

**EXHIBIT BUILDER – MAY 2005****MAXIMIZING REVENUE FOR TOURIST DESTINATIONS****Baltimore museums utilize design to increase visitation**

By Katie Giordano

How to increase revenue is a major challenge for tourism officials and museum directors. With lower state funds allocated, many non-profit tourist destinations and museums must come up with creative ways to entice both first-time and repeat visitors through the doors. So how are some museums and/or tourist destinations maximizing revenue potential? Design Collective, Inc. (DCI), a Baltimore, MD, based architecture firm, came up with various creative solutions for the Maryland Science Center and the Baltimore Zoo.

DCI uses a three-prong approach. The structure should present a physical aesthetic appeal. The facility needs to maximize the visitor experience. The facility must be flexible and contain multi-purpose areas, which will bring in revenue independent of the venue's main tourist function.

DCI found that tourist attractions needed to move in a different direction with their design concepts compared to their counterparts of the past. Traditionally, zoos, for example, were designed as introverted models – their features included glass-encased exhibits, heavily barred zoo cages. Museums often contained windowless buildings in order to protect sensitive content and to keep audiences at bay.

A trend that's emerging is functional and flexible design for these types of facilities. In Baltimore, the Maryland Science Center and the Baltimore Zoo stand as two prime examples. DCI designed additional windows to bring in natural light into the Maryland Science Center, providing visitors with a sense of openness. Exhibits and transparent physical walls were incorporated as well to help create multiple-use facilities which in turn generate additional revenue and increase services to the community and visitors.

**AESTHETICS**

The major challenge facing DCI was how it could help the Maryland Science Center increase visitor traffic. Despite the rise in tourism at the Baltimore Inner Harbor, where the Museum is located, it is physically isolated from other harbor icon buildings, such as the renovated Power Plant retail entertainment plaza and the National Aquarium. In addition, the fortress like building presented a visual barrier to potential visitors, and the rigid octagonal layout of the Museum's interior was not conducive to large, new exhibits.

To combat these obstacles, DCI's first order of business was to make the building more approachable and to create an open aesthetic space that would attract Harbor tourists. The solution was to expand the facility and incorporate an open design. A Dino Hall with huge urban windows facing the Baltimore Inner Harbor exposed the Museum to those on the outside, giving them a glimpse of what was inside, and invited them in to see more.



Similar to the Maryland Science Center, the Baltimore Zoo plans to make their destination more spacious and inviting by eliminating traditional barriers and by putting visitors closer to the animals. Emphasizing content and engaging visitors are a few methods used to attract repeat visits, thereby increasing revenue.

#### **USER EXPERIENCE**

Maximizing the visitor experience is critical for tourist venues seeking to increase visitor traffic. With increasing entertainment options available to visitors, facility directors must be acutely aware of every aspect of their patrons' experience. Before bringing in DCI, the Maryland Science Center was aware that it was hampered by its original design, which included only one entrance for both large groups and independent visitors. This layout was not conducive to the handling of large groups of people, particularly school children in need of a space to orient themselves without disturbing other patrons. To improve the experience, DCI helped the Maryland Science Center create separate entrances for different visitor groups. The Museum's old entrance became the school group entrance, renovated to include a bus drop-off and orientation space, as well as a separate cafeteria and separate restrooms. Having two entrance reduces congestions, facilities an enjoyable experience for all visitors, and accommodates the unique needs of many.

To address the Baltimore Zoo's user experience, DCI developed plans for a tram system to transport visitors from the entrance to a new central hub. The hub will serve as an easily identifiable starting point, with exhibits situated on all sides around it. For visitors to have a carefree and enjoyable experience, they can view an exhibit and easily return to the central hub location to rest and reorient before moving on as opposed to the old, linear design that guided visitors from one end of the zoo to the other only to have to retrace their steps to the exit. Zoo officials and DCI realized this method was cumbersome and not pleasant for their patrons.

#### **FLEXIBILITY**

The need for museums to be flexible is more attractive than ever, with traveling exhibits becoming an increasingly dominant museum trend. Promoting a new exhibit every few months has the advantage of increasing repeat visitation – a huge revenue driver – in addition to attracting first-time audiences. For the Maryland Science Center, the content couldn't change significantly due to the layout of the original design. The floor plan did not have the capacity to house large-scale "traveling blockbuster" exhibits, which ranged in size from 6,000 to 9,000 square feet. DCI's solution was to create a large hall to accommodate traveling exhibits. The 8,000 square foot space on the Center's upper floor now has the capability to house one large exhibit or several smaller ones. The ability to house more than one exhibit is a valuable marketing tool, allowing the Center to promote up to three new exhibits at one time.

### **MULTI-USE, DAY AND NIGHT**

Through the development and design process, DCI and the Maryland Science Center uncovered another valuable source of revenue generation. Special events for fundraisers, weddings and/or

corporate galas could be held in the larger spaces. While planning the renovation, DCI created several locations to house multiple events. The 7,000 square foot lobby, 8,000 square foot traveling exhibit hall and newly created rooftop terrace – which looks out over the harbor and city skyline – create the opportunity for the Museum to generate revenue during the evening when the doors are closed to daytime visitors. And with three facilities in one building, the Museum can hold three revenue-generating events at one time.

Also included in the Baltimore Zoo's master plan were opportunities for multi-use facilities. Although the Zoo is closed to tourists at night, the design includes additional rental spaces over and above those that already existed, such as the historic Mansion House, the Waterfowl Lake pavilion and the Lakeside Pavilion. The new, attractive locations to host after-hours events includes the new polar bear exhibit, with its dramatic theatrical lighting and the Zoo's new central plaza with ample open space.

### **INCREASING REVENUE**

Fundraising and revenue-generation is a challenge that will continuously face museum directors and tourist officials. By creating a functional facility, DCI addressed the needs of the Maryland Science Center and the Baltimore Zoo by providing them with the means to sustain content-oriented exhibits, to change exhibits to keep a fresh look, and to develop an aesthetic-pleasing facility to bring visitors back.