

Abstract

Being the only public body in Hong Kong equipped with the necessary facilities and expertise for conservation work, the Central Conservation Section is committed to promote public awareness for the preservation of the cultural property of Hong Kong. Yet, with limited resources, raising conservation understanding in the community and winning public recognition for the work of preservation and conservation is the best assurance to protect and preserve the local cultural heritage so that it is accessible to future generations.

This paper describes the use of a successful marketing strategy by the Section to deliver conservation extension and educational programmes. Results from the PEST and SWOT analyses confirm that this strategy should continue to be included as one of the Section's core services in order to create a target audience in the community for the 21st century.

Résumé

En tant que seul organisme public de Hong Kong à être équipé avec les installations et l'expertise nécessaires aux travaux de conservation, la Section Centrale de Conservation se doit de promouvoir la conscience publique pour la conservation du patrimoine culturel de Hong Kong. Lorsque les ressources sont limitées, augmenter la compréhension de la conservation au sein dans la communauté et gagner une reconnaissance publique pour le travail de conservation et de restauration restent la meilleure garantie de protéger et préserver le patrimoine culturel local afin de le rendre accessible aux futures générations.

Cet article décrit l'utilisation, par la Section, d'une stratégie de marketing efficace pour produire des programmes d'éducation et de dissémination sur la conservation-restauration. Les résultats des analyses PEST et SWOT confirment que cette stratégie devrait être intégrée durablement au sein des services fondamentaux de la Section afin de créer une audience cible dans la communauté pour le 21^e siècle.

Synopsis

El Departamento de Conservación Central es el único organismo público en Hong Kong equipado con las instalaciones necesarias y la experiencia

Building an audience for conservation in Hong Kong

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Introduction

The Hong Kong Central Conservation Section was established in 1985 with the aim not only to protect, preserve and maintain cultural patrimony, but to promote public awareness and develop local expertise in heritage conservation to ensure that Hong Kong's cultural properties are available and accessible to future generations.

With fourteen public museums and fewer than 30 museum conservators currently in Hong Kong, resources are always insufficient. Given this situation, getting the public involved in the conservation business is a good way to help save the many valuable objects of local cultural heritage which cannot be collected or acquired by museums.

As Cosgrove (1994) stated, "It is the act of conservation that makes an object part of the cultural heritage, not the cultural heritage that demands conservation". This tells us that in order to build up a cultural heritage, conservation must come into play, which implies that in order to sustain a cultural heritage, conservators must deal with the technicalities. To ensure the future of conservation and sustain a cultural heritage, conservators need to illustrate the importance of their work to the general public so that the field can be better understood.

Background

When the Central Conservation Section was first established in the 1980s, conservators spent long hours working behind the scenes (i.e. away from the public) in laboratories. However, over the years, it has been proven that conservation of the local cultural heritage is a holistic activity, which can only fully succeed with community participation. In fact, with the raised awareness regarding rights and privileges, many people in Hong Kong are very interested in getting involved in the conservation/preservation of the cultural heritage. As some of our citizens are preparing to contribute their effort, time and views for the long-term well-being of our cultural legacy, it seems an opportune time for the Central Conservation Section to respond proactively, (i.e. to open up the doors of conservation) and encourage wider participation and public involvement in the conservation business.

In view of the huge number of collection items that it has to deal with, it has long been the wish of the Conservation Section to tap public resources and seek their views in handling conservation tasks. As the public has been eager to get more engaged in the conservation business in recent years, a simple "supply-and-demand" phenomenon has been naturally set up. Seizing this opportunity, the Section takes the issue further and sets strategies for building up its audience.

Goals of the Conservation Section

Everyone understands that conservation is a long-term commitment, which requires the proper care of cultural property, the inadequate provision of

para labores de conservación. Por ello el departamento está comprometido en promocionar la preservación del patrimonio cultural de Hong Kong en la opinión pública y para beneficio de la comunidad. Aunque cuenta con recursos limitados, la difusión de conocimientos sobre la conservación en la comunidad y obtener el reconocimiento público por el trabajo de preservación y conservación es la mejor garantía para la protección y preservación del patrimonio cultural local para que ser heredado y usufructuado por futuras generaciones.

Este documento describe el uso de exitosas estrategias de promoción por parte del Departamento para ofrecer programas de profundización y cursillos educativos sobre el tema de conservación. Los resultados de los análisis PEST y SWOT confirman que esta estrategia debería continuar para ser incluida como uno de los principales servicios del Departamento para crear un público destinatario, o de “conocedores”, en la comunidad del siglo XXI.



Figure 1. Students visiting the conservation facilities in the conservation laboratories during the School Culture Day Programme



Figure 2. Students attending the experiential workshop during the School Culture Day Programme

which can result in its loss for various reasons, such as natural deterioration, mishandling, or negligence and that the loss is often irrecoverable. However, given the very limited resources of museum conservators, it is impossible to take care of all cultural heritage objects in Hong Kong, no matter how hard the conservators work. The Conservation Section believes it is essential to raise conservation awareness in the community and win public recognition for its work in preservation and conservation, as this will be the best assurance to protect and preserve the local cultural heritage for future generations. Winning popular support and recognition from the public is, therefore, a goal of the Central Conservation Section in Hong Kong.

The marketing strategy

Experience gained from studying the strategic market planning process adopted by many for-profit and non-profit organisations launching new business plans has led the Central Conservation Section to plan and deliver educational and extension activities to sense, serve and satisfy customers needs while simultaneously meeting its institutional goals of reaching its targeted audience with its message. However, unlike most of those institutions, the Section had not carried out a formal PEST (political, social, economic and technical environment) and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis before delivering a series of extension and educational programmes in 2000. These types of analyses are strategic planning tools that help an organisation understand and respond to its position within its operating environment.

Incorporating the use of the 4Cs marketing concept (communication, customisation, collaboration and clairvoyance) in the delivery of educational and extension programmes such as the School Culture Day Programme, the Conservation Volunteer Scheme and the International Museum Day Programme amongst others, the Section developed a conservation awareness campaign and adopted a customer-focused approach to initiate, cultivate and nurture a relationship with the general public with a view to creating a target audience within the community.

The school culture day programme

In collaboration with schools, the Section offers two three-hour workshops – Conservation in Action and Conservation from All Angles – almost every month throughout the academic year, to fit with the new school curriculum on liberal studies and to complement the student’s learning with the concept of preservation and conservation of cultural properties.

By means of a multimedia presentation, students gain a preliminary understanding of the role of museum conservation. Then they join in a ‘behind-the-scenes’ tour to see the facilities and on-going treatment work in the laboratories (Figure 1). Through participation in an experiential workshop (Figure 2), students will not only advance their knowledge of conservation, but they can also experience the fun and challenges of conservation.

To better prepare students for the visit and to recapture what they have learnt during the programme, information worksheets have been uploaded to the Section’s website <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/Conservation/eng/service/scdps.htm> (Figure 3). Computer games appeal to all, particularly the young, and are a popular way to communicate messages, so a series of interactive games with conservation as their main theme are available on the Section’s website (Figure 4). To help maintain a longer-term memory of the Section and its services, branded stationery and souvenir items are distributed free to event participants (Figure 5).

The conservation volunteers scheme

The Conservation Volunteers scheme is new concept to Hong Kong. Instead of simply placing individuals wishing to contribute their time and resources

"Conservation in Action" Worksheet

The following is the conservation process for the reconstruction of an excavated pottery, please choose the appropriate answer for the following conservation steps:

Step	Picture	Answer
Documentation		Documentation: a. Drawing b. Illustration with pictures c. Photography
De-salination		Instrument: a. Thermometer b. Hydrometer c. Conductivity meter
Excavated pot shreds reconstruction		Material: a. Scotch tape b. Double-sided adhesive tape c. Masking tape
Gap filling		Material: a. Dental wax b. Colored plastic c. Paper
Retouching		Conservation standard for the retouched part to be identified: a. within 6 feet b. within 6 inches c. within 6 meters

Figure 3. Conservation worksheets for schools



Figure 4. Conservation interactive game on the Section's website: <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/Conservation/eng/activity/game.htm> (Chinese version only)



Figure 5. Branded stationery and souvenir items

within the Section, the Conservation Volunteers Scheme is used as part of a dynamic extension/education programme that connects people to their local heritage and to conservation projects in their community.

The Section collaborates with all those who have a passion for conservation work and designs various types of volunteer programmes. In this way, not only does the Section make conservation projects in the community more accessible to the public, it offers conservation training/educational sessions to the volunteers, which broaden their exposure to the subject and build their knowledge and practical skills.

Other extension programmes

Other educational/extension activities which enable the Section to communicate with the community and satisfy their various needs include special workshops/visit programmes for the public during the annual International Museum Day event (Figure 6), occasional publicity via the media, and regular updating of the Section's website, www.lcsd.gov.hk/conservation.

Results and feedback of the extension programmes

The various extension and educational programmes have been a resounding success. The public response has been very positive and it is clear that they are interested in gaining a better understanding of the subject. After a few years of continuous effort in extending the services to the general public, the Section is now known to many sectors in the community. As more people become aware of its heritage-saving mission, there is an increase in the number of enquiries regarding various kinds of conservation issues and in requests for conservation advice, by telephone, letter and a web-based enquiry system. Enquiries regarding internship possibilities with the Section have also increased considerably, demonstrating that more people are aware of conservation as a career option.

Of all of the extension activities, the flag-ship programme which attracts the largest audience is the School Culture Day programme. The programme is held almost every month during the school year and separate comments are collected from the students and the teachers upon completion of each activity. On average, the Section receives 10–12 schools per year under the School Culture Day scheme. From the survey results collected, almost all students were first-time visitors to the Conservation Section laboratory. Over 75% of the participants graded the programme as highly satisfactory; over 80% indicated that it had greatly increased their understanding of conservation; 70% indicated that their interest in conservation had increased after the programme; and almost all indicated a strong interest in future conservation activities/programmes. The Section also collected some favourable comments from the teachers, including that "the programme is useful in inspiring students' thinking", and "the programme is helping students to learn from a wide perspective of subjects". The teachers also indicated a strong interest in encouraging their students to participate in similar conservation workshops/activities in future.

Based on past years' figures, the Section is organising an average of ten conservation workshops and ten behind-the-scenes laboratory tours during the annual International Museum Day event. As a general reference, the Section's extension and educational activities, which total over 20 events, attract more than 1200 participants per year, including students, teachers, researchers, collectors, overseas museum delegates and the general public.

As indicated by the survey results, some people had never been to a museum before participating in the Section's activities; many of them expressed an interest in returning (with friends and families) to visit the museums some time later and would like to participate in conservation activities again.



Figure 6. Fun during the 2007 International Museum Day Programme, Hong Kong

The way forward

As revealed by the activity surveys, all extension programmes have been well received. There are continuous requests to extend the scale and extent of the current services. The Conservation Section understands the need to develop public support for conservation, as preservation of cultural heritage can benefit from the knowledge of non-conservators who have some basic knowledge of conservation. In 2008, the Section will expand the School Culture Day programme to an outreach programme in which conservators go the schools and introduce conservation to the students. It is hoped that this kind of outreach programme will enable more students to understand conservation at a faster pace and thus meet client needs more effectively. In the years ahead, the Section hopes to engage more with the public and thereby encourage them to join as conservation volunteers, with the aim not only to help them to contribute to the preservation of the local heritage, but also to serve the needs of the students who are the potential conservators/collectors of tomorrow.

Discussion

The resounding success of the extension and educational programmes has proven to be a positive move for the Section and an effective way to publicise the Section's mission and solicit the public's help with the conservation of the local heritage. By launching customer-oriented extension programmes, the Conservation Section is in fact focusing on its existing strengths and making use of the strategy of community partnership to identify opportunities for building its audience.

Results of a PEST and SWOT analysis (see below), which act as strategic planning tools to evaluate the current situation and inform the implementation of new customer-oriented programmes, confirm that the Section is moving in the right direction. It should continue to adopt a customer-oriented approach to the delivery of its extension and educational programmes and engage more public involvement in conservation work.

PEST analysis

The current political, economic, social-cultural and technological factors in an external macro-environment Hong Kong are considered.

Political: As the government is going to develop a new cultural hub (the new West Kowloon Cultural District with museums and cultural facilities) in Hong Kong in the years ahead, it is keen to increase public awareness of cultural heritage and conservation issues.

Economic: While the economic situation in Hong Kong is healthy, the government is able to support the Conservation Section to conduct more extension and outreach programmes to enable the public to gain a better understanding of the need to preserve cultural heritage.

Social: The public has become very interested in conservation work; not only are they becoming more concerned about the preservation of their personal belongings, they are also concerned with the conservation/preservation issues of the local heritage which is part of their "collective memory".

Technical: Through the media and various Internet sources, the public gains an increased understanding of conservation generally as well as of the work of the Conservation Section in Hong Kong in particular.

Results of the PEST analysis indicate the market attractiveness and business potential of engaging the public in conservation in the Hong Kong market.

SWOT analysis

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Section are considered below.

Strengths: The Conservation Section is the only public body equipped with the necessary facilities and expertise for conservation work, and is committed to promote conservation awareness.

Weakness: As the volume of cultural relics always exceeds the capacity of conservators, preservation of the local heritage cannot succeed without the participation of the community. Meanwhile, public awareness and understanding of conservation is generally limited in Hong Kong.

Opportunities: The Section can act in a more proactive way to tap the resources from the community in conserving the local heritage while satisfying the “needs” and “wants” of the community to participate in conservation issues. With the increase in awareness of rights and privileges, the general public is becoming interested in getting involved in the conservation/preservation of the local heritage, which forms part of their collective memory. Moreover, students are getting more interested in conservation, which, being an interdisciplinary subject, dovetails well with their new school curriculum on liberal studies under the recent education reform.

Threats: If the Section does not cultivate and nurture relationships with its target audience, it will never be able to accomplish its mission to save the characteristic cultural legacy of Hong Kong.

With the results of both the PEST and SWOT analyses, the Conservation Section is convinced that it should – and has the ability to – reach out and engage the public on the issue of conserving the cultural heritage of Hong Kong in all its forms.

Conclusion

Public engagement in conservation is a natural convergence of the respective demands of the public and the Conservation Section. Using the 4Cs marketing concept to implement regular extension programmes, the Section is assuming responsibility for offering the community the tools and conditions to support its values and the objective of preserving the unique and characteristic cultural heritage of Hong Kong. By piquing public interest in conservation, the Section hopes that a target audience can be created and engaged with for the 21st century. Through the organisation of the extension programmes as part of the Section’s marketing strategy, it is hoped that not only the younger generations but also the wider general public, politicians and administrators in senior management will better comprehend the subject and wish to support the mission of the Central Conservation Section.

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