

Mass participation experiments

Reaching new audiences through
internet based experiments



What is the BA?

- established 1831
- nationwide organisation with a regional & branch network
- communicating science in an open society
- broad programme of events
- open & inclusive membership



What does the BA do?

- the BA *Festival of Science*
- UK *National Science Week*
- media fellowships
- *sciBARs*
- science & society forums
- public consultations
- mass participation experiments
- events for professional science communicators
- *Science & Public Affairs* magazine
- Alpha Galileo press service
- young science writers awards
- award schemes for young people
- major hands on science events for younger children
- *Visions* workshops

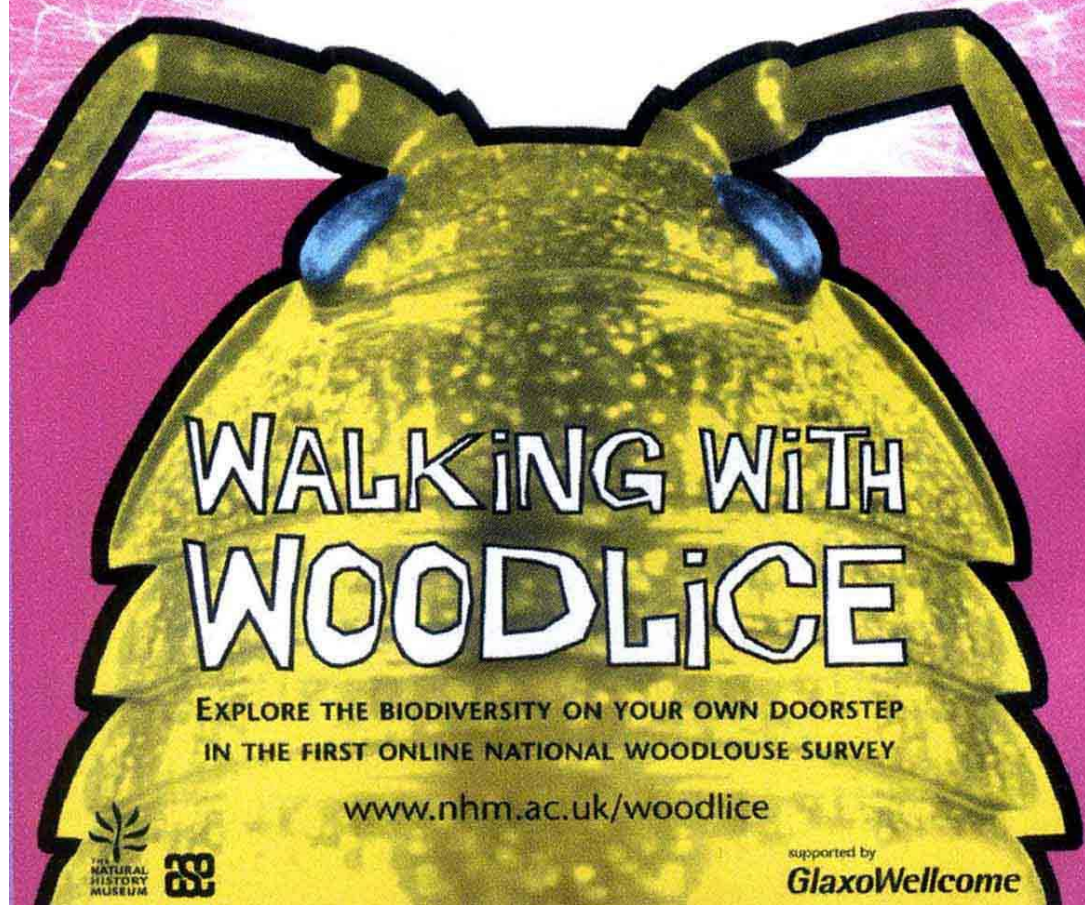
Mass participation experiments

- engaging people in real science
- offering an entertaining experience
- providing research data

creating SPARKS

The Natural History Museum
and Glaxo Wellcome

PRESENTS



WALKING WITH WOODLICE

EXPLORE THE BIODIVERSITY ON YOUR OWN DOORSTEP
IN THE FIRST ONLINE NATIONAL WOODLOUSE SURVEY

www.nhm.ac.uk/woodlice



supported by
GlaxoWellcome

Walking with Woodlice

The background context

- part of a much larger Festival in London
- part of the outreach programme
- created to involve people in real science
- designed to attract attention
- part of a sponsorship arrangement

Walking with Woodlice

What was it?

- UK nationwide biodiversity species mapping
- in partnership with the Natural History Museum
- prime audience 8 – 12 year olds & families



Walking with Woodlice

Why woodlice?

- they are all over the UK
- there are 37 varieties!
- they are safe
- they are an environmental indicator

Walking with Woodlice

How did it work?

- poster
- www.nhm.ac.uk/woodlice
- biological key
- database
- educational support materials
- field work data collected

Walking with Woodlice

Did it work?

- media coverage
- thousands of hits
- over 5000 data sets
- provided feedback
- it continues.....



laughLAB

Take part in the UK's first on-line experiment
to find the nation's **funniest joke**.

Submit your own jokes and rate other people's.
Log-on to **www.laughlab.co.uk**

www.laughLAB.co.uk

the BA
entertainment comedy award

U+H University of
Hertfordshire

SCIENCE YEAR

LaughLab

Background context

- part of UK Science Year
- part of the BA programme for teenagers & those who influence them
- created to involve people in real science
- designed to attract attention



LaughLab

What was it?

- the scientific quest for the world's funniest joke
- in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire
- prime audience teenagers



LaughLab

Why humour?

- very broad appeal
- (almost) everyone enjoys a joke
- scientific interest in humour receptors in the brain

LaughLab

How did it work?

- press launch
- poster
- www.laughlab.co.uk
- database
- supplementary scientific materials
- jokes submitted
- jokes rated

LaughLab

Did it work?

- vast media coverage
- millions of hits – over one million hits in first week (crashed server!)
- over 40 000 jokes submitted
- over 2 million jokes rated (ie data sets)
- worldwide impact
- results announced
- feedback sent to joke raters
- LaughLab-the-book published!



Lessons learnt (1)

- mass participation experiments can work
- topic must have broad appeal to audience & to the media
- and be safe & ethical for intended audience

Lessons learnt (2)

- use of internet increases potential reach although excludes non users
- design of website important – must be appealing
- appropriate domain name helps
- careful database design is important
- need plenty of server capacity

Lessons learnt (3)

- validity of data high
- difficult to find a scientific area that fits all the necessary parameters
- scientists are prepared to engage
- potential for more serious studies

Lessons learnt (4)

- possible to engage very large numbers indeed & to make sense of the data
- cost: Walking with Woodlice c£25 000; LaughLab c£30 000
- partnerships are very helpful

LaughLab

The world's funniest joke is.....

'A couple of New Jersey hunters are out in the woods when one of them falls to the ground. He doesn't seem to be breathing, his eyes are rolled back in his head. The other guy whips out his cell phone & calls the emergency services. He gasps to the operator, 'My friend is dead! What can I do?' The operator, in a calm soothing voice, says, 'Just take it easy, I can help.

First let's make sure he's dead.' There is a silence, then a shot is heard. The guy's voice comes back on the line. He says, 'OK, now what?'



the **BA**
communicating science