

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Between July 2000 and November 2002, membership has declined in total number. There is a continuous membership creation and renewal cycle built upon exposing the public to the museum and converting citizens into patrons, then converting patrons into members, and renewing members through a series of four renewal notices to the expiring members. Despite this consistent, continual process, the membership total has dropped off considerably. For this exercise, I took a broad view at defining the membership process and undertook a study to find characteristics which are critical or important to the process, and attempted to determine if any aspects should require further investigation as potential causes for the decline.

Variable Data: I collected membership activity data from January 1996 through December 2002, consisting primarily of membership gift transactions and expiration dates which are the two standard quantifiers used by the membership department.

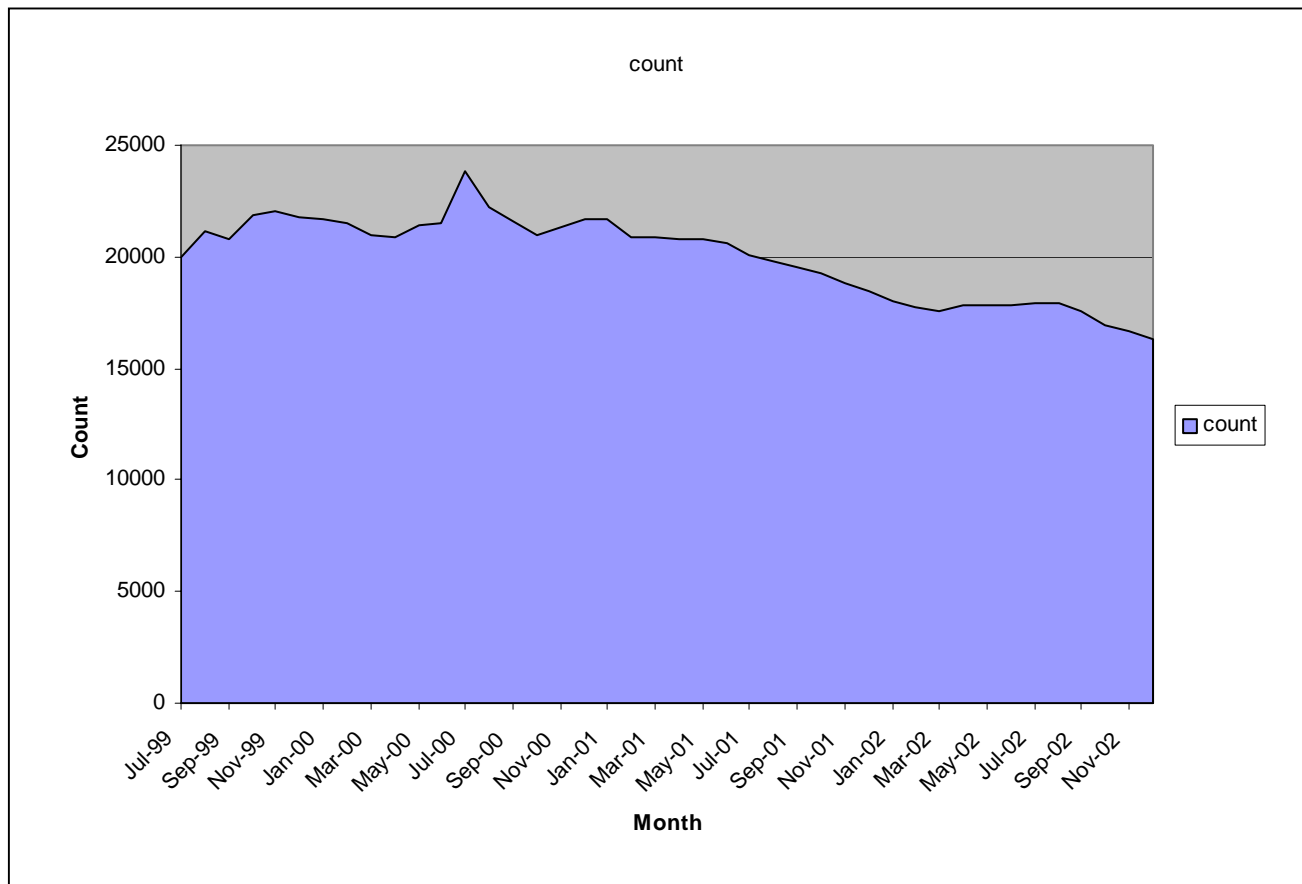
Attribute Data: I was provided with a list of the museum exhibits from 1996 through 2002 which detailed the months of the exhibits and their names, but not any hard data regarding attendance figures. I observed these exhibits and assigned each of them an “exhibit value” to use in determining an effect, if any, upon the quantifiable data collected from the membership records. I also observed the people, machines, methods, measurements, and environments surrounding the membership process to further support and cause and effect relationships.

This collection of data took me on a trail that will not necessarily substantiate a single cause for the decline in membership, but will provide support to management for the existence of such relationships.

In this paper, I will present an overview of the data collection and the tools used, and the potential causes and effect. I will conclude with a brief recommendation for management.

PART 1. DATA COLLECTION – MEMBERSHIP TOTALS.

The success or failure of the membership process is often summarized by the total number of members at the end of each month. I collected this data and created a run chart titled “Monthly Membership Count.” The X axis represents the time span from July 1999 through December 2002, and the Y axis is the total number of members at the end of each month. Upon looking at this graph, it is easy to see that membership was trending up through July 2000, but since that peak it has continuously declined.

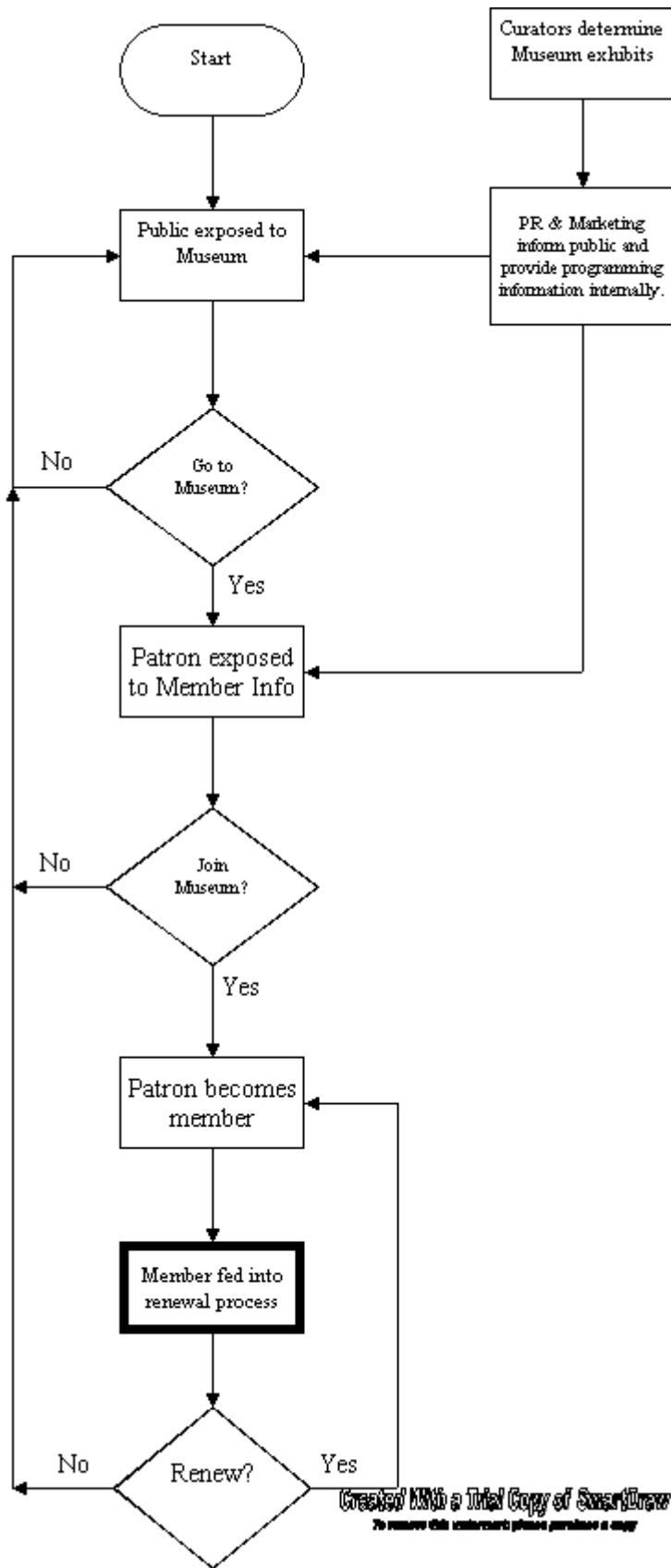


PART 2 – PROCESS FLOW CHART/ CAUSE AND EFFECT CHART

I created a process flow chart to document the major steps in the membership cycle. I learned that by the time the public is exposed to the museum, the curatorial staff, exhibitions committee, chief curator, and museum director have decided both the ongoing exhibitions and the special exhibitions. The results of those decisions are disseminated to the public and to the museum staff via the Public Relations and Marketing department.

This flowchart indicates that the membership department is in essence a “customer” of the curatorial department who supplies the product for the museum to offer to its customers, the public. If the public likes the offerings, it will attend the museum, possibly take a membership to receive benefits such as free admission and discounts. Once a member, that person is then subjected to a very consistent and rigorous renewal process. Anywhere along the way, if the museum customer decides not to attend, or not to join, or not to renew, he or she is sent back up to the top of the process to be exposed to the offerings of the curators. Thus, the flowchart has a beginning, but no end, per se.

I also created a Cause and Effect diagram which captures the machines, measurement, environment, materials, methods, and people involved in the membership cycle process and contribute to the effect of membership varying.



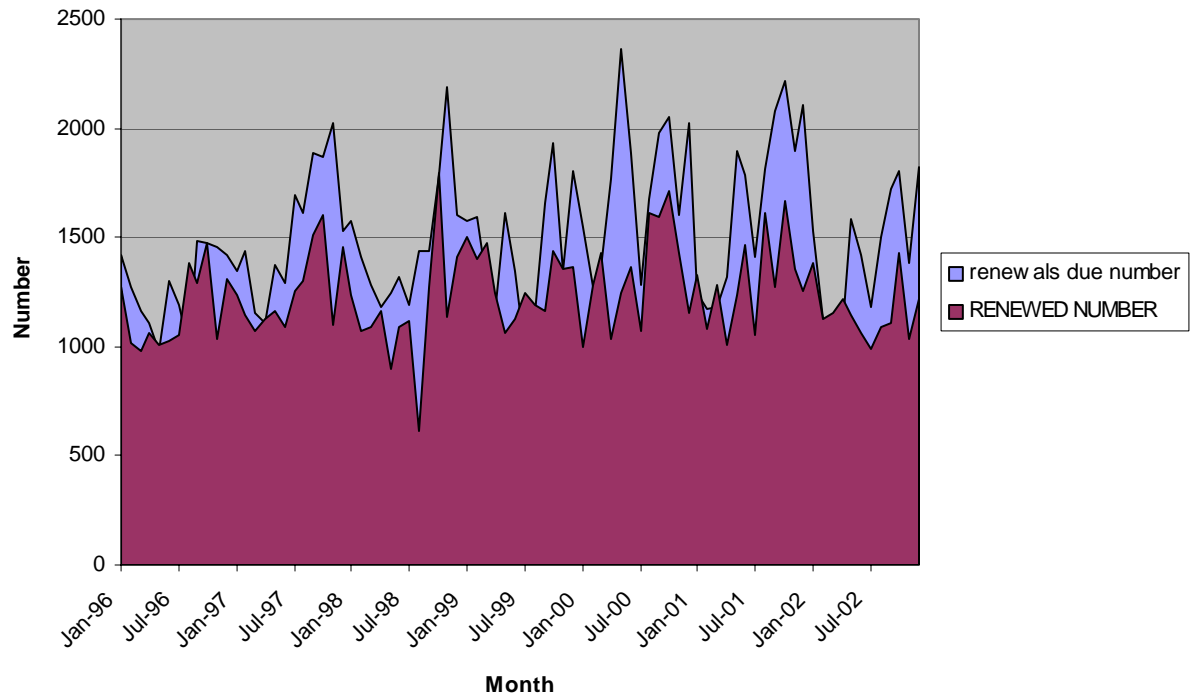
PART 3. RENEWALS SENT VERSUS RENEWALS PROCESSED

The preceding flowchart and cause and effect diagram indicate that although the curatorial department is but a minor participant in the overall process, it does place considerable effect upon the efforts of the membership process, more as a supplier than a participant.

Conversely, the membership department executes most of the effort in the process, but has little influence over the big picture, and I collected more data in an effort to substantiate this claim. I summarized the monthly total of renewals that were due and the monthly totals of renewals processed by the membership department for the period of July 1996 through December 2002, into two run charts and superimposed the renewals processed upon the renewals sent.

Referring back to the process flowchart, the renewal process is represented by the bold-lined black box “member fed into renewal process.” This run chart indicates that there is a very tight relationship between the efforts and the results of renewing the existing members and also suggests that the cause for the decline in membership is not solely an effect of the renewal process. There are factors that are not considered here including the billing materials because they have not varied during the entire period under study. Thus the trail went outside and upward on the flowchart as seen on the next chart, and more data was collected and analyzed in an attempt to find a cause and effect relationship that would support the decline in membership.

Renewals Sent vs Renewals

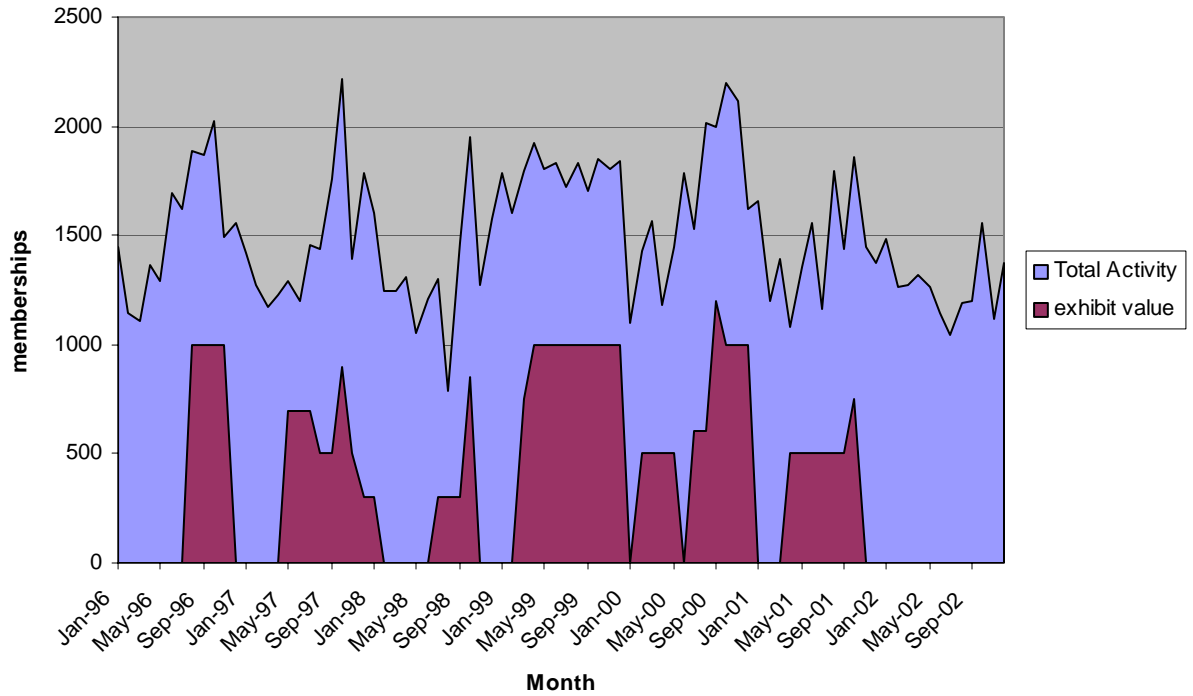


PART 4. EFFECT OF PROGRAMMING UPON MEMBERSHIP ACTIVITY

I collected data regarding the exhibits presented at the Museum during the period of January, 1996 through December, 2002. There were no hard data regarding attendance, but I had been employed at the museum during that period so I assigned a subjective, qualitative “exhibit value” to each exhibit ranging from a factor of 100 for a blockbuster such as Egypt an the Impressionist down to a 0 for no special exhibit. I applied my rating scale based on my qualitative observations during that period and without regard to the actual membership numbers in an attempt to determine a relationship between programming and membership activity.

I created a run chart which superimposed the monthly exhibit value onto the actual number of monthly membership transactions. The chart suggests that a relationship between programming and membership activity is supported.

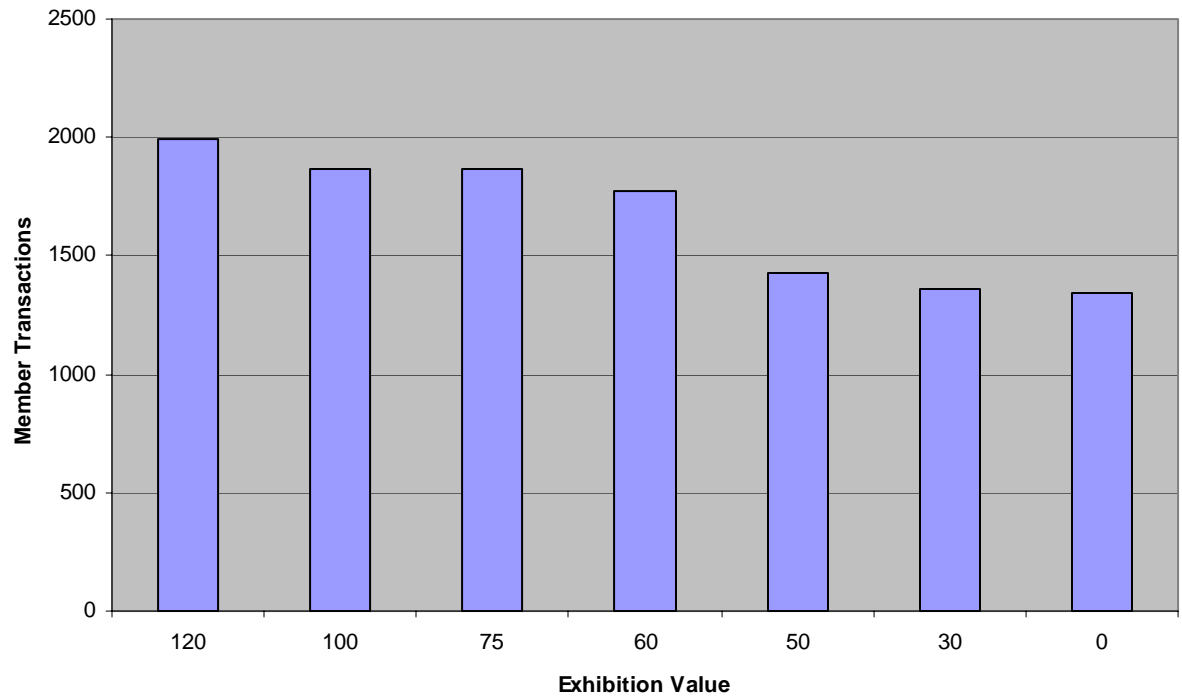
Programming vs Memb Activity



PART 5. EXHIBITION VALUE ANALYSIS

The previous chart suggested a relationship between programming and membership. To further investigate this, I summarized those months of exhibition data, and calculated the averages for number of membership transactions per month grouped by the exhibition value assigned in the previous step. From that I created a Pareto chart which depicts that the higher the exhibition value for a month, the greater the average number of membership transactions for those months.

Exhibition Value Analysis



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

This study suggests and supports a relationship between programming and membership activity. As membership is an essential component of the continuing existence and success of the museum, I recommend that the curatorial staff, the exhibitions committee, the chief curator, and the director of the museum understand the museum's market, and supply programming that will maximize the generation and retention of members while maintaining the artistic mission of the museum.