

Federation Square
Paul Byrne, Strategic Planning Manager

The Product

Federation Square has become the new 'face' of Melbourne. The architectural icon on the corner of Swanston and Flinders Street has quickly grown in stature since it opened in October 2002. It has won the hearts of most Melburnians and millions of visitors every year.

It has created a new arts and cultural focus for Melbourne, but, more importantly, it has created a new heart for the city and a gathering place for locals and visitors. Federation Square attracts more than 8 million visits a year, making it one of Victoria's most popular tourist attractions.

The Issue

The attraction is entering its 3rd phase of development, according to Federation Square Management. The first phase was building the complex and getting it to an opening state. The second phase was building the number of visitors, primarily through the staging of community events. Its success is indisputable: nearly 30 million visitors in under four years of operation.

It is now entering its third phase, which requires ensuring that visitor levels are sustained by concentrating on building the visitor experience. About 50% of visitation is from Melburnians, which is a market that could easily reach saturation if they are not provided with a reason to return and with a high quality experience. High levels of satisfaction will also ensure word of mouth referral and often higher expenditure.

However, the task of improving the visitor experience at Federation Square is complicated by the fact that the experience is delivered by over 35 organisations and commercial tenants, over which Federation Square Management has limited control

The research

Federation Square conducts ongoing intercept customer research, which consistently reveals that Fed' Square has very strong brand awareness. However, this is often a double-edged sword. Visitors also fail to distinguish between Federation Square 'the entity' and its individual components. Therefore, a poor cup of coffee or ordinary service in one of its café may result in a visitor telling others that they had a bad time at 'Fed Square'.

An extensive customer survey in September 2005 was used to identify very specific areas of need. It revealed that a major issue was people being unable to find out general information about Fed' Square through its individual providers. It showed that visitors relied on their interaction with front line staff to gain knowledge about the wider experience and that gaps in their knowledge was directly affecting the visitor experience.

The onsite surveys will be conducted every quarter to monitor and benchmark achievements. An annual external survey will also be conducted to obtain 'outside' perceptions of the facility.

The results from each survey will be fed back to front line staff through briefing sessions with tenants, through the customer service advisory group and through twice weekly bulletins.

The results

The survey results told Fed' Square Management that it needed to play a more central role in helping to continuously lift the standard of service and information within the complex. Specifically, it showed that much better systems were needed to convey information to all staff.

Fed' Square Management formed a tenant customer service advisory group, which now meets regularly to monitor results and plan methods to address any problems. As a result of the group's work, the following measures have been introduced:

- 1. Staff familiarisation forums**
Many of the tenants already conducted basic staff induction programs, but the knowledge imparted was very product specific and did not include more general information about Federation Square. So far more than 100 staff have undertaken the new programs, with specialised programs also being run for the larger tenants and institutions.
- 2. Twice weekly information bulletin**
It had been found previously that electronic bulletins did not necessarily always reach frontline staff, who had the highest interaction with the public. A distinctively coloured A4 bulletin is now produced on Mondays and Thursdays and hand delivered to each business.
- 3. Formalised customer service training**
In recognition of its responsibility, Federation Square Management now coordinates and pays for a general customer service program, which is available free of charge to staff of its tenants. Conducted by William Angliss TAFE, the two three hour sessions held over two weeks ensure that staff are equipped with a high level of understanding of customer service needs. The sessions impart general customer service principles, institution specific knowledge, as well as more generic knowledge about Federation Square.
- 4. In order to be able to compare the customer service survey results conducted by several tenancies within Federation Square, a standard customer feedback survey across the whole site is now being developed and implemented.**
- 5. Business breakfasts**
A new innovation are the quarterly business breakfasts. These are designed to build on the huge pride most staff display in working at Fed' Square. They are held in a different venue each time so it also acts as a familiarisation opportunity. Often they are tied into the launch of special events or exhibitions, which also helps staff to impart knowledge about those events to their customers.

Staff are already indicating to management that they are much better informed about what is happening in the facility. It's expected that future surveys which reflect that the greater knowledge among staff results in higher visitor satisfaction.

The need to concentrate on building the visitor experience has now been encapsulated into the latest revision of Federation Square's Corporate Plan.

Key findings

- Visitors/ customers often fail to differentiate between the overall establishment and its individual components.
- Strong brand awareness doesn't always mean that the visitor experience is as good as it could be.
- The reputation of the facility and the quality of the visitor experience is highly dependent on the skill and knowledge of the front line staff.
- Use your staff's help and knowledge to address improving the visitor experience and to raise customer service standards.

Disclaimer

The content of this Tourism Victoria web site is provided for information purposes only. No claim is made as to the accuracy or authenticity of the content on this site at any time.

Tourism Victoria does not accept any liability to any person for the information or advice (or the use of such information or advice) which is provided on this web site or incorporated into it by reference. The information on this web site is not to be displayed except in full screen format. No liability is accepted for any information or services that may appear in any other format. No responsibility is taken for any information or services that may appear on any linked web sites.

Case studies are provided by Tourism Victoria for illustrative purposes only. It is important to note that, as with any business, actual individual results may vary. Likewise, past performance may not be indicative of future performance and may be materially different from results, performances or achievements that may be expressed or implied by the information provided in the case study. Tourism Victoria does not guarantee or represent that you or anyone will achieve a similar level of success by following the approach provided in the case study.

Please note *Tourism Excellence* is not an accreditation program.