MUSEUMINSIDER 2014 BUYERS’ GUIDE FOR PROCUREMENT IN THE MUSEUM AND HERITAGE SECTOR.

SPONSORED BY KOSSMANN.DEJONG

AN INSIDE LOOK AT WHO HAS BEEN AWARDED CONTRACTS, AND HOW TO ENSURE YOUR TENDER ATTRACTS THE RIGHT COMPANY
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to MuseumINSIDER’s third volume of its Blue Book. Written specifically for museum and heritage procurement managers, we have gathered content to help you find the right supplier and get best value for money.

Steve Slack of MuseumINSIDER asks nine leading museum suppliers for their suggestions for streamlining the tendering process, developing a partnership with a museum, and how to work with creative teams.

Here you’ll see examples of best practice at museum and heritage sites across the UK and Europe— from some of the sector’s leading suppliers. You’ll also get an idea of some current trends in the sector.

Our archive of tender awards for 2013 should provide a useful starting point for expanding your list of suppliers, or finding one for the first time.
INTRODUCTION

“Procuring goods and services in the museum and heritage world is completely different to other parts of the public sector,” one procurement manager at a national museum in the UK told me. “What we need to know is who has the right experience and set of skills for our unique, almost always bespoke, projects.”

That is the objective of this book. Written specifically for procurement managers at the UK and Ireland’s museums and heritage institutions, we’ve gathered together information that we think will help you pick the right companies for your jobs.

At the end of the day, museum suppliers want more business and the institutions want suppliers that deliver best value for money. By gathering here examples of current best practice, as well as listings of awarded tenders from the MuseumINSIDER archive, we hope to help both the supplier and the procurement manager meet their objectives.

Ann Curtis
PROCUREMENT

DOS AND DON'TS

Whether you’ve been working in procurement for years or have been asked to run a tender for the first time, ensuring that you choose the right company to design your next exhibition, permanent gallery or digital project can be a difficult and daunting task.

MuseumINSIDER spoke to twelve of the leading voices in the museum design sector to hear their side of the story.

They welcomed the opportunity to share their advice and concerns with museums, in the hope that these recommendations can help the procurement process to become smoother and more cost-efficient for all involved. Here are their top ten DOs and DON'Ts for getting the right company on board with your design project.

CONTRIBUTORS

HERMAN KOSSMANN, CREATIV DIRECTOR, KOSSMANN.DEJONG
MARK DE JONG, CREATIV DIRECTOR, KOSSMANN.DEJONG
NICK BELL, DIRECTOR, NICK BELL DESIGN
ANDREW TODD, DIRECTOR, TANDEM DESIGN
ROGER MANN, DIRECTOR, CASSON MANN
PAUL STOIK, DIRECTOR AND PARTNER, FABRIQUE
ORIEL WILSON, PROJECT CONSULTANT, HALEY SHARPE DESIGN
ARNE KVORNING, DIRECTOR, KVORNING DESIGN
CHRIS MATHER, DIRECTOR, MATHER & CO
CHARLIE BARR, DIRECTOR, STUDIO MB
ALISTAIR MCCAW, DIRECTOR, REAL STUDIOS
KATE MCHUGH, BUSINESS DIRECTOR, BRIGHT 3D

MUSEUM DESIGN REQUIRES TRUST AND A GREAT DEAL OF INPUT FROM OUR CLIENTS...WE CANNOT DO IT ALONE. MUSEUMS MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT THE DESIGN PROCESS IS AND TAILOR THEIR PROCUREMENT PROCESS AROUND THIS.

BEFORE THE TENDERING PROCESS STARTS

01. DO YOUR BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The best way to kick off the design procurement process is to visit some projects of a similar scale to the one you have in mind.

Alistair McCaw of Real Studios says: “Many clients have not undertaken a build project before and there can be a steep learning curve. Undertake plenty of research. Look at a range of comparable projects and find out who has designed them. Seek recommendations from other institutions for design companies. Review websites of known design companies.”

Andrew Todd of Tandem Design recommends more than just desk research. “Go out and look and see what you can get for your money, but make sure you look at projects with a similar budget size.”

Oriel Wilson of Haley Sharpe Design agrees: “I would argue that is a precursor to even starting the tendering process. This informs the selection of the short list.”

02. DO TRY AND UNDERSTAND THE DESIGN PROCESS

While you’re in the research stage it can be worth asking around amongst your contacts in the sector. A company recommended to you by someone you trust may end up being your designer. But you might also get some honest feedback.

Andrew Todd says: “Talk to everyone who has worked with your proposed designer. What were the challenges?” Nick Bell of Nick Bell Design agrees.

Amazingly, over three quarters of our designers mentioned that their references are often not followed up by prospective clients!

And Chris Mather of Mather & Co agrees: “Exhibition design is a very specific skill that you can’t buy off the shelf. Once you’ve spent some time figuring out how designers work, you might be in a stronger position to commission them.

Arne Kvorning, of Kvorning Design, recommends museum staff who are new to this field should find out how the process works from the designer’s point of view, such as: “How to manage a complex project and how to choose and use the wide range of possibilities, technology and effects to create an emotional, touching and exciting exhibition experience.”

If the world of design is baffling to you, maybe you could seek outside help with writing your tender or with the design process. Andrew Todd suggests having an independent interpretative designer, who is an external advisor, on your team.

“They can help you evaluate the tenders and hold your hand. They can also help you understand the design process, how long things take and what things cost.”

Procuring services is always
different to procuring goods. But design is slightly different to other services you may procure in that the outcome – the final product – is not known when the contract is put in place. The challenge comes in being able to predict whether the consultant in front of you is going to be good enough for your museum.

Nick Bell told us: “The work happens together. Every project is a collaboration. What you ask us to do beforehand needs to enable us to tell you what working with us will be like.”

03. DON’T CONFUSE THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS WITH THE DESIGN PROCESS

When you go to tender for a designer it can be tempting to ask them to do some design work as part of the procurement process. But it’s important to remember that the bulk of the design work will happen after the contract is in place. Asking designers to come up with extensive creative treatments for free, before they’ve been commissioned, not only isn’t fair. It is only indicative of a company’s skills.

Kossmann.dejong told us: “The design work will only come out after the process. It can’t be designed during the tendering process.”

Paul Stork of Fabrique agrees with this: “The selection process is not the project.”

Andrew Todd told us: “You don’t go to ten restaurants, order starters, don’t pay for them, and then decide which restaurant to eat at.”

While Nick Bell says: “The procurement process fails when it tries to do the job of starting the project in the procurement process. The job of procurement is to find someone that the organization thinks they can best work with.”

Instead, designers recommend that as part of the procurement process you look at previous examples of their work and also take the time to find out more about them.

PROJECT SPECIFICATION AND THE TENDER

04. DO PQQ

Designers don’t run away from procurement paperwork – it’s a necessary part of project working. Indeed, they agree that the PQQ (pre-qualification questionnaire) process is vital to the start of commissioning design, in advance of tenders or interviews. But they often get frustrated when they are asked to fill out forms that are so long they take up a disproportionate amount of time.

Paul Stork says: “PQQs are good, they put the opportunity out there to many companies. However you need to ask the relevant open-ended questions to narrow the list down to a manageable number of companies.”

Oriel Wilson agrees with having only a few people on the PQQ list. “By working closely with a small number of agencies during the tender process, you get to establish a bit of a relationship with them, which you rarely get a chance to do if the list is long.”

Kate McHugh of Bright 3D adds: “The procurement process is an opportunity not just to fill in forms, but for clients and designers to get to know each other and start to build a relationship. Successful projects are usually the result of a good and honest relationship.”

Roger Mann believes the PQQ is important to narrow down the number of firms who will be investing their time developing a creative pitch: “If it’s a level playing field, and it’s a five or six way pitch, then fine.”

Opening up your procurement to a wide range of participants can bring new ideas and energy to the design process. Paul Stork says: “I am grateful for the procurement process in that in the past, projects were distributed only on the basis of friendship. Now, there is more opportunity for new companies and companies outside of the UK.”

However, Arne Kvorning points out, tenders may not all be of the same standard. “When launching an open competition the museum will have a lot of bids from non-professional designers and companies – so the PQQ is essential to secure a professional outcome of the process.”

There are some frustrations with the PQQ process though. Charlie Barr of Studio MB says: “It would be better that the people leading the exercise do not dispatch [the PQQ or tender] and then disappear on holiday. They really need to be part of and help the tendering process.”

05. DON’T WRITE A VAGUE BRIEF

Designers are creative people, but they are not mind readers. If you don’t tell designers what you want there’s no way they’ll be able to create a design that’s right for your museum. At the PQQ, tender and interview stages, it’s important to be clear about what you want your project to achieve.

Kossmann.dejong and Tandem both told us that tender documentation needs to define what you want to achieve and describe as clear a vision of the type of exhibition you want as you can.

Charlie Barr says: “I am grateful for the procurement process in that in the past, projects were distributed only on the basis of friendship. Now, there is more opportunity for new companies and companies outside of the UK.”

However, Arne Kvorning points out, tenders may not all be of the same standard. “When launching an open competition the museum will have a lot of bids from non-professional designers and companies – so the PQQ is essential to secure a professional outcome of the process.”

There are some frustrations with the PQQ process though. Charlie Barr of Studio MB says: “It would be better that the people leading the exercise do not dispatch [the PQQ or tender] and then disappear on holiday. They really need to be part of and help the tendering process.”

06. DO ASK FOR SPECIFICS

When you’re putting your PQQ or tender documentation together, it’s important to be as specific as you can about what you want. Andrew Todd says: “Be clear about why you are asking questions. Give us your plans divided into RIBA stages, make it in plain English.”

Designers told us it would also be useful to indicate in the paperwork how you want people to respond to your questions. Paul Stork suggests: “Ask meaningful open-ended questions that are relevant to your project. Limit the number of sentences or paragraphs to focus the designer’s responses to the essential, key points.”

Nick Bell said he’d find it useful to see response criteria set in terms of the number of words/pages/images you are looking for.

And Chris Malther suggests asking prospective designers to describe three varied approaches to projects on three sides of A4.

Charlie Barr adds: “Imagination is not limited to the exhibition design teams. There is no reason why the PQQ and tender documentation cannot be the start of creative conversation.”

07. DO REALISE THAT TIME IS MONEY

It’s important to think carefully about what information you think you will need in order to be able to make a decision about potential interviewees. Designers told us they sometimes spend a long time putting together proposals based on criteria the brief says are essential, but which turn out not to actually be relevant or required. If you need to see images, ask for them. If you don’t need to see images, don’t.

Oriel Wilson says: “Sometimes the tender requirements are so onerous that we spend a notable percentage of the project budget on tendering. There is sometimes a lack of appreciation of commercial pressures or of dealing with a business, but that is the reality.”
08. DO INTERVIEW

Everyone we spoke with said that the interview is a crucial part of the design procurement process. Nick Bell suggests that you should, “never commission a designer without having met them.”

Tandem believe that design is all about relationships and that the interview is a chance to test out that relationship. “You must meet the designer! Will they listen, dominate you, work with you? Inspire you?”

Alastair McCaw points out: “You wouldn’t employ a builder from a leaflet posted through your door. It’s exactly the same.”

But Kossmann.dejong suggests that just meeting isn’t enough. You have to ask the right questions.

Alastair McCaw agreed: “Don’t ask the tenderers to design the whole museum – take one or two key areas or exhibits and ask for initial design responses.”

And Oriel Wilson adds: “The interviews that are effective are the interviews that are not overly formal, where you can get a feeling if you can work with people. That is not a panel of twenty people each asking one prescribed question.”

09. DO COMMUNICATE

As with so many other parts of professional life it seems that communication is key when it comes to working with designers. Charlie Barr told us, “The best narrative environments are always achieved through an honest and collaborative relationship throughout all stages of the process.”

The relationship between museum and designer cannot be undervalued. Nick Bell says: “The selection criteria should hinge on relationship potential.”

Oriel Wilson agrees. “You want to make sure you can have a good ongoing relationship with the agency you appoint.”

Roger Mann goes further than this, suggesting that sign off is just as important as leadership, in the design process but also at the procurement stage. “Every project needs a project champion on the client side.”

And Oriel Wilson adds: “I think it is 100% central to create an open and creative collaboration between client and designer. Then both parties will do their utmost to conceptualise, develop and produce the project together in a respectful and optimal way.”

10. DO HAVE A DECISION MAKER

Exhibition designers told us that the best projects they work on are ones where someone in charge is able to make decisions. With so many people involved in the design process, from the consultant you end up hiring to your own staff, it’s good to have someone with whom the buck stops.

Oriel Wilson says: “If no one person or organisation has the authority to take decisions and sign things off, that is a warning sign. It can lead to delays and problems.”

Mark de Jong says: “If there is no clear decision maker at the client, the ship doesn’t stay the course. Many people are involved in these projects, so they need to have someone in charge, projects need a captain on the client side.”

And Arne Kvorning, Director of Kvorning Design, agrees: “It is key to create an open and creative collaboration between client and designer. Then, both parties will do their utmost to conceptualise, develop and produce the project together in a respectful and optimal way.”
IF DIFFERENT CHARACTERS REPRESENT DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, THE STORYTELLING IN AN EXHIBITION BECOMES MUCH MORE LAYERED AND INTERESTING.

PHOTO / THIJS WOZAK

‘A MONUMENT FILLED WITH STORIES’, THE LAURENSCHURCH ROTTERDAM, 2010

EXHIBITIONS ARE A BALANCE BETWEEN SPACE, TIME AND STORIES.

PHOTO / THIJS WOZAK
THE DARKROOM’, DUTCH PHOTO MUSEUM, ROTTERDAM, 2011

THE PRESENTATION BECOMES MAGIC IF THE INTERACTION IS SIMPLE AND ALL THE TECHNICAL DEVICES ARE HIDDEN FROM THE VISITOR.

WINNER INTERNATIONAL DESIGN & COMMUNICATION AWARDS (IDCA) 2013 CATEGOR BEST EXHIBITION LAYOUT

PHOTO / THIJS WOLZAK

‘LONGING FOR MECCA - THE PILGRIM’S JOURNEY’
ENTHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM, LEIDEN, 2013

IN THE EXHIBITIONS WE DESIGN, FORM ALWAYS FOLLOWS THE CONTENT. IF THERE IS NO CONTENT, THERE IS NO STORY.

FIRST PRIZE, IDA INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS, 2013 CATEGOR INTERIOR DESIGN - OTHER

FINALIST LONDON INTERNATIONAL CREATIVE COMPETITION (LICC), 2013 CATEGOR INTERIOR DESIGN

MERIT AWARD SEGD GLOBAL DESIGN AWARDS, 2014, CATEGOR EXHIBITION DESIGN

PHOTO / THIJS WOLZAK
IDENTIFICATION AND INTERACTION ARE IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS FOR A GOOD EXPERIENCE.

HIGHLY COMMENDED - MUSEUMS + HERITAGE AWARDS 2014
CATEGORY INTERNATIONAL

HONORABLE MENTION - IDA INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS 2013

FINALIST CINEKID LEEUW 2014, CATEGORY BEST NEW MEDIA PRODUCTION

FINALIST - IDCA AWARDS 2014, CATEGORY BEST SCENOGRAPHY FOR A PERMANENT COLLECTION

PHOTO / GERRIT SCHREURS

URTANIAN PAVILION, WORLD EXPO SHANGHAI 2010

NEVER COPY REALITY.
ACTIVATE THE IMAGINATION OF THE VISITOR.

PHOTO / TH.I. WOLZAK
"MAINPORT LIVE" - MARITIME MUSEUM, ROTTERDAM, 2007

THE POWER AND QUALITY OF AN EXHIBITION IS THAT DIFFERENT STORIES CAN BE TOLD AT THE SAME TIME.

PHOTO / MAARTEN HELLE

"BISJPOLES - SCULPTURES FROM THE RAINFOREST"
TROPENMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM, 2007

BY ADDING LIGHT, FILM AND SOUND, THE COLLECTION OF BEAUTIFUL ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM ARTIFACTS TRANSFORMS INTO IMPRESSIVE RITUAL OBJECTS AGAIN.

PHOTO / KOSSMAAN.DE.JONG
EXHIBITION DESIGN IS MAKING ENGAGING SPACES.

PHOTO: THIJS WOLZAK

A LOT OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS NEED A STRONG DEDICATED SETTING TO COMMUNICATE WELL TO THE AUDIENCE.

PHOTO: THIJS WOLZAK