

SOME GENERAL POINTS ABOUT REVIEWING A PLANETARIUM SHOW

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1. One of the most difficult things for planetarium and museum personnel to do is to separate their own subjective expectations of what a show should be like in terms of language, pacing, density of information, musical style, program length, and visual complexity. While the specificity of such criteria is often justified as “what our audiences here expect,” it is more often the result of personal bias and past experience in a limited environment.
2. The effectiveness of a show is best measured by how well it can tell a gripping story, plays to its technological strengths, educates in a way that feels entertaining, and contains a pleasing mix of science and drama to the majority of its audiences.
3. What does it mean then to be ‘objective’ in reviewing a show? It should begin with the basics, not searching out the little ‘bad moments’ and letting them dominate one’s impression of the entire show. No doubt the little things will have an effect, but how many of those occur and to what level of negative severity they affect the target audience is what matters, not what WE judge as good or bad to ourselves. The “basics” to focus on are the effective marriage of story and visuals, strong narration, emotive and supportive soundtrack, professional visualizations that immerse audiences in a realistic-feeling environment (not cartooned or ‘hokey’), and how well the story demonstrates the human connection to the topic.
4. In evaluating the lesser negative elements of a show, a professional review should include a “producers eye” view – an evaluation of what can be done to modify and improve the weaknesses, and whether the improvements will be sufficient enough to make it attractive to its primary audience.
5. How else can you get objective information on the attractiveness and effectiveness of a show? Bring in Focus Groups for private showings and have them fill out carefully-worded surveys. Do the same thing for museum members, like a “Film Festival.” Get advice from a professional marketing firm on how to word the questions and most importantly, how to interpret the results.