

Robot Thought project partners meeting Dana Centre/Science Museum, 1 June 2006

Notes from discussions

The project partners agreed that their involvement in Robot Thought had been a positive experience. These notes summarise suggestions for improvements raised in the discussion between project partners and the presenters of the NMSI *Roborama* show. Action points discussed between the project partners are also listed at the end of this document.

Several themes emerged from the discussions with the presenters, which were picked up by the project partners in order to decide next steps. The themes were:

1. Timescale for developing the show
2. Use of videos
3. Communication between presenters and project partners
 - Support in scripting
 - Deciding an appropriate age range
4. Presenter briefing/research lab visits/resource packs
5. Issues around including real robots in the show
6. Adding value with extra activities

1 Timescale for developing the show

- Presenters acknowledged that the time they had allocated to develop the show script and demos was insufficient.
- All other activities such as the briefing had taken place much earlier, at the appropriate stage of the schedule.

2 Use of videos

- It was suggested that including videos of real robots in action could enhance the show
- Presenters explained that a video section had been included, but that audiences did not find it interesting so it was cut.
- Barbara Webb has an archive of interesting robot videos that can be made available to the group

ACTION BW and KB to liaise re: creating video resource and arranging copyrights etc. so that video clips are available to all partners in the network.

3 Communication

- Presenters appeared to be unaware that they were able to decide the most appropriate audience for the show
- It was felt by the group that the show was probably suitable for a 7+ audience, rather than 5+ as advertised. This was especially true for shows with Dave Barnes' involvement.

- More frequent communication with roboticists, especially when drafting the script, would have been helpful for the presenters.

ACTION Science Museum team and DB to communicate ahead of the summer Roborama performances

ACTION Project team to emphasise and encourage regular direct contact (e.g. by email or phone) between the roboticists and presenters during the development of future shows

4 Presenter briefing/resources

- The resource pack was described by presenters as a 'useful starting point'.
- The video and script of the previous show were helpful so presenters did not have to create the show from scratch.
- The presenters found their briefing and the visits to the research labs as very valuable, as they are not robotics experts.
- Partners felt that it was valuable for presenters to understand researchers' opinions as well as the science and engineering.
- It was felt that the presenters had not fully grasped the aim of the project prior to the briefing session.
- It was pointed out that organising the initial briefing day was difficult due to researchers' other commitments

ACTION All partners should encourage as many researchers from their labs as possible to participate in the presenter briefing session.

5 Including real robots in the show

- Presenters felt strongly that, for a Robots show, audiences would expect real robots and would be disappointed if no real robots were included.
- Ideally, the real robots would be 'bombproof'... Unfortunately this is not possible in the real world!

ACTION Three steps were suggested to minimise the detrimental effects of a robot that fails:

- Pick the most reliable robot possible to include
- Ensure presenters are confident in the robot's operation (practice!)
- Have a contingency scripted section: could be a joke, a backup robot, a video, an explanation of the nature of real research or a discussion of possible implications of robot malfunction

6 Added value

- The science museum added value to the Robot Thought project in a number of ways. These included running related activities during the May/June run of *Roborama*, and planning another run of the show for the summer holidays.

- One idea included using the time audience members were queuing to ask them to draw a picture of a robot or complete a similar task.
- It was mentioned that Thinktank are planning a robot-themed trail around the galleries while Robot Thought is running. It was felt that perhaps more could have been done to mention NMSI exhibits during the show.

ACTION Project team to work with future venues to identify ways of adding value to Robot Thought through extra performances or related activities.