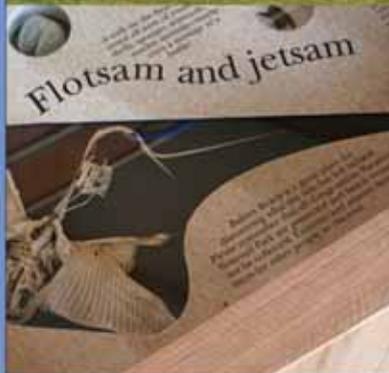


Tasmanian Thematic Interpretation Planning Manual

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Tourism Tasmania

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Introduction to the Tasmanian Thematic Interpretation Planning Manual



Who is the manual for?

This manual has been prepared for planners involved in a range of levels of strategic communications within the Tasmanian tourism industry. It recognises that strategic Thematic Interpretation planning is an effective approach for:

- tourism businesses and organisations that have visitor interpretation functions;
- tourism businesses and organisations that seek to adopt a strategic approach to visitor communications; and
- regions, touring routes, clusters, local areas, cities and other tourism entities that seek to develop and implement strategic communications centred on effective creation and delivery of messages to visitors.

The manual is part of a package of training and support materials developed by Tourism Tasmania in conjunction with Prof. Sam Ham, to assist the Tasmanian tourism industry with the adoption of thematic interpretation as part of the Tasmanian Experience Strategy (further information on the Experience Strategy can be obtained from the Tourism Tasmania corporate website, www.tourismtasmania.com.au).

Its focuses on strategic planning for thematic interpretation and is not intended to provide the skill development necessary for delivery of thematic interpretation.

To help you use this manual in a way that results in maximum benefit for your organisation, it is recommended that you first participate in a thematic interpretation introductory workshop, such as a TORE™ Workshop. This will provide you with an understanding of thematic interpretation, its potential, and the difference between thematic interpretation and other forms of communication. It will also give you a chance to practice writing themes.

An understanding of thematic interpretation is an essential pre-requisite for those seeking to apply the strategic planning methodology outlined in this manual.

To inquire about an introductory workshop, please contact:

Destination Development Unit
Tourism Tasmania
Ph: (03) 6230 8360
Email: deb.lewis@tourism.tas.gov.au

How to use the manual

The manual has been prepared as a step by step guide to the interpretive planning process. Each step is equally important for effective outcomes and you are urged to work through the steps as they are presented in the following pages.

Before we get into strategic planning for thematic interpretation, you might want to consider why you would invest time, energy and other valuable resources into a planning process that delivers thematic communication.

This way of communicating with tourists, or more specifically, with your tourist customers, has impact on your bottom line in two broad ways.

More customers

First, it is a tool that assists in the development and delivery of visitor experiences that have impact well beyond the time your customers spend with you. It enables you to influence their thinking and their impressions of your product after they return home, so that they contribute to your business through word-of-mouth advertising and repeat visitation. So thematic interpretation can generate more business for you.

More sales

Secondly, this way of communicating provides you with strategic opportunities to commercialise interpretive products and generate on-site sales.

There are three main ways that interpretation can lead to on-site commercial outcomes: Merchandising; Animation and Presentation. The following diagram shows how it works.

The three categories of Merchandising, Animation and Presentation are simply tools to help planners envision the range of possibilities for commercialising interpretive products. Whether a given product falls neatly into just the one category is unimportant.

The diagram illustrates the fact that five broad commercialisation opportunities exist, where customers pay for thematic interpretation:

1. Merchandising
2. Animation: face-to-face
3. Animation: non-personal
4. Presentation: face-to-face
5. Presentation: non-personal

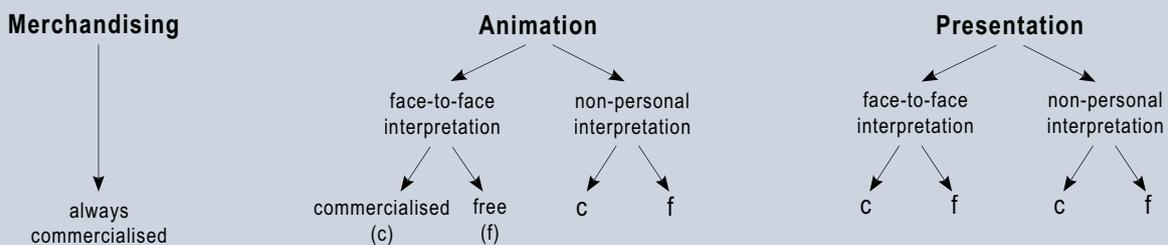
This does not mean that commercial opportunities are the only ones to consider when it comes to the direct economic impact of thematic interpretation on-site. It is important that you do not underestimate the value of free interpretive opportunities, as these can serve a vital, strategic on-site marketing function – in essence, creating the buying impetus.

Diagram 1: Opportunities to commercialise interpretive products (MAP¹)

Merchandising = involves sales of items (usually souvenirs) that communicate strategic themes.

Animation = involves strategically placed visual, auditory, olfactory and human accoutrements (e.g. musicians, art, interior decoration) that create an ambience conducive to the communication of strategic themes, triggering or accentuating a buying impulse.

Presentation = involves direct interpretation through face-to-face activities (e.g. talks, guided tours and performances), as well as non-personal interpretive devices (e.g. exhibits, signs and publications) that communicate strategic themes.



¹ Schematic prepared by Sam H. Ham © 2002. The acronym 'MAP' expresses the three main mechanisms through which interpretation is delivered to tourists: Merchandising, Animation and Presentation.

Why plan?

Like most things that are worth doing, thematic interpretation is more effective when it is applied in a planned way. In this way, activities and other forms of implementation arise from a clear direction and a documented list of tasks or actions, all based on sound reasoning.

A strategic plan ensures that any actions are based on informed decision making geared to achieve the kinds of outcomes you desire. It gives you the means to actively manage your thematic communication and make critical choices about the best ways to use available resources.

More than two decades of experience in using thematic interpretation has shown that the most effective practitioners are the ones who take the time to develop plans and review them on a regular basis.

This is a “how-to” manual for people who want to develop a thematic interpretive plan. It presents the steps you would normally follow in developing such a plan and provides guidance about the key things to think about as you work through decisions which will enable you to connect people to places with the use of powerful themes.

Interpretation is strategic communication

Preparing a thematic interpretive plan requires you to see interpretation not merely as some arbitrary “infotainment” activity but as strategic communication about the places you interpret for visitors and the kind of experience you can offer.

Strategic interpretation is purposeful. It has an intended outcome, such as enhancing visitor experiences, promoting your business, park, museum or other place of work, producing positive word-of-mouth advertising, protecting fragile or vulnerable features, or keeping visitors safe from hazards.



When we know what we’re trying to accomplish through interpretation, it is much easier to achieve it. And that’s what we mean by “strategic”.

Thematic interpretation basics

To undertake strategic planning for thematic interpretation, it is essential to understand the principles that underpin it. These principles are covered more fully in introductory training and in further reading listed at the end of this manual. However, it is important to understand the basic reasoning behind this approach, so let’s revisit it.

Simply put, a theme is a take-home message; it’s the moral of the story or main conclusion a visitor takes away from an interpretive activity (like a guided tour or talk) or device (like an exhibit, website or brochure).

In thematic interpretation, we understand that visitors are going to forget most or all of the colourful facts we present to them. But we know that if the conclusion they draw from all those facts is meaningful and important, it will provoke them to thought and they'll continue to think about that conclusion even when the facts that supported it are long gone from their memory.

That's why in thematic interpretation it's the thinking that matters most to us, not the facts. You might prefer to describe it as wondering, marvelling or pondering, however, thinking is what leads the visitor to attach meanings to the thing and the place being interpreted.

Meaningful things and places matter to us. And that's what thematic interpretation at its best, does: it causes visitors to make meaning. Logically, these meanings will be extended to you, your organisation or business and even to the state of Tasmania as a destination.

Thematic interpretation enables you to influence the way visitors experience your place or product.

So, planning to communicate powerful themes that help you to achieve effective outcomes is a smart thing to do for anyone in the tourism industry. This manual tells how you can do this strategically.

Three key decisions

At its most basic level, strategic planning for thematic interpretation involves making decisions about three things, as illustrated in the diagram below:



Working from left to right, themes are the take-home messages that we want to deliver to visitors through some form of communication medium

(like a guided tour or brochure) to an audience (consisting of one or more visitors).

When you're planning thematic interpretation, you're making decisions about doing these three things—nothing more or less (although, as you'll see as you work through the process, you won't make these decisions in this order).

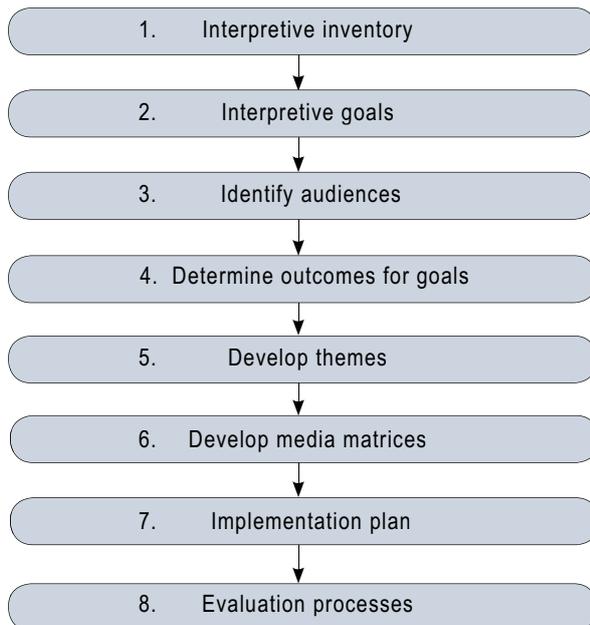
When you've finished your interpretive plan, you'll have in hand a series of decisions about the people you're going to communicate with, how you're going to reach them and what themes you're going to try to get across to them. It really is that simple.

Now you're ready to follow the eight planning steps shown in the following flow chart.



Snapshot of the interpretive planning process

This is how the interpretive planning process works:



1. Interpretive inventory

An interpretive inventory consists of two parts. First is a description of the storytelling potential of a place: what's important about it and why visitors would be interested in those things. The second part is a general description of who the visitors are in broad marketing terms. In doing this kind of inventory, we don't want to get bogged down in a lot of details but we do want to develop a good sense of what is special and noteworthy about the place, along with a general but accurate understanding of who our visitors are: where they live, how long they stay, the main reasons behind their trip etc.

A: Describe the interpretive potential

Document the features

In most cases, you will already be familiar with the things that are interesting and important about

the places, people and things you interpret for visitors. These are the features, whether natural, cultural or gastronomic, that make your place special and noteworthy. The character of these things defines their interpretive potential.

For example, Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park has an unusual geology, history and wildlife, a colourful history with rich Aboriginal origins, and a rare ecological system spanning many life zones because of the elevation changes in the park.

In an interpretive inventory, these are documented and described in a way that outlines their significance—why they are important to Tasmania and the world. A winery or brewery, on the other hand, may have an interesting history of ownership or lineage along with a setting where visitors can observe wine or beer-making firsthand. These would be described in the interpretive inventory for these places. A cultural site like Port Arthur or the Hobart Museum may decide that their greatest interpretive potential lies in the buildings and artefacts still visible at the site and, of course, the stories about the human dramas played out there a century ago.

Unique selling point

In assessing the interpretive potential of a site, pay special attention to the things that give the place a unique selling point (USP). These may be features (e.g. a tall mountain, an outstanding view), an opportunity (e.g. to see Tasmanian devils at night, to catch a particular kind of fish, to taste some type of food or beverage as it is being made), or even a symbolic connection to something that no longer be seen (e.g. a place where an historic event took place or where a particular film was made).

Likewise, facilities like museums may have unusual or rare collections, food and beverage businesses may allow behind the scenes tours, or zoos may exhibit a rare species of wildlife.

Whatever the significance of the places you interpret, be sure to describe them in ways that identify the topics for interpretation at those sites. Once you've done this, it will help you later as you write themes for the interpretive plan and it will also serve as a valuable resource for new employees who need a quick immersion in what's special about the place or tourism product.

As new information comes to light, be sure to add it to the inventory. If you do this routinely, the interpretive inventory will become an ever-useful reference and a constant reminder of the values associated with the places you interpret. In this sense, you might say that once an interpretive inventory begins, it never ends.

B: Describe the audience in broad market terms

Market research

Unless you're a large organisation with significant resources, you probably can't afford to conduct your own marketing research. However, you still have access to a lot of useful information describing tourists to Tasmania. Tourism Tasmania conducts an annual Tasmanian Visitor Survey and outcomes of the survey, as well as other useful documents, are available on Tourism Tasmania's corporate website at <http://www.tourismtasmania.com.au>.

Although almost any information about a tourist is potentially useful in interpretive planning, it's particularly helpful at this early stage of the planning process to answer the following questions:

- where do tourists come from (Tasmanian visitors, interstate or international and if so, which countries)?
- what are the main reasons tourists come to your part of Tasmania (what do they do here, how do they spend their time, what are their preferred activities etc.)?

- what kind of transport do they use to get here (e.g. plane or ferry) and how do they get around once they're here (e.g. hire car, private vehicle, coach, taxi, tour)?
- how long do they stay in Tasmania?
- where else do the interstate and international tourists go before and after their trip to Tasmania?
- who are they – what do you know about their demographic patterns (e.g. age, level of education, gender, singles, couples, families etc.)?

Having a sense of the broad characteristics of the tourism market probably won't lead you to many firm conclusions about themes, media or specific audiences just yet but it is almost certain to reveal some broad parameters for later decisions.

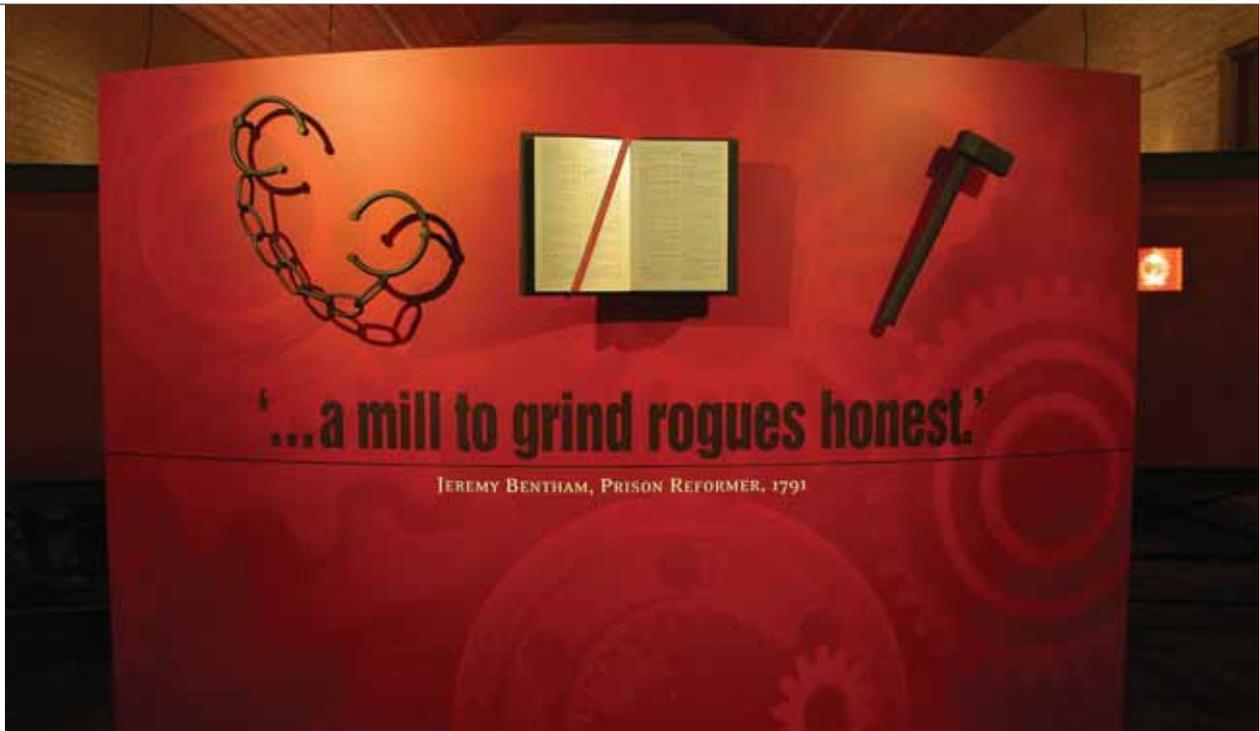
2. Decide on the broad goals of your interpretive program

What do you want to accomplish?

Once you've assessed the interpretive potential of a place and have gained a sense of the general characteristics of the visitor population, the next step is to start thinking about what you want your thematic interpretation program to accomplish.

This process begins with thinking about the broad goals you want to achieve. Goals don't have to be measurable but they do need to describe a kind of benefit or improved condition you envision as a result of communicating powerful themes to visitors.

Sometimes these goals are found in an organisation's mission or vision statement but in a lot of cases they haven't been established. Whether they exist or have to be developed, it's important to make a list of them so that the decisions you make in planning the interpretive program can be traced back to them.



Connecting thematic interpretation to its root goals will ensure that whatever you decide to do is in keeping with the benefits you hope to achieve by doing it.

Four broad goal categories

The kinds of goals you select are purely up to you. However, four broad goal categories are pretty typical in most situations:

- i. enhancing visitor experiences;
- iv. enhancing public relations;
- ii. protecting the site and its resources; and
- iii. protecting visitors from hazards.

i. Enhancing visitor experiences

Enhancing visitor experiences is arguably the primary and most important goal for interpretation in virtually any situation. In fact, many organisations concentrate almost exclusively on this goal. Creating satisfied customers is central to success for anyone who hosts or guides tourists and, of course, positive experiences produce satisfied tourists.

In our earlier discussion of interpretation as “meaning making,” we noted that the primary purpose of thematic interpretation is not just to give entertaining facts to visitors but to lead visitors to draw conclusions from those facts – and in doing so, to provoke them to think more deeply about the place, its features and the qualities that make it special.

The thinking that visitors do creates meanings and memories of the place. When this happens, experiences are enhanced and visitors return home with positive things to say about the place and the time they spent there.

Enhancing experiences through thematic interpretation can lead to other kinds of outcomes that are of special interest to private tourism businesses. First among these is the positive word-of-mouth advertising that occurs when satisfied visitors tell friends and workmates about their memories of the place. In addition, tourists provoked to think about the things they see and do in a tourist destination often buy souvenirs and other merchandise that serve as tangible reminders of the good time they had.

Smart tourism operators manufacture and sell merchandise (from clothing to toys and other

paraphernalia) that link to interpretive themes and, in turn, serve as reinforcers of the experience. Merchandise items printed with messages based on themes become a form of direct advertisements for future customers.

ii. Enhancing public relations

Projecting a positive image to important segments of the public is important for every organisation, whether private or public, big or small. If you're not supported or appreciated by someone who matters, your ability to achieve your goals is limited.

Not all audiences are equally important to your public relations but some typical ones are your customers (on-site visitors); journalists (especially those who might write about you); elected officials (who can influence funding decisions or the operating environment of your organisation); employees of government agencies (who can influence how you do your job); stakeholders; interest groups and community organisations or groups.

Tourism Tasmania, for example, targets visiting journalists and travel writers as an important audience. Similarly, many tourism operators in the State probably see Tourism Tasmania as an important audience.

Maintaining and enhancing public relations is an important aspect of thematic interpretation. Sending important audiences messages that show you in a positive light is the single most effective way to be valued, which has an impact on such things as funding levels, community good will and active support for your activities.

It is in this goal category that the distinction between interpretation, public relations and marketing begins to blur. At some level, they are all after the same thing in terms of creating a positive image for the place or product.

iii. Protecting the site and its resources

Visitors always impact the places they visit but sometimes their impacts directly threaten the values of a place.

In national parks, visitors straying from designated walking tracks may unknowingly trample plants, compact soil or disturb sensitive wildlife.

In cultural tourism settings such as the heritage property, Woolmers Estate, near Longford, they may touch artefacts or parts of buildings causing cumulative damage to one-of-a-kind things. At other times, they may pick flowers or cut tree branches, while oblivious to the impacts they are having.

Visitors do not have your specialised background or experience with the physical settings in which you encounter them. Often they're unaware of the impacts they have and sometimes they don't appreciate the cumulative effect that thousands of visitors just like them can have over time.

Interpretation is often used as a way to sensitise visitors to their impacts so that they will voluntarily behave in ways that cause minimum impacts. Research has shown that when they are aware of the potential to cause damage to a place, most visitors will gladly comply with your requests for them to "do this" or "not do that".

A good example is in the United States at Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument, where visitors sometimes walk off designated tracks in order to get a closer look at certain trailside features. In doing so, they unknowingly trample tiny plants that help to convert the pumiced landscape into organic soil for a future forest. Following a thematic interpretation approach, monument managers have erected small interpretive panels along the track that say: "Tiny plants along the trail grow by the inch but die by the foot. Please stay on the designated trail. Thank you!" The signs show an illustration of the bottom of a bushwalking shoe.

Not all visitors cause impacts that need to be addressed by interpretation but some visitors engage in certain types of activities that make them an important target audience for this goal category. For example, thematic interpretive signs are being used at Port Campbell National Park in Victoria to persuade visitors to stay on designated tracks in fragile areas.

iv. Protecting visitors from hazards

Just as visitors lack knowledge about the impacts they can have while enjoying a place, they also lack knowledge about the ways in which the place can impact on them.

Especially important are threats to visitors' safety and security. Unstable ledges, dangerous wildlife, contaminated surface water, unsafe swimming areas and a host of other hazards can potentially await the uninformed visitor.

Thematic interpretation is sometimes aimed at helping visitors to recognise and protect themselves from these dangers. For example, Yosemite National Park rangers in the United States use thematic interpretation to inform overnight campers about how to store their food properly when camping near black bears.

In other places, signs are placed near scenic viewpoints to warn photographers to stay behind protective guardrails and many guides explain to visitors which bush tucker is safe or not safe to eat.

As with protecting the site, not all visitors need to be targeted with interpretation related to their safety and wellbeing. But timely reminders to visitors about dangers they may be unaware of can make a big difference not only in the quality of their experience but in the unfortunate event of a law suit or other legal dispute.



3. Identify audiences and do your homework

Preparing a planning table

You can now begin to build a planning table, as shown below in the example for a national park.

As indicated on the column headings of the sample planning table, once you've established your interpretive goals, the next requirement is to identify and list important audiences for your thematic interpretation program.

As you do this, you'll probably list different audiences in each of the goal categories.



Table 1: Example of a strategic plan outline for a theoretical park

Goal	Strategic Audiences	Goal Outcomes	Example of Key Themes	
1. Enhance experiences	1.A. All visitors who utilise face-to-face or non-personal interpretive services on-site	1.A.1 Visitors who utilise interpretive services report that they contributed to their experience in a positive way	(Themes focused on protected values of the site)	
		1.A.2 Visitors who utilise interpretive services report being inspired about park values.	(Themes focused on protected values of the site).	
		1.A.3 Visitors will be able to find their way to sites, attractions & facilities.	(Themes focused on protected values of the site)	
2. Promote public support for park, its programmes and services	2.A All visitors	2.A.1 Visitors report having positive image of the park.		
		2.A.2 Visitors will say that they are pleased with management of the site.		
	2.B Local residents 1	2.B.1 Local residents 1 report having a positive image of the park.		
	2.C Local residents 2 (indigenous)	2.C.1 Local residents 2 report having a positive image of the park.	2.C.1.1 Parks generate valuable income for regional communities.	
	2.D Teachers/parents	2.D.1 Teachers/parents report having a positive image of the park.		
3. Protect resources	3.A Self-drive visitors	3.A.1 Vehicles stay on designated tracks and respect off-limit signs.		
		3.B Bushwalkers	3.B.1 Bushwalkers practise minimal impact bushwalking techniques. 3.B.2 Bushwalkers pack out all rubbish.	3.B.1.1 Plants here grow by the inch but can die by the foot. 3.B.1.2 etc.
	3.C Overnight campers	3.C.1 Campers use gas stoves.		
		3.C.2 Campers camp in designated sites.	3.C.2.1 People can easily upset delicate balances and relationships in the natural and cultural environment.	
	3.D School groups	3.D.1 Teachers monitor student groups at all times around indigenous artefacts and sites.	3.D.2.1 Removing or disturbing the cultural objects and relics within our protected areas is illegal.	
	4. Protect visitors	4.A All bushwalkers	4.A.1 Bushwalkers respect the role of rangers and advise them if they see park behaviour or activity that is inappropriate, irresponsible or dangerous.	
			4.A.2 Bushwalkers register at trailhead.	
4.A.3 Bushwalkers store food properly.				
3.B Overnight campers		4.B.1 Overnight campers follow all regulations and restrictions with respect to the use of fires and stoves.		
4.C Scenic overlook users		4.C.1 Scenic overlook users stay behind guardrail.		
4.D Students				

Audience-centred interpretation

The audience is critical to interpretation delivery and outcomes. Therefore, it's essential to spend the time and effort necessary to gain a clear understanding of who they are, why they come here, the kinds of experiences they seek and enjoy.

Decisions throughout the interpretive planning process are made from the point of view of audiences, their preferences and the outcomes you want to achieve through influencing them.

Here are the critical considerations in defining your target audiences:

i. Communicating in time and space

Audiences may vary in many ways but the fundamental principle in thematic interpretation is to define each audience so that you can communicate with it in time and space.

ii. Desired audience experiences

Know what they desire in the way of a good experience. Use data sources such as websites, surveys and market research. Depending on the type of tourism business or facility you have, staff from Tourism Tasmania's Market Research Unit may be able to assist with access to pertinent data.

It may also be necessary to conduct some on-site interviews to assist in determining desired audience experiences. These interviews are different to visitor survey interviews in that they are assisting you to scope the potential experiences that visitors would value. Therefore, a relatively small sample (sometimes only 20-25 interviews) will often result in what is known as theoretical saturation – the point where you are no longer getting new information but are getting the same kinds of responses from interviewees.

So, don't be afraid to ask people and listen to them. Also, find out what media they prefer and especially, which media they do NOT want (e.g. signs intruding in a natural environment).

iii. Keep the audience categories simple

Audience categories that are simple are usually the best to work with. You can always sub-divide an audience.

iv. Market segments are different to audiences

Market segments are the defined groupings for visitors during the marketing process and make it possible to target them for the purpose of influencing their decision-making process around a purchase. Market segments are the categories that people fall into while a business is trying to attract them.

Interpretive audiences, on the other hand, sort themselves into different groupings once they're on-site, as they self-select into activities and experiences.

The key to working with both market segments (if your business has identified them) and interpretive audiences is to develop a good understanding of who is in the mix for the segments because it gives you valuable information, at the on-site level, to work with your audience categories.

Because audience categories tend to be much simpler than segments, when the people identified in the segments get on site and move out of those categories or 'boxes' and into the simpler audience categories or 'boxes', your understanding of the segments means that you have greater insight into the range of interpretive needs within each audience.

Looking back to Table 1, you'll see that the next column identifies specific outcomes for each goal.

4. Outcomes for each goal category

This is where you determine, for each audience, how you can know when you've succeeded in influencing them.

The predominant or major goal category is to enhance the visitor experience. However, other goal categories will be important and it is essential to identify clear outcomes for all relevant categories. Some examples are indicated in Table 2.

Non-observable vs observable outcomes

All outcomes are either mental/emotional outcomes (non-observable) or behavioural outcomes (which are observable if they occur in the short term).

For example, where the use of a theme has resulted in meaning-making for visitors, the outcome would be a non-observable one. However, if

you interviewed those visitors later, they might report that they felt inspired or were provoked to thought by the experience.

Observable behavioural outcomes may be immediate, such as visitors staying on walking tracks and therefore protecting the environment; or an increase in sales of related merchandise or interpretive products.

Other observable outcomes may be less immediate, such as an increase in repeat visitation, enhanced public relations, an increase in sales of related tourism products, increased word-of-mouth promotion or a rise in donations.

You may need to add your own goal category or categories to meet the specific needs of your business.

Now that you have identified non-observable outcomes or any behaviours that you intend to achieve, you are ready to write some themes to be communicated in order to reach your end goals.

Table 2: Examples of outcomes for goal categories

Type of Setting	Enhance experiences	Promote public support	Protect resources	Protect visitors
Park	Visitors who utilize interpretive services report that they are inspired about park values.	Local residents say positive things about the park	Track users pack out their own rubbish	Visitors don't climb over guard rails
Museum	Visitors are provoked to thought about the period or subject matter interpreted in the museum	Visitors recommend the museum to others	Visitors respect requests not to photograph certain items	Visitors walk safely up and down stairs
Winery/ brewery	Visitors buy wine at the cellar door or beer at the tasting/retail area	Visitors say positive things about the wine/beer to prospective customers	Visitors respect requests to stay out of certain areas.	Visitors don't enter dangerous areas.
Chocolate factory/ manufacturing outlet	Visitors buy souvenirs that remind them of the experience	Visitors say positive things about the product to prospective customers	Visitors respect requests to not touch certain items.	Visitors don't touch equipment.
Cruise	Passengers are inspired by the features interpreted during the cruise.	Passengers recommend the company to prospective customers	Visitors are quiet in sensitive wildlife areas.	Visitors wear life jackets when requested.

5. Themes and how to develop them

What is a theme?

- a theme is a whole idea that is usually expressed in one sentence (and occasionally two sentences or more). For example:

Tasmania's temperate rainforests are a living link with the ancient super-continent of Gondwana.

- a theme is the way you express the essence of the message you and others in your organisation want to impart to visitors: it is not necessarily the set of words you would use in direct communication to visitors.

The words chosen when communicating to visitors depend on who your audiences are and what kind of experience they are seeking.

Powerful themes

All themes convey a moral to the story, a conclusion. But when a moral to the story really matters to the visitor then it touches them in lots of ways, and that's when it really sticks.

Themes that affect visitors in this way are more powerful in the impact they make. Given that we're using themes in the first place to create meaning and connection, then it makes sense to go for powerful themes where possible.

In this way,

"Cataract Gorge shows us that nature is dynamic and ever-changing".

becomes

"Cataract Gorge challenges us to remember that we cannot take nature for granted – it is dynamic and unpredictable."

Tangibles and intangibles

When you make links between the tangible and intangible elements in creating a theme, it adds power and relevance to it.

The tangible qualities are the physical ingredients – immediate things you can see, touch and experience directly. They might be geologic formations, a heritage house, a river, animals etc.

The intangible qualities are those that are symbolic, that represent beliefs and values that are part of our human experience and are represented by the tangibles.

Here is a short exercise (inspired by Dave Dahlen, Chief of Interpretation at Glacier National Park in the USA) to show what happens when you move from the tangible to the intangible –

Hand around to individuals in a group a piece of rock that's conglomerate, with pieces of other rock embedded in it. Ask each individual what it is as they pass it on.

People who are into rocks will say that it's conglomerate, maybe igneous. Others will comment on how smooth it is, whether or not they think it's been in water. People start sharing all the facts that they know about the rock, based on what they can see and touch. They use their senses to verify all the things they know about it – what it means to them. All of these physical things are the tangibles.

Then say to the group: "Oh, there's one thing I forgot to tell you about this rock. Remember Berlin and the wall that came down? Well this is the piece of rock that I brought back from there. It's part of the wall".

Now ask each individual what the rock is. Suddenly their minds will shift from the tangible meanings they assign to the rock, to meanings that can't be seen or touched or verified by any of the senses. Some may say it is a symbol of tyranny or persecution. Some will say it symbolises freedom. Most will see powerful meanings in it – these are the intangible meanings.

Generating ideas for themes

Getting started

There are lots of ways to find ideas for themes but the good ones all come from the one source – someone’s passion for a subject or site.

‘Mining’ that passion is the key to discovering and developing themes. Excitement or enthusiasm about a topic is a sure sign that there’s something meaningful at work and those ‘hot spots’ are the source of good raw material for themes.

You can generate theme ideas through:

- a community workshop (particularly useful for goal category i);
- an in-house workshop (particularly useful for goal categories ii, iii and iv); or
- examining what drives your own connections to a place and its people.

A community workshop:

is beneficial when there are stakeholders with an interest in the interpretation product; or when the involvement of others can significantly inform or add value to theme development by providing fresh points of view and expanding the understanding about the range of ways that people connect with the place or product.

In determining who to invite, consider those who are enthusiastic and articulate about the subject matter. It is also important to invite people who provide a wide range of perspectives.

For example, the invitation list for a community theme development workshop at Cradle Mountain included: a ranger who had worked there for several years, members of the Friends of Cradle organisation, an Aboriginal heritage specialist, a local commercial guide, local tourism operators, the director of the local photography gallery, a graphic designer, a writer and representatives of Tourism Tasmania.



An in-house workshop:

involves your organisation’s team and will enable you to draw on the full range of strengths, perspectives and sense of meaning contained within the organisation. For this reason, it is particularly important to involve as many people as possible and not just those directly involved in interpretation. In the case of themes related to behaviours that will protect resources or visitors, include members of the organisation who have a good understanding of the issues and impacts. Not only does this lead to better outcomes but it helps develop a sense of commitment and ownership within the organisation.

Going it alone:

may be necessary in a small tourism business where you are the sole guide or leading a small team of casual guides. Look for what excites you about the subject matter – not just the topic areas but what it is about the topics that inspires, interests or moves you. And also consider what inspires, interests or moves visitors on your tour.

What to do

The process is a simple one and works by casting a wide net at first then focusing in on theme ideas with the greatest potential for achieving the outcomes you’ve identified in Step 4.

1. Ensure that arrangements are in place to record all contributions, without value judgments. What appear to be unlikely suggestions or disparate ideas can, at a later stage, form the basis of strong themes.

In addition, it is useful to record the information and messages arising from the workshop and as part of the later theme development process so that the thinking behind the decision-making on themes can be included in briefs to writers, graphic designers and others involved in implementation of thematic interpretation.

2. Brainstorm a list of topics across the whole subject matter and any particular aspect of them that is considered important either by you, participants in a group or visitors. This is the range of possibilities.
3. Group the topics in terms of whatever general categories they fall into. The purpose of this step is to gather topics into manageable groupings for development of theme ideas. For example, Cradle Mountain's Theme Development Workshop identified four main categories, with some topics crossing over them:
 - a. spiritual, sensory responses and aesthetics
 - b. human history through to current
 - c. natural history through to current
 - d. World Heritage Area values/significance
4. In a workshop situation, break into small groups and assign a topic category to each of these sub-groups.
5. Complete the following statement in relation to a topic category or in relation to the entire site or product, as a way of getting to the heart of the most significant messages.

When it comes to [site/product name], and in order for this audience to think/feel/demonstrate the desired behaviour [choose

whichever is most applicable], it is really, really, REALLY important for them to understand that _____

Each attempt should begin with "that" to encourage the writing of a full sentence – a sentence always includes a verb and a noun.

Participants – or those working individually outside a workshop session – can repeat the exercise as many times as they wish until there is a comprehensive range of theme ideas.

6. In a workshop, all suggestions are reported back to the full group and there is opportunity for feedback/discussion, which can add further depth and substance to the ideas.

Developing the theme/theme package

One or many?

Depending on the type of visitor experience or product you're offering, you are now ready to develop your theme or a package of themes.

If you have a tour or interpretation product that is straightforward and delivered in a relatively brief duration, such as a short guided walk, you will probably need only one theme.

However, for an experience or product that is more complex, or is delivered over a longer time frame or is aimed at achieving multiple outcomes, a package of themes will be needed to provide sufficient depth for interpretation e.g. a five-hour cruise.

Pinning down themes

You now have your 'raw material', identified in a theme development workshop or through your individual efforts. It's time to:

- review the ideas to remove duplication; identify opportunities to link more than one together, or incorporate one or more into a unified theme;

- use the ideas as the basis to write a theme or set of themes;
- rank themes in order of significance to determine if any are sub-messages of broader themes;
- assess gaps in relation to desired audience experiences;
- develop new themes to address any gaps; and finally,
- review the theme or package of themes to check for any opportunity to incorporate intangibles.
- **Play with each theme, edit it, rework it, push it as hard as you can until it is strong and conveys real meaning, one that will provoke the audience to think more about it – to wonder.**

Test themes against audiences and desired audience experiences

Now you have your set of themes, it's time to test them against the audience requirements, as indicated on your planning table.

The 'acid test' is the capacity of each theme to be relevant to your identified audiences and to contribute to the desired audience experiences or achieve other outcomes, either non-behavioural or behavioural, identified in Step 4.

Conservation and management messages

For natural areas, you may have priorities relating to both the goal category of enhancing visitor experiences and protecting resources. Because the development of themes for each of those two goal categories can require a different focus in terms of your perspective (i.e. external vs internal perspectives), it can be useful to have separate theme development processes for each.

Also, if you first develop themes relating to the enhancement goal category, then develop conservation and management messages, it is often possible to align or even incorporate conservation and management messages/themes with the experience-related themes. That way they serve to support and reinforce the meaning-making outcomes.

When are you finished?

Hopefully never! The process of theme development is an ongoing one of testing, refining, improving and owning. All themes – even the truly great ones – need reviewing on a regular basis as part of revisiting your Thematic Interpretation Strategy. Audiences change, new desired outcomes emerge, experiences can change and personnel certainly do, so it is important that your themes remain relevant to the visitors, the product and the organisation's goals, and that your staff have the opportunity to make creative contributions that arise from their passion for the place or subject matter.

Putting the themes to work

It's time to put your new resources to work. In the next section, you'll see how themes get matched to audiences and the delivery mechanisms or media. However, it helps to understand that your theme or package of themes will have the greatest effectiveness if applied in an integrated way across your organisation.

So not only do the themes reach your audiences through interpretive media, they can also help set the tone for other communications, such as public relations plans and marketing collateral.

Once you have your theme or set of themes then it makes it easy to know what kind of experience you're offering visitors and, therefore, what you need to communicate. Your theme or themes can then get to work doing what they do best – helping you and your organisation get the outcomes you want to achieve.

6. Media matrices

Strategic selection of media is vital for the success of your interpretive program because the media are the vehicle through which you deliver themes to your audiences. Each medium provides a communications bridge to carry your themes to the specific groups of people you're targeting.

As with all aspects of the thematic interpretation planning process, the central consideration in making strategic decisions about media is the audience – the needs and desires of the people you seek to influence.

In its broadest sense, this decision-making occurs at two levels:

1. assessment of the most appropriate media to reach specific audiences at specific locations; and
2. assessment of the range of selected media to ensure a judicious mix that meets the range of needs that exists within each audience set.

Choosing an appropriate range of media

At this point in the planning process, it is invaluable to draw on the understanding of your market that you developed through formal or informal market research when completing the earlier Interpretive Inventory at Step 1.

As indicated earlier, interpretive audiences are defined according to the way they use a site and/or can be 'reached' through the interpretive program on site.

Once the audiences are defined, it is important to consider the visitor profiles for the market segments to determine the range of needs within each audience set.

As the example below indicates, at Cradle Mountain, an assessment of the visitor profiles enabled planners to build a picture on needs within each audience.

In addition, no matter how good your market research may be, it is impossible to accurately predict audience preferences down to the

Cradle Mountain Visitor Profile and Media

Pencil Pine Precinct Visitors

These visitors are making their first stop inside the park boundary and include those starting the Cradle Valley Boardwalk, the King Billy Walk and the Rainforest Walk, as well as picnickers and bushwalkers.

This audience is likely to include a high proportion of visitors who will seek park experiences without active exploration (e.g. visitors less than 2 hrs; visitors with low levels of fitness/mobility). At the same time, they still desire a meaningful experience and connection to the park and its values. This audience will also include visitors seeking shelter due to inclement weather or when the road is closed due to snow, and interpretation planning should take into account the fact that this audience is accessing the park's biggest visitor building.

This example indicates certain implications for media selection, such as:

- the need for the majority of interpretation to be easy and quick to access (small 'bites', simple display panels, ranger roves where immediate access to relevant interpretation can be obtained; ready access to self-guided brochures etc);
- a proportion of interpretation geared to those who will spend most of their visit around visitor facilities (in-depth interpretation that can be absorbed over a longer period of time); and
- as this may be the only opportunity for this audience to gain a sense of connection to the significance of Cradle Valley, the focus will be on media that most strongly deliver the primary themes.

individual level where some people will prefer to read panels, others who will give priority to personal interpretation or self-guided brochures that let them discover for themselves etc.

Visitors self-select their preferred form of interpretation.

Therefore, the goal is to ensure that there are elements in the media mix to meet the full range of identified needs.

The matching game: audience meets themes and media

Once you have identified the audiences and themes and have developed an understanding of the market profiles for visitors, it is time to develop your media matrices.

What is a media matrix?

A media matrix is simply a table that shows which media will be used to deliver each theme to a specific audience.

Collectively, the media matrices are the ‘heart’ of the interpretive plan.

How to develop media matrices

1. Create a separate media matrix template for each audience (see an example of a template at the end of this section):
 - write the audience name above each matrix;
 - then within each matrix write the themes for that audience as headings across the top – one theme per column;
 - if relevant to your organisation, include a column for management and conservation messages; and
 - list each medium down the left-hand side, each on a separate row.



2. Now fill in the template using the same question for each blank cell where a theme meets a medium – “what’s the best medium to use to communicate this theme to this audience?”
3. For each cell on the table that indicates a specific medium to deliver a specific theme, place an X.
4. As you make your decisions and place each X, use a notation system so that when you need to cross-reference the specific selection to background ideas or rationale for each choice, the information is readily accessible.

This step is vital as each X that appears in a cell of the table represents considerable thinking and any important information not evident on the matrix will need to be captured so that anyone who reads the interpretation plan can share your understanding – especially those responsible for implementation.

AUDIENCE: _____

	Theme A	Theme B	Theme C	Theme D
panel – entrance	X	X ⁱ		
guided walk		X		x
website	X ⁱⁱ	X	X	X
brochure	X	X	X ⁱⁱⁱ	x

- i. emphasise the historical aspect
- ii. strong use of images rather than text
- iii. this theme should be specifically integrated with Enchanted Forest walk

One of the simplest notation systems is to place a number or Roman Numeral alongside the relevant X and then list all of the notations immediately below the table e.g.

5. Note separately any ideas for technical design that you might want to pass on later to designers and artists, either informally or as part of a formal implementation brief.
6. To differentiate between those themes to be strongly communicated via a particular communication medium and those to be communicated more subtly, use X for strong communication and the lower case version, x, for subtle communication.
7. Once you have completed each of the draft media matrices, review each one to ensure that you have a judicious mix of media for each audience.
8. Ensure that you give consideration to pre-visit media, which reach your audiences before they arrive on site, such as websites and brochures. Pre-visit media play an important role in creating anticipation and conditioning the audience to themes and visitor experiences.

The table shown above is just one of the ways to present a media matrix. The style of your matrix will depend on your organisation and the complexity of your interpretive planning.

Information relating to budget and implementation is addressed as part of the ‘action plan’ to be developed in the next section. This may involve an incremental implementation or prioritisation of communication as indicated on the media matrices or – due to budgetary constraints – may necessitate returning to the matrices and revisiting certain decisions.

The primary audience

In a situation where the completed matrices have considerable overlap – i.e. the same media show up on one or more matrices – then for the implementation phase it will be necessary to determine who the primary audience will be for the media matrices. This is necessary so that the graphic designer, writer, photographer etc. can select the language, style and tone that meet the needs of a particular audience.

Example of primary audience identification

Cataract Gorge Strategic Interpretation Plan

The two audiences, Visitors and Local/Tasmanian Users, had a range of media in common, including:

- self-guided walk brochure
- website
- handrail concept for interpretation
- contemplation places/platforms
- community events

Market research demonstrated patterns such as:

Visitor use of the Gorge was over a broader area of the site than for Local/Tasmanian Users; Visitors were actively seeking to connect with the values of the Gorge, while Users were more likely to be seeking a social or recreational experience.

As a result it was determined that the primary audience for media matrices would be Visitors as they had the greatest need and preference for interpretation.

Template for a Media Matrix

Audience _____

Themes for this audience

Tools/media	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Guided walk			
Roving interpreter			
Self-guided brochure			
Storyteller			
Brochure			
Information shelter panel			
Trail head sign			
Wayside panels			
Website			
Slide show			
Video			
Soundscape			
Drive trail			
Audio tour			
Computer interactive			
Performing arts event			
Interpretive centre display			

7. Implementation Plan

Now that you've made all the key decisions about the shape and direction of your thematic interpretive program, it's time to prepare an implementation plan, otherwise known as an action plan.

This is the point where decisions will need to be made about:

- budget;
- resources;
- who is responsible for what;
- any training needs for interpretive staff or others;
- scheduling of specific actions; and
- timelines.

Implementation of a thematic interpretive plan is often a major undertaking and most organisations have limits on their budgets, human resources and time. For this reason, it is critical to identify which actions have priority and which ones can be phased in over a longer period, in some cases this may be over a number of years.

The implementation plan balances the available budget against the organisation's interpretive priorities and the time required for implementation. At the same time, it provides a clear, action-oriented outline of the specifics for bringing your interpretive program into being.



8. Evaluation

Why evaluate?

No thematic interpretive plan would be complete without an evaluation component.

Evaluation is important because it:

- enables us to measure the progress or success of an interpretive program;
- provides feedback for continual improvement of an interpretive program;
- demonstrates the benefits of interpretive programs, in the private sector, to business managers; and in the public sector, to senior management, funding bodies and stakeholders; and
- it is a vital ‘diagnostic’ tool for the health of an interpretive program, enabling us to identify what is not working and therefore, to avoid making costly mistakes.

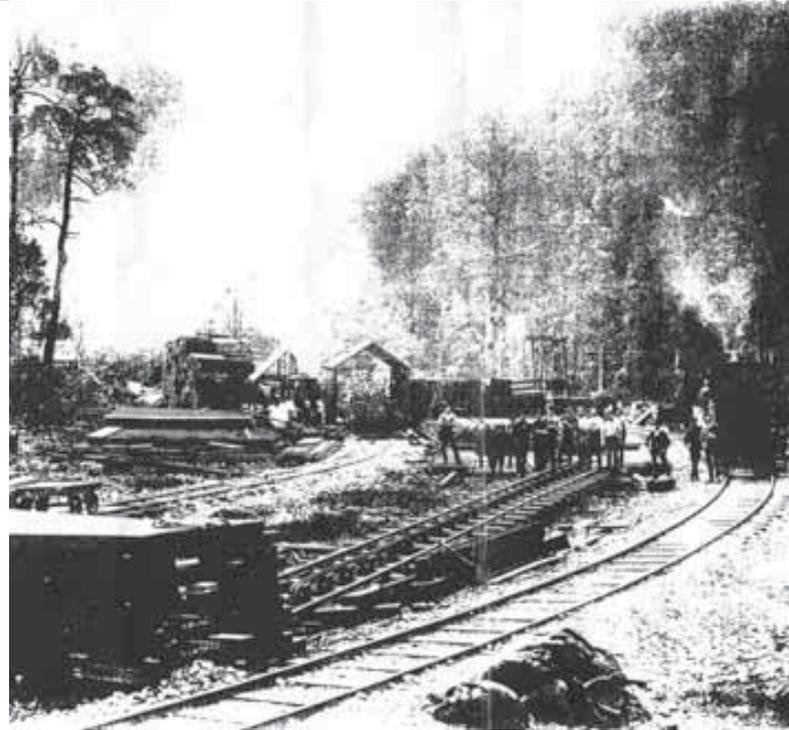
When to evaluate

Evaluation processes can be conducted before, during or after implementation of an interpretive program, activity or device –

Before

Often called formative evaluations, this approach allows us to test an activity or interpretive device before further money or staff time are invested. They enable us to:

- improve a program before it has been fully implemented; or
- identify a program that is not likely to prove effective with visitors and, if need be, cancel it before wasting additional money or effort on it.



During

These are evaluations conducted to monitor an interpretive program. They can tell us about immediate responses and effectiveness of an activity or device and whether it is actually reaching intended audiences.

Program monitoring evaluations are a useful tool for assessing whether a program, activity or device needs to be modified to improve its performance.

After

Evaluations conducted at a later stage are often called ‘impact assessments’ or ‘summative evaluations’.

They tell us whether our objectives were met or are being met by an activity or device, over time.

Looking back at Step 4 and the examples provided in Table 2, we can see that having outcomes documented in advance (especially observable ones), gives us a yardstick against which to evaluate our interpretation.

How to evaluate

It is important to determine what evidence we can gather to assess whether (or to what extent) we have achieved the outcomes we set out to reach.

Common ways to evaluate are:

1. ask visitors questions via individual or group interviews, focus groups or questionnaires (e.g. did they get the theme? did they enjoy the activity?);
2. observing the behaviour of visitors (e.g. do they pay attention, read or listen as desired? do they stay on a track? do they refrain from feeding wildlife or walking where they're not supposed to walk?); and
3. observing the traces that visitors leave behind (e.g. counting children's nose prints on a glass exhibit case, monitoring the increase or decrease in plant growth along a bushwalking track).

Evaluation in Tasmania

In 2003-2004, Tourism Tasmania collaborated with the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre to develop an Evaluation Toolkit for thematic interpretation programs in Australia. The toolkit, based on research conducted by Professors Sam Ham and Betty Weiler, at Monash University, and Dr. Anne Hardy, at the University of Tasmania, includes a field-tested questionnaire that measures the effectiveness of interpretation according to a series of 11 primary indicators deemed most important by industry.

For information on how to get your copy of the Interpretation Evaluation Toolkit, contact:

Destination Development Unit
Tourism Tasmania
Ph: (03) 6230 8360
Email: deb.lewis@tourism.tas.gov.au



Thematic interpretation and the West Coast Wilderness Railway: a case study on the use of themes

With thanks to WCWR General Manager, Eamonn Seddon

The need for a visitor experience focus

The restored West Coast Wilderness Railway began operating in November 2000, with a short trip from Queenstown to Lynchford marking the start of passenger services that by December 2002 had been extended to the full route to Strahan.

In July 2002, Federal Hotels & Resorts announced it had secured ownership of the railway. Until then, the huge challenges of a three-year restoration program had meant that the focus for the railway had been on operational matters and little development of the railway visitor experience had occurred.

Without a clear understanding of the strength of the visitor experience that could be provided by the railway, it was difficult to make decisions on the interpretation program, to develop strategies for product development, and to determine the key messages for marketing and communications.

In November 2002, the West Coast Wilderness Railway engaged a consultancy group to develop a strategic interpretation plan, assisted by Tourism Tasmania. The group, Inspiring Place Pty Ltd principals John Hepper and Jerry de Gryse, with freelance communications practitioner Anna Housego, adopted thematic interpretation as the framework for preparing the plan.

Thematic interpretation is regarded as world's best practice in interpretation and was developed by University of Idaho's Prof. Sam Ham. He was technical adviser to the planning process.

Developing themes

The initial brief provided a number of ideas indicating what the WCWR experience might be. These ideas were disparate and included: forestry, mining and mining practices, railway heritage and the Abt locomotives, local lifestyle (isolated communities, way of life etc.); Huon Pine; existing use of the railway to transport beehives/ link to leatherwood honey; and wilderness.

Welcome to a remarkable railway

LABOR OMNIA VINCIT
WE FIND A WAY OR MAKE IT

Welcome to a remarkable railway, born from a frontier spirit on the edge of civilisation and built against all the odds by remarkable people.

Ride the West Coast Wilderness Railway through some of the most treacherous country on Earth - a wild country the critics said no rail line could tame. Hear the stories of unbelievable risks, working conditions that stretched men to the limits, rivalry and scandal.

This is a railway that lived up to its motto, Labor Omnia Vincit "we find a way or make it" despite predictions that it would slide into the King River.

Journey with us into a bold world of yesteryear that inspires us today.

WEST COAST WILDERNESS RAILWAY

This posed a challenge – how to develop these ideas into an integrated and powerful visitor experience?

The first step was a theme development workshop – Apt Minds for the Abt Railway – held at Strahan. Workshop participants were a diverse group of individuals, who either had a strong connection to the WCWR or the capacity to make a creative contribution. They brought a wide range of perspectives to the table and included an historian, poet, social historian and theatre producer, local residents who worked in the tourism industry, representatives of Tourism Tasmania, WCWR staff, and a Federal Company Director.

The group brainstormed topics and from those topics, developed ideas for themes.

By the end of the workshop, it was apparent from the list of ideas that the most powerful story for creating a memorable visitor experience revolved around the human endeavour and drama in getting the railway built in the first place.

The main theme was subsequently identified as:

The West Coast Wilderness Railway was born against the odds at the far edge of civilization – it is a story that inspires us today.

[Guides are free to interpret what this inspiration may be e.g. “ by proving that all things are possible if you have a vision”.]

Because the train journey is four hours, it was decided to adopt three sub-themes to support the main theme and add further depth and richness to interpretation:

- The people that made the railway possible risked it all, gambling money and lives to “find a way or make it”.
- Life at the wild frontier was a far cry from what we know today but can teach us about dealing with challenges and change.

- The railway survived not only once but twice, with its restoration truly making it a railway that refused to die.

It is interesting to note that within the ‘storylines’ captured in the themes, aspects of the original set of topics can still be covered but – through the lens of the themes – with a clear focus.

The WCWR Interpretation Plan acknowledges that a topic is the subject matter to be discussed while the theme is the principal message about that topic or subject matter that you wish to impart. When using a topic as the basis for interpretation, it is difficult to achieve a focus or to discern what information will be included or excluded. When using thematic interpretation, the theme brings a focus that enables easy decision-making about what information is relevant to convey – and how to convey it.

The planning process

With themes now prepared, work began on developing an interpretation plan, based on the interpretation needs and specific features of the WCWR. Steps included the following:

- the audience profile was examined;
- each station and site along the railway route was assessed for its relative strengths in delivering the theme and sub-themes and specific locations at each site were identified;
- site sheets were prepared for each location, providing background information on the history, the setting, safety and amenity, interpretation constraints, interpretive opportunities and potential links to the themes;
- initial and longer-term interpretive products were identified;
- interpretation media were identified; and
- an action plan was developed.



Due to the immediacy of the need for interpretation, the plan also included key deliverables such as text for an interpretive brochure for passengers; a series of guide script modules and a notional theatrical script.

Putting themes to work

The WCWR theme and sub-themes now provided definition for the passenger experience, which would be one of connecting with the incredible human endeavour and risk of getting the railway through such remote and wild country.

Interpretation products

It is interesting to note that adoption of the above theme and sub-themes has created an experience that is far broader than the actual train trip. In this approach, the train itself – particularly the original Abt steam locomotives and the unusual section of rack and pinion rail from Halls Creek to Dubbil Barril – become an integral part of the toolkit for conveying the ‘take-home’ messages but are not the main focus of themselves.

The themes were introduced into all passenger interpretation. This included:

- a preliminary interpretation brochure provided at the point of ticket purchase: the brochure included text spelling out the themes as well as images that worked visually to reinforce themes;
- guide script modules providing a wide range of relevant stories, historical and current information that guides could select to support delivery of the themes as well as suggestions for delivering the themes;
- guides are encouraged to share their local stories about family connections to the original railway as a means of providing passenger connections to the early way of life;
- food in the catering carriage was selected with an eye to bringing to life the daily routine of men who worked on the line e.g. food packaged in a lunchbox that echoes the fettle’s lunch package; research indicated that Cornish pasties were regular lunch fare and these are stocked in the carriage;
- a series of 25 all-weather interpretive panels were developed for stations, each one designed and written to communicate the themes or particular aspects of them. A generic panel setting the scene for the main theme and sub-themes was installed at Queenstown and Strahan Stations.

Panels emphasise the impossibility of the original railway project, the remoteness, the risks involved, the way the company and construction workers rose to the challenge, the way of life along the route, and the second feat of bringing restoration to reality.

A sub-series of six panels highlights the people factor – one for each major stop – profiling a key personality and drawing on those aspects of the personal story that most strongly support the themes;

- The panels have proven so popular with passengers that WCWR is currently in the process of having the artwork printed as a series of postcards that will be part of the merchandise range in the Queenstown Station shop;
- Commercial interpretation products also include a high-quality, full-colour Guidebook that retails for \$9 and delivers the themes with a greater level of detail than is possible during the journey. As with all WCWR interpretation, it reinforces the themes with a blend of personal stories, historic photos featuring people of the day and a focus on the way of life now gone.

The themes have determined the style, tone and content of all interpretive text, as well as the selection of contemporary and historic images. In the Guidebook, for example, a device was developed based on a composite historic ‘navvy’ character, whose story unfolded throughout the publication until he transforms into a modern-day fettler for the purposes of the restoration component.

In sourcing and selecting historic images, priority was given to those images that included workers in remote or difficult conditions or highlighted the engineering challenges or the sense of a lifestyle distant from civilisation. Contemporary images included people, where possible.

Other customer communication

The WCWR recognised that its themes were now driving the passenger experience and as a result, made a number of changes to ensure consistent communication and reinforcement of the themes across the business. For example, contemporary advertising was removed from the Queenstown Station; and workshops have ensured that all staff, not just those directly responsible for delivering interpretation, are familiar with themes and understand their significance.

Themes are currently being integrated beyond the interpretation program into Federal Hotels & Resort’s marketing and communications strategies (e.g. marketing collateral, website, recent series of advertisements in the Mercury bicentennial magazine series etc).

Knowing the story makes a difference

Knowing the themes – the essence of the story – has enabled WCWR to provide greater focus, depth and substance to its visitor experience.

And while the themes provide strong ‘umbrella’ messages for interpretation, they also provide a flexible framework for interpretation. In practice, this means that railway guides can now discern what to focus on and what to leave out, while having the creative room to work with their own passions and the audience they have on the train that particular day.

They have the framework and they know what they are aiming to achieve, which provides the freedom to do their commentary in a way that works with their own style and with the content that they find most fascinating.



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