and a trip to Wagga for the day needs to be worth it.

This is why the Museum, Library, Theatre and Gallery work together quite often in regards to visits from schools in remote geographic areas. Many outlying schools take an hour and a half to get to Wagga and Wagga Wagga City Council's cultural facilities aim to provide a program for teachers to maximise the time they have available. A recent visit by an entire school from Tumbarumba incorporated a trip to both sites of the Museum of the Riverina, a tour through the Wagga Wagga Regional Gallery and a story time session in the Library.

By offering such a flexible program that can be tailored to their needs, many schools such as this one, are able to make a trip to Wagga Wagga City Council's cultural facilities part of their annual activities for all students.

This example of working in partnership is an effective way that the Museum can promote its collections to an audience that cannot have regular access.

Another such example of taking the museum to the audience is the museum's 2004 National Science Week program. The Museum of the Riverina was successful in gaining federal funding from the Department of Education, Science and Training to present an astronomy program to be hosted by five museums across the Riverina from Hay to Gundagai covering over 1000 kms during Australia's largest festival.

The opportunity for some of these small regional museums to participate in a National Science Week event and be a part of quality programming that individually many would not be able to provide was priceless.

Some of the visitors to the Hay astronomy program had travelled from Deniliquin and Balranald - another hour west of Hay again - and even Melbourne. Instead of producing a program that was suitable for Wagga and its surrounding villages only, the Museum of the Riverina coordinated a

program that enabled promotions such a tv commercial to be made and broadcast in an area from Tumut to Balranald which incorporates most of southern NSW. Something that any individual museum in the Riverina simply could not afford to do alone.

National coverage was garnered, front page of most of the local newspapers and a fanatastic night for many locals, some of whom had never ventured to their local museum previously.

But what about our *collection*?

During the first half of 2004, the Museum of the Riverina, Wagga Art Gallery, Wagga City Library and Charles Sturt University participated in the DCITA Regional Hubs Project which involved a case study of Wagga Wagga as a regional hub for Riverina cultural collections.

The subsequent report raised many points in regards to the museum promoting its collection. As we have a limited promotion and indeed program budget, the need to 'get creative' when promoting our collection is essential. We have seen the need and experienced first hand, the benefits of developing partnerships with other organisations and groups both within council and externally.

The Museum of the Riverina has been involved in the establishment of a network of professional museum workers in the Riverina who meet quarterly. The network was established in early 2003 and the benefits are already appearing. The Science Week program I mentioned earlier would not have been possible if I had not had the opportunity to meet my colleagues in the region on a regular basis and develop a rapport and partnership.

This network has also led to a greater collaboration between the regional museums and through the Museum of the Riverina's fortnightly spot on the ABC Riverina local radio we have been able to promote workshops and exhibitions for other Riverina museums. Just recently the ABC has requested that the other museums in the network alternate the other fortnightly spot, which is fantastic news as it gives a regular region wide voice to all museums in the Riverina.

The Museum has developed a strong rapport with the media both regionally and nationally. Our fortnightly spot on ABC Riverina which broadcasts right across the region and enables the museum to showcase both our programs and collection and as well as this the museum has secured a monthly page in the Daily Advertiser in which we can also highlight new acquisitions, exhibitions and events.

The museum also features in The Land newspaper's country arts page which along with sporadic features in other state and national media attracts interest from all over the country. Another reason we also put so much attention on promoting our travelling exhibitions is the emphasis we place on curating a local component to accompany it. This provides the opportunity for our curator

to draw on specific items from our collection which may otherwise be in storage due to a limited display area for the permanent collection.

Michelle Maddison, our Curator, recently put together an exhibition on 'The Wonderful Women of Wagga' to accompany the travelling exhibition The Women of the West, a photographic show on women living and working in far western NSW. Michelle also presented Chats with the Curator in which she gave a talk on 12 of Wagga's more influential women over time.

When we program events we also look at targeting other 'remote' users – those who walk past our front door every day and simply don't see themselves as museum workers. This approach of attracting a new audience without using the collection has introduced a large number of new audiences to the museum. One such example is the museum offered to host Wagga Wagga City Council's Biggest Morning Tea in conjunction with the Cancer Council which was previously held in the staff lunch room. Hundreds of council employees came down to the Museum – many of them had never ventured through the door even though we are based approximately 20 feet from the main entrance to the Council building.

Another example of this is when the Astronomy program was at Shear Outback in Hay. Some of the very few locals whom had never ventured into the museum were very excited at the forthcoming visit of the astronomy team and made their first trip to Shear Outback. By getting these new visitors into the museum you now have a captive audience who are more open to exploring the space than by purposefully visiting the museum to solely view a collection.

Of course when I talk about the promotion of our collection to a remote audience one of the most effective means is via our website. The Museum of the Riverina's website was completely revamped in April this year and we have already noticed the difference. In the 5 months the new website has been online we have had two television travel programs visit, three requests for interviews with a national audience and several NSW and Victorian statewide interviews, many of whom used the Museum of the Riverina website as their first point of contact.

Last week saw the launch of a travelling exhibition at the museum and several people from Canberra attended the launch after seeing an article in the Canberra times. We had a similar result with our previous exhibition which saw visitors from Albury who had heard about the museum through an interview broadcast in Victoria.

As well as providing details about events and travelling exhibitions the website proves a vital tool for showcasing our collection. Recent acquisitions are highlighted, The Wagga Wagga Sporting Hall of Fame is available online and we are currently in the process of having our permanent collection which is currently being digitised using the Mosaic software program, searchable through our webpage. The work of our Regional Museum Officer is also highlighted with the Riverina Connection newsletter available online for community museum workers to access. The Educational Resources page has been very positively received by teachers as they can download activity

sheets before a visit and also get a general background of the museum and its collection.

Through the Regional Hubs report by consultant Chris Brophy, many successes within our collections were highlighted as well as barriers and recommendations. In her final report Chris commented that "Wagga cultural collecting agencies have led by example, not just by supporting and inspiring smaller museums, libraries and galleries in the Riverina, but by demonstrating to the wider cultural collections sector what regional museums, libraries, galleries and archives are able to achieve with reasonable levels of government and community support."

By being open minded and flexible in our approach to the promotion of the Museum and each museum worker individually and as a team adopting outreach into their work philosophy, we have experienced a 700% increase in our attendances since the museum first opened, and this year looks no different as we are well on our way to record numbers again.

Thankyou

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Museum of the Riverina

www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/museum

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