

The University Management &
Business Research Association



texasumbra.org

How The Thinkery Can Engage College Students

Background: UMBRA

The University Management & Business Research Association—UMBRA—is a McCombs Associated Student Organization and represent the student voice for the Department of Management. Founded in the 1960s, UMBRA has evolved over the years from a lecture-based club to its current incarnation: an organization that utilizes an industry-proven consulting methodology to develop tailored recommendations for UT departments and local companies.

Through the course of a semester, UMBRA tackles a given problem area for a given system, process, or product that can be improved. Our proprietary methodology is derived from IDEO's Design Thinking and 3M's Lead User Generation. This methodology has a creative focus with primary research centered around in-depth experiences of users.

Report Overview

Providing immersive science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) educational experiences to the Austin area, the Thinkery carries on the formative mission of Austin Children's Museum. As a community resource, the Thinkery is both a creative space and a place for family recreation.

The Thinkery's core exhibits and workshops primarily cater to children and families while hosting late night events for young adults. Although successful at marketing towards young families, the Thinkery has shown its interest in increasing its engagement with the college student and young adult demographics.

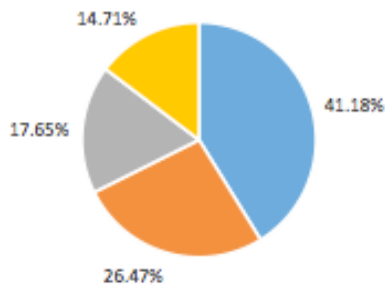
To achieve the same success with capturing the infant-11 market segment for the young adult crowd, the Thinkery needs to increase its brand awareness among the young adult crowd and address the needs and expectations of the older market segment. Events such as Thinkery21 are currently successful, with tickets sold out weeks before, but exclude many college students due to the age limit. To provide recommendations for capturing the college market segment, UMBRA conducted in-field research and identified three areas of improvement: awareness and branding and exhibit diversification.

Findings

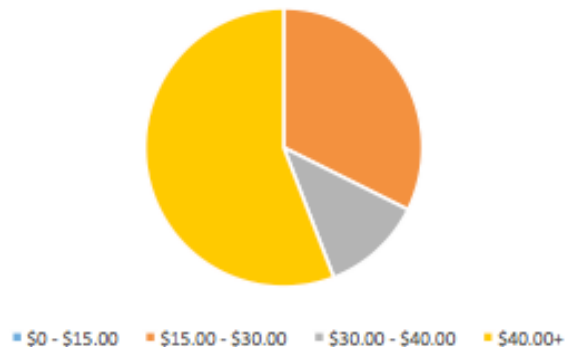
UMBRA associates conducted interviews on the UT campus to gauge college student awareness of the Thinkery and visited the Thinkery to predict how college students would react to the atmosphere and infrastructure of the museum. The purpose of these interviews was to develop a sufficiently deep, detailed, and empathic understanding of the young adult experience with museums. Our in-field research revealed the following findings from 34 interviewees:

1. Many UT students were reluctant to leave campus spontaneously unless they had a group of friends already going to an event due to transportation difficulties.
2. Most UT students experienced transportation problems relating to the fact that they did not have a car and negatively viewed using the public transportation system.
3. The Thinkery was built for children: exhibits, furniture, and the architecture are at a height more suitable for children than young adults.
4. 56 percent of UT students said that they had visited a museum within the past year. Due to UT students' close proximity to a number museums including the Blanton, LBJ, and Bob Bullock, UMBRA decided to investigate what students might desire from a museum experience.
5. According to secondary research, museum visitors desire more convenience or services which includes longer hours and more advertising.
6. UMBRA discovered differences in price elasticity between what students were willing to pay for a usual outing versus a special event. Only 31 percent of students were willing to pay over \$30 for a usual outing. For special events, willingness to pay was significantly higher, which indicates that for these more unique, important outings, pricing is less elastic: 55 percent of students were willing to pay over over \$40.

Expected Amount of Usual Outing



Expected Amount of Special Outing



Awareness & Branding

The Thinkery has built a diverse set of exhibits and special events that has allowed the museum to have tremendous success, especially with children and their parents. Successfully engaging young adults requires overcoming the stigma of the “children’s museum” for the Thinkery. The growing pains associated with reaching out to new audiences must be navigated carefully as to not alienate either population segment. UMBRA has identified strategies for the museum to attract the college student market segment without alienating the infant-age 11 segment.

Potential Marketing Opportunities

Longhorn Run

Longhorn Run takes place annually at The University of Texas at Austin where students have the option of running or walking a 5K or 10K. According to the Longhorn Run website, over 3,000 students (undergraduate and graduate) participated in 2014. UMBRA recommends this event as a potential opportunity for the museum to expand its college customer base. Opportunities include volunteering while wearing Thinkery shirts and passing out water bottles with Thinkery information.

Tailgates & Football Games

The museum can also increase brand awareness at the freshmen and transfer orientations before every fall semester that occurs during the summer.

Student Organizations

Additionally, UMBRA recommends the museum expand its affiliation with organizations on campus to endorse events such as formals, socials, and workshops. The organizations that the museum would be most interested in are those that focus on disciplines such as engineering, science and medicine, early childhood education, and entrepreneurship. UT Austin has over 1,100 student organizations that the Thinkery could approach as a partner.

Promotion

One of the central issues that UMBRA's findings indicate is the childish stigma associated with the Thinkery's previous iteration as the Austin Children's Museum. To incentivise the college-age segment to visit the Thinkery, UMBRA recommends engagement through creative and enticing promotional strategies:

Mobile Exhibits: Create mobile exhibits/puzzles to advertise throughout Austin. With a name like "Thinkery," the museum's title piques curiosity, but often its visitors do not know what it offers.

Partnerships: Partnerships with student organizations.

Alternative Orientation Events: Host alternative student orientation entertainment and social events as an alternative to Fraternity rush parties. This allows safer social gathering of students, promotes the brand, and generates significant exposure in an educational environment.

UMBRA also recommends giving out promotional items with the Thinkery's logo at these events to increase awareness among college students. Promotional items include t-shirts, water bottles, USB drives, pens, and stickers.

Exhibit Diversification

In an effort to diversify the museum's offerings, UMBRA proposes partnering with local entrepreneurs, startup incubators, and student innovators from local universities. These partners would be responsible for coordinating new exhibits that showcase new ideas and innovations attractive to variety of people. For example, the Thinkery hosted Google's self-driving car for patrons to see a test and learn about the technology. By partnering with technology leaders in the Austin community, the Thinkery can diversify its offering and attract a wider audience without incurring the costs of creating new exhibits.

Product

The Thinkery hosts monthly events for adults with events such as Thinkery21. However, the age limit of 21 on Thinkery21 excludes many college students from participating. UMBRA suggests that the museum host monthly nights open to all college-age students.

College Nights provide opportunities to work with UT student organizations. The Thinkery offers the use of its space and exhibits for event hosting. UMBRA recommends partnering with student organizations for college nights to tailor the experience for specific student organizations. An example could be a science-themed night for an aerospace engineering club. These events would increase brand exposure at the University while forging long-term connections with student groups.

Conclusion

The Thinkery has already revolutionized and excelled in engaging children in STEAM activities and UMBRA believes similar success may be achieved with the college market segment.

The Thinkery already has the expertise in creating pertinent exhibits for young adults. For the Thinkery to establish itself as a true propagator of Austin culture, educational growth, and lifelong learning, the next step is to capture the college student segment.

These events would follow the Thinkery's mission statement of creating "innovative learning experiences that equip and inspire and inspire the next generation of creative problem solvers". Furthermore, it would distinguish the museum as a location for creative science learning and further increase its brand throughout Austin.

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