

Event case study:

Commotion Arts

“Gesture Café”



Gesture Café was an exploration of our everyday conversational gestures. The event invited visitors to think and notice their own and other's gestures through a range of activities, films and a specially created sound installation. Gesture Café celebrated the beauty of these diverse and complex hand movements and provided explanations to the reasons why we use gestures and how they help us to communicate. Our target audience was the general public – we aimed to attract a diverse audience of adults, children and families.

People involved in planning and running

- Creative Director and sound artists from Commotion Arts
- A researcher from Warwick University who specialises in research on gestures
- Seven volunteers to help on the day
- A number of people who were recorded for the sound installation

Main steps of the organisation process

- Getting the idea

I found out about British Science Week through the London Young Peoples' Programme Network. I thought it sounded like an ideal opportunity to engage new audiences by organising an event which bridged the gap between science and the arts.

- Organising and creating

Between October and December I worked with our scientific advisor to gain understanding and knowledge of his research around gestures. I used this research to inform the activities for Gesture Café and provide an outline for the script for the sound installation. Work for the sound installation including recordings and editing took place between December to March. I marketed the event through a printed flier, e-fliers to arts organisations, social media and website listings. I recruited a number of volunteers and met each of them prior to the event to support them in preparing to lead on their activities.

- Delivering

Gesture café was set in a pop up café with food and drink. The venue offered a relaxed social environment where people could stay as long as they chose. Tables were set up with activities some independent others lead by volunteers. These included games, research and drawing tasks designed to encourage observation and conversation.



Headphones were placed at one table that housed the sound installation and we screened two films themed around hands and gestures. The rigorous pre-preparation; schedule and venue layout helped ensure that the event run smoothly on the day.

- Results and feedback

Gesture Café was a successful event; everyone who came got fully involved in the activities. Many people stayed for the full four hours, and from the written and verbal feedback I received Gesture Café went beyond its aim of getting people to notice gestures. The room was filled with conversation exploring why we gesture, and many people spent time looking around to watch others as they spoke and gestured.

- Next steps

I am keen to develop Gesture Café as an event that can tour to cafés in the UK and abroad. I would like to investigate how the activities can be more of an immersive experience, and to explore how science can be integrated into an arts event. In order to continue this work, I will be looking into obtaining funding for the research and development stage of the project.

Successes and challenges

Gesture Café was successful, encouraging people to notice everyday movements in more depth. It was exciting to see so many visitors engaging fully with the activities. The volunteers supporting the day gained a lot from their experience and had a number of interesting and insightful conversations.

The biggest challenge we faced was time and funding to cover the administration and marketing of the event. I believe that more marketing would have attracted many more people; however, as I was responsible for creating, administering and marketing the event, my time was very limited. The funding only just covered the cost of the event, therefore we had fewer resources to cover marketing.