SUBMERGED

- STORIES OF AUSTRALIA’S SHIPWRECKS
An exhibition project involving the largest development team...ever! *Surely?
Initial stages

1. Decided to work with Australian Maritime Museums Council (AMMC) members to develop a travelling exhibition on shipwrecks

• Proven formula of ‘flat-pack’ exhibitions:
  – They’re small, lightweight, durable and easy to install and dismantle.

• Popular subject:
  – Surveys of museum visitors reveal an enduring fascination with the topic. (Jateff 2016)

• National relevance:
  – Australia is surrounded by 11,000 + shipwrecks, (many yet to be found).
  – Artifacts and reference materials relating to the wrecks are held in numerous different museums.
Initial stages

1. Decided to work with Australian Maritime Museums Council (AMMC) members to develop a travelling exhibition on shipwrecks

2. Received Visions of Australia development funding

3. Held a series of professional development workshops around Australia to engage AMMC members in the project
• 7 workshops: TAS (x2), SA, QLD, VIC, WA & NSW

• 198 attendees

• From 88 regional and remote museums and organisations
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4. Set up website for members to upload their stories and vote on those they'd like in the exhibition
Submissions

150 year search for the elusive Mary Ann!
The first paddle steamer built on the Murray River has eluded many over the past 150 years who have attempted to find this precious piece of Australia’s maritime history.

A Case of Cowardly Crewmen
How could two ships collide on a clear night, causing one of NSW’s worst peacetime maritime disasters?

A Monumental Mistake
At the height of the gold rush, the luxury steamship Monumental City entered the burgeoning inter-colonial trade...
Why workshops?

• To meet and engage with AMMC members from all over Australia

• To explain the project and how to get involved

• To offer professional development on writing for exhibitions, to be applied to this and future projects

• To facilitate networking with and between other organisations

• To provide advice and information on adding shipwreck objects from their collection to the exhibition
Key messages (at workshops)

• Constraints of banner exhibitions:
  – Limited space - legible height
  – Strictly 2D - only text and images
  – Risk of visitor fatigue
  – Becoming very common

• Target audience – varies for different venues / dates
  ...So needs to have something for everyone

• Engaging audiences
  – Evoking emotions
    • Inherent in topic – drama, loss of life, survival, rescue, discovery
    • Write to engage
  – Eye-catching imagery
  – Accessible, interesting content, local stories
  – Fun elements
Key messages (at workshops)

• Museum audiences are unique:
  – On the move
  – Standing
  – Tired
  – Distracted

• Average reading speed is 5 words / sec. Visitors spend max 10 secs / label = 50 words

• They don’t follow a path, even if there’s a clear one. They stop at less than half your panels.

• They want easy, spontaneous, convincing language - like someone’s talking to them. (Active, not passive voice).

• They stop reading if they find unfamiliar words.

So...

Ask yourself:
Who's your audience? – who are you writing for?
What’s the hook? – why should they care?

Then:
Write in plain English – (this is not the same as dumbing it down)
Beware of jargon

Write it as you’d explain it to a mate down the pub!

‘...since the beginning of museums, exhibit labels have been used as instruments of torture on helpless visitors’ - Bitgood 1991
What happened

• **68** stories submitted from **46** different organisations
• **51** votes cast to rank the favourites
• Joint AMMC, ANMM panel convened to make final selection
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<td>Wollongbar II</td>
<td>Mid North Coast Maritime Museum</td>
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<td>Apollo Bay and District Historical Society</td>
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What’s next

• Final design and production about to commence
  – challenge to make cohesive exhibition from wide variety of material

• Bookings for tour underway
  – Exhibition will tour Australia from 2018-2020
  – Educational and marketing materials included
  – Expected to reach at least 100 venues
Add-ons

• Venues can book exhibition and add their own stories and objects to the show when they host it (using templates provided so everything matches)

• Opportunities for organisations and individuals with shipwreck objects to share them with local audiences by lending them to venues hosting the exhibition

• Opportunity to ‘travel’ objects around / short-term loans
With big teams come big outcomes!

• The large team allowed us to cast the widest net and gather a huge array of fabulous exhibition content.

For example:

_Thousands of wooden boxes packed with butter floated ashore from the wreck of the Wollongbar II. Because butter was rationed in those war years, cakes and scones were suddenly on many dinner tables in Port Macquarie!_
Thank you

• Please contact us for more information or to book the exhibition:

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This exhibition is supported by the Visions regional touring program, an Australian Government program aiming to improve access to cultural material for all Australians.