Content Card Sorts

This step combines clarification of content possibilities with surveys of visitors to refine and enrich content choices and language. The team makes a deck of 48 cards: 12 Idea cards with the key concepts of the exhibition; 12 People cards that depict people who are important to the exhibition and can have emotional resonance with visitors; 12 Object cards featuring the top objects in the exhibition; and 12 Physical cards describing possible interactive/immersive/audio experiences. Visitors use these cards in a kind of game: picking the ones they like best, arranging them in clusters, and naming the clusters. They then take an IPOP survey. The data is analyzed statistically to determine which cards had especially strong or weak responses and how IPOP preferences relate to those choices. The team can then choose to replace the lowest ranking cards with alternatives; re-phrase and re-present them; or leave them as they are (depending on how important they are to the overall concept/story). The process is repeated until the team feels that they have established a strong core of Ideas, People, Objects, and Physical experiences.

Directions

Determine the content of cards –

    Idea cards contain concise, clear statements of the ideas. They can be "big ideas," i.e., large encompassing concepts, or "factoids," i.e., interesting facts. They should be something other than common knowledge, obvious abstraction, or incidental facts. They should be "ideas worth having," the sort of thing that, once you know them, you want to pass them on to someone else.

    People cards show an individual and include the person's name and just a very short phrase describing what's special about that person in this context, e.g., "Neil Armstrong, first to walk on the moon."

    Object cards shown a striking object, photograph, or scene, and identify in a few words what it is.

    Physical cards describe an activity. Images or sketches can be used, but, if people are shown, their faces should not be visible.

Make the cards –

Each card needs a unique identifying number. Ideally that number is small and light in tone, so that it isn't noticeable except to someone looking for it. See sample:

Neil Armstrong
first to walk on the Moon

Assemble the 48 cards into a deck. Give each set a number and write that number on the back of each card in the set (to help in case sets get confused). Keep decks separate.

Collecting data
Set up one or two tables with chairs in heavily trafficked locations for maximum efficiency in collecting data. Necessary materials include: decks of cards, tally sheets, IPOP surveys, post-it note pad, and pencils. A single data collector can handle at least two participants at the same time.

When you are ready to begin, approach a person passing by the table (whomever comes by first) and invite them to participate, by saying something like, "We are talking with visitors about a new exhibition we're planning. Do you have a few minutes to look at some cards and tell us what you think?" If more than one person in the party wants to participate, that's fine (provided you have open seats).

Give the individual a deck of cards with the instruction, "I want you to divide this deck into two sets – the cards that are most interesting to you in one set, and all the others in the other set. You can have as many cards in a set as you want."

When they have finished their selection, take away the cards that were not selected (put them in their envelope or just off to the side), and proceed to the next instruction, "Now I want you to divide those cards into clusters or groups – in whatever way you wish. You can make as few or as many groups as you want. Just put together cards that you think go together in whatever way you choose."

Once the individual is finished, ask the person to provide a name or description for each cluster. Write the name/description on a post-it note and attach the post-it to the top card of the cluster.

Stack the clusters and take the pile and give the participant a copy of the IPOP survey – be sure that the ID on the IPOP survey is the same as the ID on the Tally Sheet that you are now going to use to record his/her choices. This is simpler if you write in the ID numbers for Tally Sheets and IPOP Surveys in advance – from 1 to 75.

If a person asks why they are being asked about non-museum activities, inform them that we are trying to get a sense of how people differ in their interests so that we can better meet the needs of people like themselves. If they are especially interested you can say something more about the theory and refer them to the IPOP articles at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cura.2014.57.issue-1/issuetoc

Record the selections on the tally sheet by cluster, i.e., take the top cluster and call it A. On the tally sheet fill in the bubbles for the numbers of the cards that were put into that cluster. On the line to the right of the bubbles, write down the

name/description that is on the post-it for that cluster. Continue until all clusters are recorded.

You will probably find that you are still tallying cluster choices after the person has completed the IPOP survey. If so, thank them, and welcome them to come back when the exhibition is open to see how well we did to try to meet their needs.

If you feel comfortable with what is still left to be done, you can solicit another participant, and continue your tally task while they are doing their initial sort with another deck. This is why it is advisable to have lots of extra decks.

If you get behind in tallying, take the time to catch up. When you're ready, rise to solicit a new participant.

When the forms are filled (75 copies were printed), return them to OP&A for scanning and analysis.

After reading the report of the first round, you may wish to make changes – either substituting some cards for others, or revising the image or text on cards that did not do as well as you thought they should.

If desired, a second round can then help you to evaluate these additional ideas and revisions.