



Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum, *in association with the Smithsonian Institution*

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Newsletter

Museum Stores - Why Are They Important?



While reading through articles on what a museum store should be, such as our Museum Store here at the Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum, I came across the phrase 'cultural commerce.' This phrase intrigued me and turned my perusing from the indescribably dull and unfortunately required reading of the IRS technical monograph covering taxing our store sales.... or not! and the truly enjoyable pursuit of creative merchandising and finding retail items that reflect our community history and the stories we tell in our exhibits! The more I read, the more I learned how much our little Museum Store plays an important role in sustaining our mission and vision. —

So I took the phrase 'cultural commerce' out for a spin and thought to share this adventure with you!

The complicated relationship between history and commerce has found the perfect home in the museum store. Contributing up to as much as a quarter of museum revenue, museum stores can be crucial to a museum's bottom line, but their contributions aren't only economic. These unique retail spaces help educate visitors, build the museum's brand, and work to highlight - and sometimes even influence - the aspects of the institution's exhibits and programs it views as important.

According to Sharon Macdonald (titles & credits given at end of this story), museum stores "have the potential to really enhance the [museum] experience by providing the opportunity for visitors to take something tangible away with

Our mission

Discover History – Explore Bisbee's Past Today

Our Vision

- The Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum preserves and shares Bisbee's culture and heritage – past, present, and future.
- The Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum encourages visitors to recognize the similarities and differences to their own lives and to tie our shared past to their present.
- The Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum provides visitors with quality learning experiences in a fun and enjoyable setting.
- The Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum inspires visitors to reflect upon the importance of Bisbee's mining heritage in shaping our nation's story.



Museum Store (left); selection of books (right) available in the Museum Store (ranging from \$17.50—\$40 as shown here)

Your Museum Store...



and the 'stuff' therein...

them.” Through the magic of retail, stores give museums a way to build their brand and develop long-term relationships with their visitors.

Things like books can help with further learning, but even items that aren't obviously educational “can provide a hook for future remembering.” A visit to a museum can last an hour or so, but the memories that come with the museum store purchase of a necklace designed with turquoise mined right here in Bisbee, a hand-crafted copper tree made right here in Arizona, or a miner's brassing-in tag (that we made!) can last a lifetime. As museums we hope that these memories will make you want to come back.

Museum stores are different from other stores in that they have a more narrowly defined purpose. “A traditional gift shop creates its own theme and own product mix to go along with that theme; a museum store is pretty much tied to the mission of the museum and the collection they represent,” says Greg McKay. “You don't have quite as much flexibility with merchandise, but it gives you the opportunity to really focus on that mission and the collection.”

Focusing on the institution's collections isn't just a nice thing to do—it's usually imperative. “The vast majority of museums are nonprofit organizations, and part of the nonprofit status includes a tax code, UBIT (Unrelated Business Income Tax and, *again, as a personal aside, an excruciating IRS technical monograph to read!*). You don't have to pay income tax on revenue generated by products tied to the mission of the museum,” explains Andrew Antoniadis. He adds, “it's better for the store to stay under the rules and regulations of UBIT so as not to jeopardize their nonprofit status.” Thus our constant quest to find items that reflect the many faces of our cultural heritage. The really cool robotic pet tumbling hedgehog, the R2-D2 app-enabled droid, or a set of carpool karaoke mics may be some of the most popular kids' gifts today, but we're not a singing robotics museum! We offer items that are sprinkled through our community stories, such as:

- Books on Bisbee, history, mining, geology, and mineralogy;
- A large selection of books on women of the West (simply because the Museum is run by women and this is an interesting topic!);
- Books by local authors and postcards/notes by local artists;
- Children's books, vintage toys, STEM crystal growing kits from which you can make crystal nightlights, crystal jewelry and crystal gardens, magnetic stones, and popcorn rocks that grow aragonite crystals like those found in Bisbee's underground mines;
- A wide variety of copper jewelry and jewelry with turquoise, malachite, and amethyst with a very broad price range;
- Exquisite copper wall art, copper splashes, hand-made copper bowls and trees;
- Copper coins, bars, and ingots;
- Reprints from the Museum's photo archives; and the list goes on and on...

After operation costs, any profit a museum store makes goes back to its institution, and based on Museum Store Association numbers, store contributions typically account for as little as 5% all the way up to a 25% of the museum's annual revenue. Large donations, grants, and government money often comes



Museum Store (above); copper trees (\$80-\$140) with chipmunk finger puppets (\$9); amethyst geodes (\$115-\$150); copper & turquoise (howlite) jewelry (\$10-\$50); Bisbee turquoise & silver jewelry (\$125-\$270); copper wall art (\$95); copper splash bowls (\$200); copper splashes (\$25-\$180); and selection of books (ranging from \$15.95-\$75 as shown here)

with rules about how cash can be spent, points out Michael Guajardo, making shops an important source of unrestricted funds.

Our Museum Store, as I good-humoredly characterize as all of 90 ft² as it is VERY small, has done very well for us with sales increasing 40% between 2012 and 2018. Last year, our Museum Store sales brought in \$67,971, comprising 27% of our annual income. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, museum stores typically bring in from 5% to 25% of a museum's annual revenue - I think we're doing great!

Beyond financially contributing to museums and helping us further communicate our mission and vision, museum stores are just a great way to keep visitors hanging around a little longer. That's because no matter how overwhelming people might find museums or how much they like the exhibits themselves, there's always one guarantee - "everyone loves to shop."

So simply remember the next time you're shopping for that birthday or holiday gift, a good book to read or simply something nice for yourself, think about your Museum Store right here in your Museum! "When you're shopping, you're giving back to the museum. It's surprising that people don't realize that," explains Susan Tudor. Museums work to give something back to their communities, we're preserving our culture and history and inviting you to join us in that learning as we wander together through our interpretive exhibits and programs. So in the bigger scheme of things, your purchases provide funding for us to keep doing our job, and doing our job well. As stated in a very loud voice by one of my excited grandsons, "That's AWESOME!"

Carrie Gustavson

This summary of museum stores was enhanced by excerpts from the following: Micaela Marini Higgs *Museums don't just want gift shops to make money - they want them to shape our understanding of art* (2018); Karen Chernick *Who Decides What to Buy in Museum Gift Shops?* (2017); and Haley Shapley *Exhibit A: The Museum Store* (2016). Quotes are from Susan Tudor, Vice President, Museum Store Association Board of Directors; Michael Gunjardo, Director of Retail Operations, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Sharon MacDonald, Director, Center for Anthropological Research on Museum & Heritage, Humboldt University of Berlin; Andrew Andoniadis, Museum Store Consultant & Designer, Portland, Oregon; and Greg McKay, Shop Manager, Denver Art Museum.

Finger puppets 'critters from the Mule Mountains' (\$9-birds shown here in our copper trees, but we also have bobcats, mice, squirrels, skunks, etc.); wooden toys (\$2.50-\$7.50 that are made in America! & lollipops with a mule, opossum or sock monkey (\$7.50); crystal growing kits (\$17.50-\$22.50) & quartz crystals on a stand (\$5); selection of children's books (ranging from \$14.95-\$29.95 as shown here)



Thank You our Museum Store Volunteers!

Andi Myntii, Becky Browder, Buc Erkin Chris Rhodes, Cindy Doane, Colleen Crowlie, Jenni Larson, Ken Heusman, Leroy Bodine, Lisa Crochet, Lisa Ross, Lois Wolhart, Lulu Yoder, Mary Benhase, Millie Kasun, Pat Hodgkins, Ron Wolhart, Sandy Heusman, Sarah Maley, Wanda Titus (who graciously comes in whenever we call!), Yasmine Morales, and Zoe Hildebrand.

And remember... YOUR DISCOUNTS!

When you shop in your Museum Store, you get a 10% membership discount and... (harking back to that incredibly mind-numbing UBIT technical monograph by the IRS) we don't charge taxes = an additional @ 10% discount on your purchases - that's a 20% discount!!!

My favorite quote: "One of the admonishments I heard when I was new to this field was that I should not refer to museum store products as 'souvenirs.' Souvenirs, it was said, evoke cheap and poorly-made things, rather than the quality merchandise of world-class institutions. But there's another way of thinking about that word, and that is as souvenir—simply the French word for 'memory.' What better compliment to a product could there be than to have it contain a person's memories?"

One thing I know for sure (and that my work in museums reinforces every day) is that museum stores are an invaluable part of the experience and that retail products serve an important purpose and wield an incredible power: they carry our collections and exhibits out into the world beyond the walls of our institutions. Once the exhibits have traveled on, the educational programs are completed, and in those hours when even the galleries of our permanent collections are hushed and dark, visitors continue to savor their experiences at our institutions through the objects they purchased (or were given as gifts) from our stores.

Above all, a museum store is the place where guests select a suitable container to hold their memories of the day."

Julie Steiner, President of the Museum Store Association Board of Directors, *What is A Museum Store* (2017)

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**Remember us in your will & in your estate planning.
A bequest can perpetuate your annual gift!**

Let's say your annual gift to the Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum is \$500, the entry level into our Heritage Keeper membership status. A bequest to us of just \$10,000 can be endowed so that it distributes approximately \$500 each year (5% of the principal) to support our work. Even a small bequest, when endowed, can have a significant impact on funding our important programs. Ask us about the many endowment opportunities available to you and how you can create a meaningful legacy through a well-planned charitable bequest. For further information, contact Carrie Gustavson, Director, at (520) 432-7071 #3 or by email at carrie@bisbeemuseum.org for details and references.

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