



POP-UP BANNERS DOTH NOT AN EXHIBITION MAKE!

POP-UP

“*The Pop-Up*”. Xavier placed his hands on the table and leaned forward. This was the body language of leaders. As the youngest guy in the room, he skirted the right kind of informality with his ‘meet the clients’ outfit. He was wearing a narrow black tie with the top button on his white shirt undone. His sleeves were rolled up a little to hint that he wasn’t afraid of hard work, when actually his line manager would have said he was. *Right guys, we are designing this space in the building for pop-ups. You are going to have a key flow of people through here and you want to grab their attention. This is a flexible, dynamic space which can powerfully encourage repeat visits*’.

Bill Staton didn’t like being called ‘guys’ by a junior, not one little bit, but he dimly recognised the phrase ‘pop-up’. Had he seen a pop-up on the recent visit to Gateshead where a mixed delegation had been sent to research different kinds of loose seating for auditoriums? He knew that as the Local Authority’s Head of Culture, Sport and Engineering he needed to express some words right now to show he was boss. He rocked forward gently in his seat to signal he was ready to engage.

‘*So, this space, this walk-through area, how will it be lit?*’ Well done Bill, back of the net! He aimed to avoid ‘pop-up’ until he could understand what it was. Bill was happy to talk about lighting. He had just been on another trip, this time to New York to see Dumbo’s ‘*Festival of Light*’. Bill’s own city elders had this idea on their ‘city spectacle’ shopping list- a device for edgy cities to metaphorically demonstrate to their citizens that they were on the march from darkness towards the light. Bill often needed illumination himself. He had felt safer when his Departmental remit had just been Engineering, back in the 1980s’. Granted, he could have got a feel for things online through Dumbo’s unique web cam or through its literature, but he didn’t know how to use the web-cam and had wanted to go to New York for the authentic experience. His partner Eric had been able to get a cheap plane ticket too so they had been able to combine some extreme retail and work pleasure.

‘*Well Bob*’, said Xavier affably, ‘*Our practice has been looking at state of the art lighting options, in particular one system where each light is controlled by its own remote, thus offering the option to control each setting individually*’. Xavier sensed he could retell this upgrading moment back at the office in order to impress the superiors. The rest of the architectural practice were all concentrating on the major spaces and had given Xavier this shoe-box to cut his teeth on. He would show them he could make it into a monument.

‘*It’s Bill, Xavier, not Bob*’, Bill intoned. Bill had, before entering the authority, considered if he should revert to William. In the end, his gut instinct had made him stick with Bill. It afforded him the right veneer of approachability as a possible leader.

‘*Apologies Bill, it was the wrong name that ‘popped up’ in my head*’. Xavier wasn’t going to let this take away his momentum so turned up the charm.

Erica Piedmont, the Cultural Producer and Engagement Officer could contain herself no longer. ‘*Forgive me, but this is, in essence, a corridor? Does it make any sense to put the best lights there?*’ Erica had attended many meetings when the Department thought they were doing something new, testing out and savouring the latest buzz words, when in fact each ‘discovery’ had been around for eons. She had thought of jumping ship so many times but it was difficult to leave the flexitime and the stability of an incrementally rising wage and attached pension.

Bill had attended many management training modules and knew that giving his staff ownership of a problem could turn it into a solution. ‘*Now Erica, this would be one of your spaces along with the galleries. Imagine. You could have this multi-functional space which could add to what you do – more space for artworks and your wonderful displays!*’

This was exactly what Erica feared. Her workload was already becoming impossible. Just the thought of having to say the word ‘pop-up’ many times on a daily basis exhausted her. She had tried, in so many ways, including compiling time-consuming yet compelling pie charts, to show Bill how her time was split up at work. The charts always showed unequivocally that her job was spent mostly on answering emails within the Authority’s target period, meetings like this and dealing with day-to-day client and audience enquiries. Only six percent of her time was spent on actually working with artists and producing. She recognised she needed to speak Bill’s language for him to hear her. ‘*Bill, remember in our planning day we scoped that we needed to focus on less exhibition spaces for quality and more retail spaces for the public in this new building? This pop-up corridor will eat away at our mission*’.

‘*The beauty of the pop-up*’, Xavier chipped in, ‘*Is its speed. For what is a tiny amount of time to set up the pop-ups, it reaps great benefits, such as footfall and public engagement. You just need to plug-in the pop-up and go!*’

‘*Forgive me Xavier*’, replied Erica, ‘*But the ‘pop-up’ is anything but quick for the organiser – it still needs organising. All that work and then the thing is only up for two days. It really is a drain on resources, both time and finance*’.

This was a possible conflict situation. Bill needed to bring this meeting to a close as he had a conference call next. The topic was on brainstorming what celebrity could turn the lights on for his festival idea and had HoDs phoning in from all over the region. ‘*Xavier, your answer for Erica please*’.

‘*Erica, to save on time you can use pop-up banners to create quick exhibitions. Furthermore, with your retail angle in mind, you could invite local producers at holiday periods to do pop-up shops*.’ Xavier looked jubilant. Seven years of study and several years’ apprenticeship was beginning to feel worth it.

Erica was horrified. ‘*Pop-up banners doth not an exhibition make!*’ Those sympathetic to her around the table smirked. She regretted it came out as a motto, but there it was. She envisaged her office becoming overwhelmed by more and more abandoned pop-up stands in their black cases, with their lurid designs detailing cornercrack environments, local pork pie manufacturers and Bill’s ‘*sitooteries*’ project from the 1990s’ he was still so proud of.

Bill couldn’t see Erica’s discomfort. He was trying to wrack his brains for the name of that recent local celebrity presenter who had made the popular documentary on Land of the Midnight Sun. Bruce? Scott? Long hair; quite annoying. He would need to ask his P.A. Susan. If green lighted by the conference call they could ask for his availability re the big switch on in 2017. Bill suddenly sensed the silence in the room.

‘*Okay guys, thanks for your time today. I feel we have thought through a lot here. Xavier, can you do a simple cost plan for the next meeting? Erica, can you include the pop-up space in your three-year business plan you are working on for us, and give me a short summary paper to circulate for the next meeting. Oh, and a SWOT Analysis would be helpful*.’ Erica looked rather crestfallen at the news.

The chairs around him scraped and Bill hoped Erica would not catch him in the corridor. Maybe if she did he could suggest her also trialling a ‘pop-up’ at one of their current venues as a case study.

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(2016)