

## Exhibitory: Contributions to Entertainment and Learning

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### Geoff Snowdon

*Petrosains Discovery Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

Petrosains Discovery Centre located in Kuala Lumpur, offers visitors 7,000 square metres of exhibitry. The focus is necessarily on oil and gas, since Petrosains is owned and funded by Petronas, Malaysia's Oil and Gas Company, 'a multinational oil and gas company of choice'.

Petrosains Discovery Centre, Galeri Petronas and the Dewan Filharmonik Concert Hall and Orchestra, form an exciting trilogy of cultural offerings that is science, art and music made available to all Malaysians by the Kuala Lumpur City Complex (KLCC) project. KLCC includes Petronas Twin Towers, a magnificently modern shopping centre complex – SURIA – and a grand green parkland, itself a spectacular and very popular feature in the heartland of Kuala Lumpur. Petrosains has premier location in a very modern setting.

Petrosains has other uniqueness in that people enter from the shopping centre by way of a 4.5-minute ride in a car similar to a Disney quiet ride

experience. This prepares visitors for more than a two-hour journey that is an entertaining and learning experience through exhibitry with its focus on the science and technology of the oil and gas industry. This has been interpreted strongly in the exhibits and the theatrical settings that form the mainstream storyline. Since opening on 25 March 1999, and even for some months leading up to the opening, staff have introduced an enhancement programme that has seen another layer of exhibitry introduced to add value to the visitor experience. The enhancements have resulted in purchase of a 200 square metre exhibition for 4-8 year olds. The addition of exhibits that provide some lead in science concepts aim to assist the visitors in their explorations and discoveries, as well as a wide range of performance oriented exhibitry aimed at engaging visitors in fun learning and entertainment.



Demonstrations intrigue adult visitors to Petrosains Discovery Centre.

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One of the vision statements of Petrosains is 'to be a dynamic world class science discovery centre that inspires fun learning, creativity and innovation'. This is rapidly being the accepted vision for Petrosains. Staff are planning, arranging, adapting to, interpreting, understanding and appreciating the scope and the potential, inherent in this vision statement. There is a keenness to work towards reaching this vision that this moment is energising and providing definite direction and stimulation for staff in Petrosains. These are exciting times for a centre that is still one of the newest centres in Asia.

The concept 'exhibitory' is interpreted in Petrosains to include anything that is provided to add value to the visitor experience. The main 'exhibitory' focus is the mainstream story line, the hardware for which includes:

- ◆ over 150 interactive exhibits
- ◆ many information panels
- ◆ theatrical settings including an impressive diorama depicting early geological time (200 million years ago)
- ◆ two helicopter simulators that take visitors to a large scaled oil platform experience
- ◆ three computer multimedia discovery stations
- ◆ a virtual reality molecule experience
- ◆ a communication device that is uniquely a hand held computer that provides a next layer of information downloaded by radio signals by request of the user and which can be stored for retrieval later on exiting the exhibition area.

Exhibitory includes enhancements, many of these displayed on special platform stands. We have introduced an earthquake machine experience, a Formula 1 driving simulator, a 'Pit-Stop' exhibit that allows visitors to compete to change tyres, as in Formula 1 racing teams and a very popular small 'Digger' that shows 'simple' machine principles for people of all ages. Many of these enhancements are added to increase the 'fun learning' of the Petrosains experience.

There is a software side to our exhibitory. This is offered through the enterprise and creativity of staff. Our front of house staff includes Visitor Services staff along with staff from our Exhibitory Department. This Department provides facilitators and the exhibit development and maintenance staff. A volunteers' programme supports both Departments. It is the software side of exhibitory that contributes significantly to the value adding visitor experience. Visitor Services staff assume responsibility for overall comfort of a visit while the Facilitators provide the engagements and the performance that are key to enhancing and providing the fun learning, entertaining parts of the visitor experience.

Facilitators build constantly on their repertoire of skills for engaging with visitors. Our approach is through Constructivism. This we work on and are developing better ways to monitor pragmatically how we use and bring our particular style and attributes to interpreting Constructivism in our Centre.

Facilitators are training and presenting science shows. We are developing an approach based on mini shows – engagements that are five-minute vignettes. Facilitators are building confidence in ‘busking’ science – impromptu engagements frequently using props from our shop. We include puppet shows in our Science Play exhibit area and are keen to explore other ways theatre might be employed. We are considering regular themes for our children’s area. We have a need to be creative and innovative in our thinking so that return visitors will know our centre is dynamic in various ways.

We are mindful that we need to shore up our links with scientists, with relevant Ministries responsible for education, science and tourism.

This is so we can make sure their needs and their reach is included in software programs we create for use with various target groups of visitors. The reach of S & T in the oil and gas industry we interpret quite liberally. There are few parts of science and technology that do not touch the industry in some way. It is pervades our lives and cultures. In this approach we can contribute significantly in the assistance of teachers, students, and professionals in the science and technology industry and especially in the science communication industry. We look forward to internships, student, teachers, scientists, writers and others as professionals in residence. These things we see as part of the dynamic world class offerings that are possible and appropriate for science centres as well as for us to achieve our vision. We are keen to entertain staff exchanges as we see these as win-win sharing situations and the opportunity for our staff to grow through such sharing.

We are in our second year of operations. We targeted 200,000 visitors in our first year. This we did in eight months. Our location in SURIA, which attracts over 400,000 weekly, helps us be confident we can reach more people in our second year. We build our confidence for increased visitation on many factors – in our approach to exhibitry in all its dimensions as well as from the Customer Service Index survey, we have recently completed where visitor’s responses have shown emphatically our approach is appreciated.



Children visiting the Petrosains Discovery Centre gather around for some fun.

Staff, who really had no experience of the science centre industry when they were appointed, are impressively seeing and accepting the many opportunities there are to help them grow. These are exciting times at Petrosains. Do introduce yourself when you visit. We will be keen to have your feedback on our exhibitry and keen also for you to share your ideas and successes with us.

Thus far it 'feels good'.

**Geoff Snowden** is the Consultant to Science Museums, Secretary ASPAC, AED Petrosains, P.O. Box 124444, 50778, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Email: [gsnowdon@tm.net.my](mailto:gsnowdon@tm.net.my)