**Jellies Special Exhibit: Building an experience and brand based on audience insight**

*Presenters: Meghan Curran, VP Marketing, Shedd Aquarium and Tynnetta Qaiyim, VP Planning and Design, Shedd Aquarium*

In 2011, Shedd Aquarium opened *Jellies*, a new special exhibit featuring some of the most fascinating and unusual life on the planet.  Chicago is an extremely competitive environment with innumerable offerings for entertainment and culture. In a declining museum marketplace, Shedd set out to welcome 2.1 million guests – a goal that had not been reached by the aquarium in more than 15 years.

Although Shedd boasts the most diverse aquarium collection in the world, market research shows that our audience sees our collection as unchanging; believing that a fish is a fish is a fish. Shedd’s special exhibit program was designed to give guests a compelling reason to visit frequently. Because of that goal, audience insight is a critical influencer in the special exhibit planning process.

The team worked collaboratively on the exhibit and the marketing campaign at the same time. We wanted work that reflected the animals – vibrant, fun, fantastical, uniquely beautiful and mesmerizing. We needed to break through and encourage Chicagoans and tourists alike to experience the vibrant, surprising world of Jellies during the exhibit’s limited time in Chicago.

This paper will investigate the integrated approach Shedd Aquarium used to develop and market this successful special exhibit. Shedd has long used audience research and evaluation to drive topic selection and titles for special exhibits. A team of Shedd staff members, led by the Planning and Design department, develops each exhibit, tailored specifically to the aquarium’s audience. The special exhibit program is designed to keep the brand fresh and to drive attendance, so the focus on audience insight is critical to meeting operational goals.

Jellies built on many years of success in special exhibits, and was the first special exhibit opening since the aquarium created its in-house advertising agency. The exhibit and its branding were developed collaboratively, and audience insight was the driver of both.

Meghan and Tynnetta will share the key insights that informed the process, and how their teams worked together to create Shedd’s most successful special exhibit launch in the aquarium’s history. They will also share a behind-the-scenes look at the planning process underway for Shedd Aquarium’s next special exhibit, due to launch in May 2015!