

# FORREC TALKS:

THE VISITOR ATTRACTION SERIES

PART 2



**MATT  
DAWSON**



**JAMES  
ANDERSON**

WELCOME TO FORREC'S TWO-PART VISITOR ATTRACTIONS SERIES, A LIGHTLY EDITED CHAT BETWEEN TWO OF OUR ENTERTAINMENT DESIGN LEADERS. THIS WEEK WE ASK THE QUESTION: IS THERE A TRICK TO KEEPING PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH A VISITOR ATTRACTION?

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**MATT:** It's a key point that visitor attractions need to appeal to all age ranges. It's not just kids you have to think about. What are the grandparents doing?

**JAMES:** I think it was two years back, it might have been at a SATE, there was an economist tracking the growth on grandparents-with-grandchildren-travel in the US. So, you're catering to both the really young and then much older at the same time.



**MATT:** The grandparent is also satisfied by an experience because they're with their grandkid. Anything and everything can change, like technology and all that, yes! But then there's also some fundamentals, like a shared social experience, that never change.

**JAMES:** But then the argument also has been that everyone has a phone in their pocket and they're looking at their phone while they're out in the park with their family. Is that social experience at risk due to the technology that we're carrying?



**MATT:** I've experienced this myself. I went to see the new Ana & Elsa attraction at Epcot about a year ago.

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## IS THERE A TRICK TO KEEPING PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH A VISITOR ATTRACTION?

Matt Dawson, Senior Director, Visitor Attractions and James Anderson, Lead Creative Director



**JAMES:** Fantastic.



**MATT:** I did think it was really good. But it was an hour-long queue, where I read BBC News, The New York Times and everything else because I had my phone. And it totally took me out of the experience. Theme parks try to put the positive spin on it by saying, “Well let’s think of ways that would engage people on their phones!” But there’s also a big negative to it – that it just takes you right out of that experience.



**JAMES:** What I’ve also seen in queues, especially for longer ones, is the game: *Heads Up*. The first time I saw it in a long queue, we were so enthralled that we downloaded it right then and there and we had a blast in that hour waiting for the attraction.



**MATT:** Because it was forced social time.



**JAMES:** Exactly. But what if that’s connected to the storyline of the attraction? What if Ana and Elsa, and even Olaf, is giving you the clues with the different words that you’re supposed to guess?

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**MATT:** Well, if you think about it – back when theme parks could really get all of your attention – they had to! Like where else are you gonna go? You know you're there for the day, so they could totally immerse you in their experience.

**JAMES:** It has to stay immersive.



**MATT:** Could they figure out a way that you can't access The New York Times on your phone? I know parks would love that!

**JAMES:** You know they have all the apps. Disney and Universal have them, but it's more about booking, time management and less about entertainment.



**MATT:** Right.

**JAMES:** Though there are different companies looking now at AR\* integrated with parks. So, you're on your phone, you're doing a series of tasks, and interacting with actual physical objects. You hold your phone over a prop or scene to get some sort of feedback or a character that comes to life – that's an interesting way of engaging people with the environment you have created. The Pokémon Go phenomenon, right?

*\*Augmented Reality*



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**MATT:** I think it's safe to say that the industry is still trying to figure out what to do with people's phones.

**JAMES:** Exactly.



**MATT:** In the museum sector, maybe five years ago, every museum was like, "We've got to have an app!" And every museum got an app. And then fast forward a couple years, they did some research and it turned out that something like 0.1% their visitors were using the app.

**JAMES:** The app needs to be convenient and engaging, or it sits stagnant on your guest's phone or worse – removed.



**MATT:** You know Disney and Universal pour huge amounts of money into the design and theming of these queues to make them an experience! And that's why it's different from Canada's Wonderland where if when you're standing in the queue for the roller coaster you know you're in a queue. You're just clock-watching.

**JAMES:** The queue becomes an integral part of the experience, setting up the characters and the narrative in the main attraction. It extends the storyline for a richer experience as well as trying to distract you from the really long wait times!



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**MATT:** Like Avatar - first time I went through the new Avatar thing was a three-hour queue. Three hours!

**JAMES:** My longest – Cars – was two and a quarter hours.



**MATT:** There's somewhere around the two-hour mark that you start feeling like: I've been here for far too long!

## THIS CONCLUDES OUR TWO-PART VISITOR ATTRACTIONS SERIES

### QUESTIONS?

Contact Matt Dawson   
Contact James Anderson  



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