

PUBLICITY

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With the Persepolis show being held over until early September 2017, there was not as much opportunity to generate press coverage associated with a new exhibit. Yet, we continue to receive media attention and to reach out to visitors and potential supporters through social media and conventional advertising.

Paid advertisements appeared in: the *Hyde Park Herald*, *Footlights* (the program for Court Theater); the Black Harvest Film Festival Program, *New City Guide*; the *UChicago Arts Magazine*; and we placed ads in the orientation issues of the *Maroon* and *Herald*. We also did a series of sponsorship spots on WBEZ that always get attention. We continue to rely upon rack cards for general information, although distribution has gotten difficult and there are doubts in museum publicity circles in regards to how effective they are for other than in-house and immediate neighborhood use. We replaced some of the worn and faded street pole banners in Hyde Park, ensuring that we have visibility through the neighborhood.

We arranged for a series of email blasts to Chicago Concierges through Concierge/preferred starting in August 2016. Our overall social media is managed by Moriah Grooms-Garcia of Social Media Moo, and our online presence continues to be a vital part of our communications program.

We were designated one of the “50 Most Impressive College Museums” in the country by collegevaluesonline.com, and we received another commendation of excellence from TripAdvisor. Chicago Parent cited us as being, for better or worse, a “Hidden cultural gem around Chicagoland.”

Denise Browning, manager of the Suq, and Suq Assistant Jennifer Castellanos have been taking merchandise and information about the Institute to local fairs. This year, they had a booth at the 57th Street Book Fair (June 3–4), the Green Music Fest (June 10–11), the Logan Square Fest (June 25–6), and the Wicker Park Festival (July 23–4), all of these allowing us to reach a younger demographic.

Online planning and information sites (such as TripAdvisor), continue to play a large role in the visibility of the Oriental Institute. The reviews, and according to some studies, are even more effective and influential than traditional print advertising. Among recent postings: “We absolutely loved this little gem. The Museum has such an amazing display of artifacts from the Near East. We had a lot of “a-ha” moments since we had just returned from a trip to Jordan and we could see a lot of similarities and influences in the art from the region...” (June 2017); “Thoroughly enjoyed this museum. Saw many items that I never thought I would be able to see personally” (April 2017); “Most people don’t realize that there is ancient art that is even more beautiful and interesting than Ancient Egyptian art, and you don’t even have to go the Middle East to see it. Make sure you see it right in the center of Chicago at the Oriental Institute!!” (March 2017).

Thanks to Knut Boehmer, the Museum has a new computer-based visitor survey, located off the lobby at the entrance of the special exhibits gallery. Although we do not get a large

sampling, the results are quite interesting (the following percentages are incomplete because often fields were not completed):

- Of 240 respondents, 37% were first-time visitors, 68% were planned visits, while 24% were spontaneous
- Reasons for visiting ranged from “just for fun” (30%); a school project (13%); a family activity (10%); and to see a specific object or to see the special exhibit, both about 2%.
- 31% responded that they would visit again, while only 3 people of the 240 responses said that they would not visit again (unfortunately without further detail, but still an extremely low level of dissatisfaction with their visit).
- 11% heard about the Museum from a teacher; 8% from a friend; 2% responded that they came because they saw a street pole banner or read about us in a guide book.
- Most of the visitors who took the time to use the comment book understandably came in small groups of one to three which accounts for the few who participated in a docent-led tour.

Some people left more extensive comments about their visit or their favorite object: “I enjoyed every artifact that I had the pleasure to see with my own eyes. I have seen many of these artifacts in many documentaries, but it doesn’t compare to the personal experience of actually being [in] their presence and magnificence. Thank you”; “Khorsabad statues are amazing! So are the Persian pieces. My first time seeing pieces from these locations and eras, quite a treasure for me”; “The winged bull, statue of Tutankhamun, Persepolis were all awesome. Egypt was brilliantly curated”; “The Hittite pottery, the Anatolian section.” And of course, there are jokers. One commented that their favorite pieces were “the ones I touched,” and another liked the “old dead people.” Looking through the comments, it is very clear that people appreciate the Museum and are fascinated with the exhibits.

Our challenges for increasing our visitor numbers continue to be unrelated to what we present, but rather issues of parking, public perception of the neighborhood, and the lack of a unified plan for publicity. Some of these issues, especially the perception of the neighborhood, are being addressed by the Museum Campus South group (a consortium on cultural institutions in Hyde and Washington Parks) that is working to bring more visitors to the area. Certainly, the Obama Presidential Center, due to open in 2021, will have a dramatic positive impact on visitorship to the Oriental Institute.