

# Children's Museum of Denver

## Case Study: Customer Perceptions and Desires Research

### ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF DENVER

The Children's Museum of Denver has served the Denver Metro community since 1973 as a learning institution for young children and their caregivers. Originally opened as a converted school bus, the Museum opened its doors along the west bank of the Platte Rivers near downtown Denver in 1984 and has been there ever since. The Museum focuses on providing experiences for children to learn through play and has a mission of "creating extraordinary experiences that champion the wonder and joy of childhood."

### BACKGROUND

As part of the Rose Community Foundation's BOOST initiative, the Children's Museum went through a strategic planning process from 2007-2010 aimed at helping the organization position itself for effective growth in the future. By 2008, the organization had developed some lofty goals for growing the organization in the future, including attracting more diverse audiences, developing new experiences that truly "wow" guests, solidifying partnerships with area educators, and solidifying the organization's ability to fulfill its mission by driving earned revenue. However, while these goals all sound fantastic on paper, learning how to actually accomplish those goals takes time, planning, and research!



### RESEARCH GOALS

In order to help the Museum understand its current position and plan for the future, the organization had a laundry list of goals that could only be gathered through research:

- ➔ Understand some of the demographic and psychographic characteristics of both Museum visitors and non-visitors in order to attract those who are not already visiting
- ➔ Understand what visitors and non-visitors think about the Museum, as well as what they would want from the Museum in a perfect world
- ➔ Understand how teachers and other educators feel about the Museum and what changes would make the Museum a more attractive destination for school groups, as well as a more valuable resource for teachers in their own classrooms
- ➔ Understand other competitive experiences that visitors might consider so that the Museum could effectively position itself in a unique space that can't be found anywhere else

The Museum, therefore, approached Corona Insights in 2008 for assistance in helping information that would serve as a foundation to would eventually become an era of growth not experienced by the Museum in more than 30 years.

## CORONA'S SOLUTION

Corona's work with the Museum began in 2008 with a plan that sought to understand perceptions of the Museum among a wide variety of audiences. Corona conducted a telephone survey of parents in the Denver Metro area and contrasted those findings with those from an intercept survey of Museum visitors in order to understand some of the gaps in perceptions that might exist between visitors and non-visitors. These surveys were then followed up by surveys with former Museum members in order to understand some of the reasons that those who know the Museum well might choose not to come back. Finally, demographic profiles of households with parents were created, as well as GIS maps of the locations where visitors lived, in order to understand what segments of the population were being served well by the Museum and what segments were not.

While this first phase of research resulted in a great breadth of understanding about perceptions of the Museum, there was still a need to understand the desires for improvements to the Museum in depth. For this reason, Corona again assisted the Museum in 2010 to conduct online surveys with both parents in the Metro area, as well as those who were already familiar with Museum and were on its email newsletter distribution list. These follow-up surveys yielded a deep understanding of what improvements the Museum could make that would yield the largest dividends in terms of increased visitation.

## THE OUTCOME

This research is perhaps one of Corona's best examples of a client taking the research findings and capitalizing on the information gained to create a truly inspiring result. The Museum was able to use the research to support the design of a \$16.1 million expansion that opened in the fall of 2015. Here are just a handful of examples of how the Museum has made impactful improvements based on the research:

- ➔ The research suggested that attractions that are too crowded can be a barrier for many parents to visiting. The expanded Museum utilizes not only a dramatically larger space inside, but also utilizes outdoor spaces in order to spread visitors out and reduce congestion.
- ➔ The research suggested that activities that involve physical activities and exercise are strongly preferred over those that involve more quiet activities by many parents. The expanded Museum includes the new Joy Park and Altitude exhibits, which both encourage kids to be active while learning.
- ➔ The research suggested that parents generally prefer attractions with many smaller exhibits rather than a few large ones. The expanded Museum includes the new Energy and Water exhibits, both of which feature dozens of small activities for kids to interact with.
- ➔ And for the parents, the research suggested that comfortable seating areas for adults are more important to parents' satisfaction than you might think. The expanded Museum has plenty of areas for adults to sit, both inside and outside the Museum, as their children play and learn.

The Children's Museum of Denver has created something special in the heart of Denver, and after nearly 8 years in the making, the expanded Museum became a reality in November 2015. We at Corona congratulate the staff on all that they have accomplished and are thrilled to have played a small part in helping them to meet their goals of creating a truly extraordinary experience for children in Metro Denver.

