The Business of Dinosaurs:
The Chicago Field Museum’s Nonprofit Enterprise
By
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The dinosaur is like the bald eagle, except it's an unofficial symbol instead of a sanctioned one. W.J.T. Mitchell author of The Last Dinosaur Book

I. Introduction

In the summer of 2001 “A T. rex Named Sue,” the traveling exhibition created by the Chicago Field Museum, came to COSI, Ohio’s Center of Science and Industry Museum. Interestingly, COSI did not perform any of their normal marketing surveys before signing up for Sue. As the museum’s research chief explains, “On dinosaurs, you don’t even have to test the market. You just look at the attendance at other places, and you know it’s a draw” (Lore 2001). The popularity of dinosaur exhibitions is not a new trend in natural history museums, however in recent years museums have developed innovative partnerships both with each other and across sectors in order to utilize these prehistoric creatures in new ways. The Chicago Field Museum’s alliance with McDonald’s and Disney, which resulted in the acquisition of a seminal Tyrannosaurus rex fossil, provided funds for the scientific investigation of this fossil, enabled the widespread distribution of paleontology information to schoolchildren, and incited the creation of a worldwide traveling exhibition, is a perfect example of the museum’s new relationship to the dinosaur. The purchase of Sue by the Field Museum and the subsequent activities involving this Tyrannosaurus rex illustrate a new type of museum management often referred to as social enterprise.

Although the definition of social enterprise varies throughout the sector, for the purpose of this paper social enterprises include activities that ultimately have a social objective and are accomplished by blending traditional nonprofit methods with commercial ones (Dees 9). Many types of dinosaur exhibitions currently exist within the
United States, but an emphasis on a social objective is what should separate museum exhibits from their for-profit counterparts. This distinction, however, should not prevent an enterprising nonprofit, such as the Field Museum, from obtaining a financial gain on their investment. In fact, more and more museums are realizing that blockbuster dinosaur exhibitions can provide a much-needed source of revenue for their organizations. Yet, economic objectives cannot be pursued to the detriment of the overall mission of a nonprofit, a characteristic of social enterprises that often requires museum management to perform a delicate balancing act. During the 1990s some natural history museums were criticized for coming too close to blurring the line between the financial and social objectives of dinosaur exhibitions. *Tyrannosaurus* Sue’s millennium debut, however, reaffirms that natural history museums can maintain an adequate balance between mission and money. By tracing the fascinating history of dinosaur exhibitions and investigating the Field Museum’s activities surrounding *Tyrannosaurus* Sue, this case study will illustrate how social enterprise can be successfully implemented within a museum context.

II. The Terrible Lizard

Throughout human history cultures have encountered prehistoric fossil remains and interpreted these remains in culturally unique ways. For instance, ancient Chinese experts believed these remnants proved the existence of dragons, while scholars in the Middle Ages viewed the fossils as evidence of the Biblical Flood (University of Virginia). The current explanation of these extinct beasts and their identification as dinosaurs developed during the early 1800s with the growth of geology as a natural science. In 1842 Richard Owen, a comparative anatomist at the British Museum of
Natural History, coined the term *Dionsauria*, Greek for terrible lizards, to describe a group of fossils with similar vertebrae structures (Olsen). The name now encompasses a large and diverse category of extinct animals.

During Owen’s time, interest in dinosaurs grew within both the scientific community and the public at large. Owen often gave lectures on the topic to crowds of hundreds. One of his ardent supporters happened to be Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s husband, a coincidence that proved instrumental to the creation of the first dinosaur exhibition. In 1852 the Queen commissioned Owen and Waterhouse Hawkins, a sculptor, to construct full-size concrete replicas of two dinosaurs for Sydenham Park based on Owen’s conception of the animals (Olsen). [See Appendix A, Fig.1] At the inauguration of the new exhibit, a dinner for twenty-one distinguished scientists took place in the belly of one of the giant reproductions.

The fanfare of this event demonstrates the Victorian’s unique relationship to the dinosaur, a relationship that is still prevalent today. Dinosaurs fulfill a dual role in our society; they inspire reverence but are also considered a source of amusement. As W.J. T. Mitchell explains, “They (dinosaurs) are both ferocious and ridiculous - - a sign of power and of the obsolete.” This view of the dinosaur continues to dominate museum exhibitions today, and over the last decade, museums began identifying entrepreneurial ways to increase revenue by capitalizing on the image of the dinosaur as entertainer, a concept that developed more than 150 years ago.

The events transpiring in Victorian London demonstrated a strong public interest in dinosaurs, and the craze soon spread to the United States. In 1858 the first nearly

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1 This historical analysis is meant to illustrate that the popularity of dinosaur exhibitions has existed since 1852, but museums only recently developed enterprising ways to financially tap into this museum asset.
complete fossil of a dinosaur was discovered in Haddonfield, New Jersey, and the find profoundly changed the previous anatomical concepts of dinosaurs. The bones uncovered at the site indicated that this particular dinosaur was bipedal, like humans (Olsen). Not only did the find revolutionize the reconstruction of dinosaurs, it also provided the material necessary to reassemble the first dinosaur skeleton.

As Hoag Levins, the editor of a website devoted to the dinosaur, explains, "Every dinosaur skeleton in every museum in the world traces its roots to Haddonfield's Hadrossaurus foulkii" ("Put on") The reconstruction was pioneered by a team at Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Science, and when the exhibition was unveiled in 1868 it became a public sensation. [See Appendix A, Fig. 2] About 30,000 people normally visited the Academy annually, but during the first year after Hadrossaurus foulkii went on display the number rose to 66,000 and then rose again to 100,000 the following year (Levins "Mounted"). These crowds provided the first hard evidence that, aside from their scientific significance, dinosaur fossils could also increase museum attendance.2 Replicas of the dinosaur were soon created and distributed to other institutions, which helped bring dinosaurs to the forefront of cultural consciousness. Interestingly, until 1883 Haddonfield's Hadrossaurus was the only mounted dinosaur skeleton on display anywhere in the world (Levins "Mounted"). However, hundreds of major dinosaur fossils were discovered during the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s. These new specimens began to fill natural history museums throughout the United States, giving rise to the first wave of dinomania.

III. Dinomania's Resurgence

2 At this time museums did not fully realize the money making potential of these exhibitions.
Since their inception, dinosaur exhibitions increased museum attendance, and they soon became an essential component of most natural history museums in the United States. However, their function as a significant stream of revenue really occurred in the early 1990s, with the rise of the dinosaur industry. In 1993 Steven Spielberg created the movie “Jurassic Park,” which was an adaptation of a Michael Crichton novel. In conjunction with the debut of “Jurassic Park,” MCA/Universal, the movie’s producer unleashed a very aggressive merchandising campaign. As Linda Berkeley, senior vice president of MCA Inc. explains, “With a Jurassic Park label we are creating a brand name in dinosaurs” (Evenson). The group’s $65 million marketing crusade for the first Jurassic Park movie covered more than 100 licensees offering more than 1,000 products (Evenson). Spin-offs included dinosaur toys, video games, socks, boxer shorts, gummy dinosaurs and temporary tattoos, just to name a few.

Museums immediately took advantage of this market by creating new blockbuster exhibitions, which only helped fuel America’s dinomania renaissance. The commercialization of the dinosaur reached new peaks during these years. Museums constantly attempted to outdo other dinosaur exhibitions by offering more enticing and more entertaining features. Some museums even began to blur the line between exhibition and theme park. Writing about the exhibition “Dinomania” at the Natural History Museum in New York, which featured robotic dinosaurs, Stephan Jay Gould comments:

All institutions have central purposes that define their integrity and being. Museums exist to display authentic objects of nature and culture – yes, they must teach; and yes, they may certainly include all manner of
computer graphics to aid in this worthy effort; but they must remain wed to authenticity. Theme parks are gala places of entertainment, committed to using the best displays and devices from the arsenals of virtual reality to titillate, to scare, to thrill, even to teach. Theme parks are, in many ways the antithesis of museums. Theme parks belong to the realm of commerce, museums to the world of education. (Cuno 162).

Gould’s condemnation of plastic dinosaurs and robots in museum galleries, although overly critical, does bring up some interesting points.

Shifts in museum practice regarding dinosaur exhibitions obviously took place in the 1990s, and these shifts directly corresponded to changes in the function of museums as a whole. Natural history museums transformed from quite sanctuaries of discovery and learning to intensely visited sites, often frequented by thousands of people a day. The changes raise some serious questions. For instance, how similar to a for-profit corporation can a natural history museum be before it is no longer a not-for-profit institution? At what point do business practices come into conflict with the core values of a mission driven institution? Can natural history museums compete against other forms of leisure activity without giving up their educational mandate or adversely affecting the unique experience they provide for the general public to view dinosaurs? As the business of dinosaurs began to grow within the third sector many museums failed to address these urgent questions.

In 1997 Steven Spielberg released another blockbuster dinosaur movie, “The Lost World: Jurassic Park,” a sequel to the film mentioned earlier. Once again the New
York’s Museum of Natural History jumped onto the marketing bandwagon. This time the movie tie-in wasn’t even subtle. The museum opened an exhibit entitled, “Lost World: The Life and Death of Dinosaurs” the day after the movie debut. Most of the objects on display were actually props from the Spielberg movie, scientifically inaccurate props. [See Appendix A, Fig. 3] Maura Lerner, a visitor to the exhibition and a mom, believes:

The museum is simply using the exhibit as a people magnet to capitalize on dino-mania. Not that it wasn’t fun. We loved the computer simulations of dinosaurs jumping around like puppies, and my 8-year old got to play paleontologist in a sandbox. What was unsettling was how this esteemed museum, known for its spectacular collection of real dinosaur fossils, blurred the lines between science and fantasy. When you enter the Lost World, you don’t know what to believe…(Lerner).

Lerner’s comments are extremely alarming. In her opinion the American Museum of Natural History abandoned its mission in favor of earned income. While all museum exhibit designers realize that exhibitions must be “sexy” in order to draw public attention, favoring flashy displays over authenticity compromises the integrity of museums. Obviously the AMNH disclosed which objects on display were scientifically inaccurate, but if most of the objects exhibited are movie props the museum still might be in direct conflict with its mission. What trade off should museums make between attendance and quality of experience?

3 Although this paper focuses on the negative activities that the American Museum of Natural History engaged in during the 1990s, it is important to understand that their actions were the norm for museum dinosaur exhibitions at this time.
As natural history museums began acting more and more like for-profit corporations in their approach to dinosaur exhibitions, the characteristics that separate this sector from the business world began to fade into the background. Many museum exhibitions are extremely similar in style and content to for-profit exhibitions such as Disney's "Dinoland." Obviously, museums are entitled to generate revenue from dinosaur exhibitions to support their nonprofit mission, but a balance between mission and money must be maintained. Exhibitions such as "Dinomania" and "Lost World" received negative criticism from individuals worried about the ramifications of commercialization within the third sector. Currently no clear line exists between the two types of dinosaur exhibitions that exist within the United States. However, nonprofit and for-profit enterprises are distinctly different, and in order to maintain their special status, the third sector must guarantee that it is engaging in the former not the latter.\(^5\) Museums should emphasize the authentic artifacts in their collections, the fossils themselves, and be more mindful of their place within the dinosaur industry.

**IV. The Hope Diamond**

Before the commercial world was caught up in the frenzy of dinomania a new discovery took place in South Dakota that would eventually change the business of dinosaurs for one museum. On August 12, 1990 Sue Hendrickson, a field paleontologist for the Black Hills Institute of Geological Research, happened to come across a *Tyrannosaurus rex* fossil protruding from a cliff located on the Cheyenne River Indian

\(^4\) MCA/Universal did not sponsor the exhibition. Most of the support came form Mercedes-Benz. Interestingly, a forest green Benz was displayed in the exhibit.

\(^5\) In my opinion the two dinosaur exhibitions produced by the American Museum of Natural History, although enterprising, really represent for-profit ventures disguised as mission related activities. These examples illustrate how a museum can go too far in their pursuit of earned income. However, the Chicago Field Museum's activities related to Sue demonstrate the appropriate balance that must always be maintained when pursuing a social enterprise.
Reservation. The circumstances of the discovery and excavation of this appropriately referred to as Sue, resulted in a tedious property dispute that did not end until April 1993. Basically Peter Larson, the president of the Black Hills Institute, a commercial supplier of fossils, failed to obtain the appropriate rights to the *T. rex* bones. Larson paid Maurice Williams, a Cheyenne River Sioux, $5,000 for permission to remove the remains from the land Williams ranches. However, since Williams’ land is in trust with the United States government the Native American must acquire permission to sell or lease his land. After a long battle involving Larson, Williams, the Cheyenne River Sioux, and the United States government, the U.S. district court declared Sue an integral part of the land and Larson lost rights to Sue because of the permission technicality.

1993 ruling placed ownership with Maurice Williams then the Bureau of Indian Affairs gave the rancher the authorization to sell it. The controversy placed Sue in the limelight and sparked significant interest in the future of the fossil.

Beyond the custody battle Sue was a media sensation for scientific reasons. Ninety percent of Sue’s fossil was excavated making her the most complete *Tyrannosaurus rex* specimen ever discovered. Only four known specimens are at least sixty percent complete, making Sue an even more exceptional find. Furthermore the exquisite preservation of the bones made them ideal for scientific study. All of these factors incited curiosity within the museum community, especially the Chicago Field Museum.⁶

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⁶ The Field Museums viewed Sue as a potential competitive advantage for the museum. Dees defines competitive advantage as, “a resource or characteristic that gives your service, program, or product a cost, quality, or other benefit relative to others competing in the same market. The uniqueness of Sue and the *T. rex*’s media coverage made this dinosaur a valuable museum resource.
Field Museum already possessed an impressive collection of dinosaurs, however it did not own a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Furthermore, according to John Flynn, Curator and Chair of the Department of Geology at the Field Museum, “Sue is the Hope Diamond of fossils” (Fiffer 1999). As an educational institution that “uses an interdisciplinary approach to increase knowledge about the past, present, and future of the earth by combining the fields of Anthropology, Botany, Geology, Paleontology and Zoology,” the dinosaur was a natural fit with the Field Museum’s mission (The Chicago Field Museum Website). However, John McCarter, the museum’s president and chief executive officer, realized that the fossil could do much more than meet the museum’s research, exhibition, and education goals.

“Tyrant Lizard King,” is argumentatively, the most widely recognized dinosaur in the world. Many other museums in the United States, such as the American Museum of Natural History and the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, have a *T. rex* in their collection (Puente). This fact alone fostered the Field Museum’s interest in the specimen. As Cuno explains:

They (museums) have become highly complicated institutions with extensive collections, staffs, and publics. These institutions compete fiercely with each other, as well as with other cultural venues and forms of entertainment, for funding, attention, and prestige…(134)7

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7 According to Dees, “Competition keeps the marketplace of capitalism in check and for-profit companies constantly on their toes, making sure they deliver the best value at the lowest cost. Because they know their customers can vote with their participation and/or resources, social entrepreneurs must also observe the competition to get insights into what customers value” (219). History has proven that dinosaur exhibitions are popular with museum customers. This popularity has created a fierce competition among
The popularity of the *T. rex* makes owning one a status symbol for museums, and acquiring the largest, most complete, best preserved *Tyrannosaurus rex* in the world would reaffirm the Field Museum's reputation as a premier natural history museum.

Furthermore, a dinosaur fossil of this consequence could bring in huge amounts of money in entry fees, donations and sales of related merchandise. For many museums, blockbuster exhibitions are necessary to create funding for less glamorous museum functions such as operating expenses. "Like universities and hospitals," explains Cuno, "museums operate in a highly charged environment where they have to constantly balance the pursuit of their core mission with the practicalities of managing large budgets and multiple responsibilities" (134). Revenue generating activities such as the blockbuster often help manage these various responsibilities. For example, these types of exhibitions often fund less popular museum projects that directly relate to the mission, but do not receive adequate support. As McCarter explains:

> The reason we do dinosaurs is so that we can do fish. Fish in the museum's collection may shed more light on evolution than Sue or any other dinosaur will shed, but having a dinosaur draw like Sue would allow us to have financial robustness and strength to fulfill the museum's mission" (Fiffer 198-9).

Therefore, the Field Museum's interest in Sue can be viewed as twofold. The appeal of Sue was a matter of both mission and money.

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natural history museums. However, the museums caught up in this competition must not compromise their mission s to entertain their customers or outdo another museum.
However, unlike the dinosaur exhibitions mentioned earlier the public attraction to Sue would rest on the authenticity of the fossil itself. The artifact was so impressive that it could stand on its own without the support of robotic dinosaurs or other theme park tactics. As Bill Simpson, the Field Museum’s chief preparatory explains, “People get a thrill seeing the real thing. All of us like being close to an object that’s 67 million years old, especially when it was once a gigantic animal that walked the Earth. It isn’t a replica or a fragmentary specimen” (Webster “Sue” 2000). Authenticity stirs the human soul making Sue the perfect social enterprise. Not only would this dinosaur fit the museum’s mission it would also attract the public which in turn would attract revenue. As McCarter explains, “We hat to look for imaginative ways to bring in revenue” (Ritter). Other museums were drawn to the dinosaur for the exact same reasons. Unfortunately, the Field Museum could not acquire the fossil on its own or cover all of the associated costs that would make Sue a financial success. The museum needed a partner.

V. Going Once...Going Twice

In 1997 Maurice Williams consigned his dinosaur to Sotheby in New York City. The auction would take place on October 4. The Field Museum only had a few months to gather monetary support for the acquisition but had no idea how much money to collect or who to solicit. In the book, “Enterprising Nonprofits,” Gregory Dees reiterates a common fundraising technique. According to him nonprofits searching for capital to fund a social enterprise should, “go through their social networks and look for potential matches. Who on your board network might be able to provide or give you access to resources you need?” (Dees 85). The process of looking for prospects instead of suspects proved extremely beneficial to The Field Museum.
John McCarter, the museum’s president, sat on the board of directors of W.W. Grainger Corporation, along with Fred Turner, then the chairman of McDonald’s (Sadler Interview). Besides the networking connection, McDonald’s appeared to be a perfect prospect for a number of other reasons. McDonald’s is based in Chicago, and fundraising tradition proves that companies are more likely to give to nonprofits located near their headquarters. Furthermore, the fast food conglomerate had a long-standing relationship of corporate giving with the Field Museum, and in 1984 a McDonald’s restaurant opened in the museum’s building (Haskell Interview). McDonald’s also had a rich history of community involvement, particularly supporting programs with an impact on young people, the most frequent visitors of dinosaur exhibitions. All of these factors propelled McCarter to deliver a pitch to Fred Turner at one of the Grainger board meetings. The feedback was very positive, and within weeks McCarter was speaking with Jack Daly, McDonald’s Director of Worldwide Communications. Daly reminded McCarter that McDonald’s had just entered into a ten-year marketing alliance with Disney, and McDonald’s was sponsoring Dinoland USA, an integral part of Disney’s Animal Kingdom, scheduled to open in the fall (Fiffer 201). This coincidence, in turn, led McDonald’s to approach the theme park to see if it might have an interest in Sue. Ironically, the theme park had already been considering the acquisition of the T. rex and immediately supported a partnership (Sadler Interview). With Disney on board, McDonald’s soon followed suite; the Field Museum had secured their two major sponsors almost effortlessly. The museum didn’t even develop a business plan or conduct a feasibility analysis (Sadler Interview). According to Sadler, “You don’t sell on a business plan; you sell on visibility, programming, and benefits” (Interview). In this
respect the alliance between the Field Museum and the two corporations does not represent a textbook example, but perhaps the procedures outlined in social enterprise literature fail to understand the unique environment that often fosters these cross-sector partnerships. "I’d like to say the process is totally systematic and strategic." Explains Daly, "I don’t think it is. I think there’s serendipity, and I think in this particular instance there was a lot of serendipity" (Fiffer 203). Although chance factored into the financial commitment made by these two major corporations, the Field Museum still needed to estimate the auction price for Sue in order to ensure that it had raised enough money to place the winning bid. Again McCarter’s network proved critical to the success of the museum.

No one on staff at the Field Museum possessed the expertise needed to attach a dollar sign to Sue. "Unwilling to be caught with his paddle down, McCarter picked up the phone and called an old friend from the WTTW board – Chicago art dealer Richard Grey," explains Fiffer (205). Grey became the museum’s unpaid consultant and immediately began assessing the financial worth of this extraordinary T. rex. His task was difficult considering the uniqueness of Sue and the fact that its auction at Sotheby set a precedent. However after reviewing material about Sue, Grey made one very crucial suggestion, tell no one about your intentions to purchase Sue. “I got a growing sense of her iconic value and how various parties around the globe might react if they knew about McDonald’s and Disney’s involvement.” explains Grey, “There would be serious competition and not just from the Untied States” (Fiffer 205-6). By making their plan public the Field Museum would only encourage a trophy mentality that would in turn

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8 Perhaps the historical proof regarding the popularity of the dinosaur exhibition made a feasibility study a
drive up the price for Sue. Grey’s analysis also provoked McCarter to solicit the help of more donors. In fact, the fundraising for Sue continued up to the very last minute. 

Going once….going twice….sold for 7.6 million dollars (8.36 million Sotheby’s commission). The Field Museum became the owners of the most expensive dinosaur skeleton in the world. True to the history of Sue the transaction, in fact the entire auction, was shrouded in controversy. Many paleontologist worried that by selling the *T. rex* at a public auction the specimen would be purchased by a private collector and whisked away form the public view or worse yet, be displayed in a casino lobby, out of the reach of scientific study. Although its purchase by the Field Museum stifled these fears, its price tag raised other concerns. J. Keith Rigby, Jr., a paleontologist who hunts dinosaurs in Montana, claimed that, “the sale may be the single most damaging action in the history of vertebrate paleontology” (Monastersky). Although most people did not harbor such a pessimistic view of the transaction, some did worry that the exorbitant price paid for Sue would encourage the continued looting and commercialization of fossils in the United States. “Sue was the benchmark that made people realize fossils are worth money,” explains fossil dealer Ron Fritihiof of Austin, Texas. “More and more people are out there looking now just because the money is there” (Toner).

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9 McCarter and his staff received additional support from certain board members and a commitment from the California State University system to provide up to $700,000 for restoration and study of Sue (Sadler Interview). Money for the acquisition of the *T. rex* only represented a portion of the support need to add the specimen to the Field Museum’s collection. Funds for cleaning, mounting, developing an exhibition, and conducting scientific research were equally important.

10 These fears proved to be unfounded. The runner-up was another museum and the only private collector who placed a bid planned to donate the artifact to a museum (Fiffer 211). However, Sotheby did devise special sales terms for museums and educational institutions just in case.

11 On the up side, the dinosaur market does offer dinosaur researchers and educators unprecedented opportunities if they identify ways to utilize the popularity of the industry. In Tess Kissinger’s opinion, “The popularization and commercialization of dinosaurs, far from being something to be frowned on, is the
whatever the implications of the auction, no one in the scientific community faulted the Field Museum for acquiring Sue. Many did, however, wonder if the participation by McDonald’s and Disney would result in another commercialization issue. Would the corporate/museum partnership focus on the business of dinosaurs to the detriment of the nonprofit’s mission? [See Appendix A, Fig. 4] The answer to this question lies in the dynamics of their alliance, an alliance that demonstrates each partner’s commitment to developing a true social enterprise.

VI. The Marriage

The Field Museum established itself as an entrepreneurial organization by identifying Sue as a window of opportunity and by finding an innovative way to obtain the needed resources to take advantage of this opportunity. Corporations rarely sponsor the acquisition of natural history artifacts, especially artifacts in which they have no direct vested interest. Furthermore, providing this level of support for a single museum object was unusual for a corporation. By successfully soliciting the financial backing of McDonald’s and Disney, the museum discovered a “new and better way” to acquire objects, an action which reflects the traditional traits of an entrepreneur, (Dees 3). However, what made the purchase of Sue a social enterprise was the fact that the Field Museum utilized business techniques to close the deal and develop earned income activities while simultaneously remaining loyal to its mission.

Another characteristic that marked Sue as a social enterprise centered on the relationship between the Field Museum and its two corporate providers, which was

only thing that’s going to bring money in. If people aren’t excited about something, it won’t get funded”
essentially a business partnership not just corporate philanthropy. In fact, the acquisition of Sue really signified the beginning of this partnership. All of the activities that occurred after the purchase were a direct result of this alliance and help illustrate its maturation.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter used the metaphor of marriage to describe partnership development (Sagawa 201). The metaphor is particularly valid because, much like marriage partners, the partners involved in a social enterprise must learn to cooperate, communicate and compromise. Business partnerships often fail in part because insufficient time is devoted to matching the reasons for forming the partnership with the intentions, competencies, and perspectives the other partners bring to the relationship. Therefore, identifying the needs and assets of each partner is key to creating a successful partnership. The Field Museum understood the importance of this task from the very beginning.

*Partners’ Needs and Assets:*

Corporations such as McDonald’s do not support acquisitions like Sue; unless a museum can demonstrate the impact of the support and then only if that impact is significant and directly related to their own goals and objectives. Providing a large amount of resources for the purchase of just one artifact could easily be counterproductive for a corporation, especially a corporation seeking more than mere recognition. While talking about McDonald’s initial hesitation towards Sue, Daly explains (Rauch 9).
We’re not interested in a plaque. At the level of financial commitment we were talking about here, getting involved makes sense for us only if we can engage our customers....and a perfect program for us is one with potential global impact in terms of news, in terms of goodwill, and then clearly one that has implications in the United States – one that can be worked right down into the grassroots of our organizations – every town, every community .(Fiffer 200/203)\textsuperscript{12}

How could one artifact meet all of those needs? The Field Museum had to present McDonald’s with a project that would engage millions of individuals, not just the 1.6 million people that visit their institution. The museum suggested creating, not one but two, traveling exhibitions for Sue based on mounted casts of the fossil. A tour, (eventually called “A T. rex Named Sue,”) would increase the social and commercial impact of McDonald’s support. Furthermore, the tour would help McDonald’s fulfill many of its customer-oriented goals by reaching out to various areas of the United States. McDonald’s also wanted to engage in brand enhancement activities, activities that would establish the company as a leader within the community; involvement with a traveling museum exhibit represented the perfect opportunity.\textsuperscript{13}

Together the Field Museum and McDonald’s created a very beneficial social venture. The Field Museum developed the content of the exhibitions and currently charges a fixed fee for their use by other educational institutions. In addition, the museum

\textsuperscript{12} According to Haskell, McDonald’s interest in Sue was about 98% strategic philanthropy and 2% altruism (Interview)

\textsuperscript{13} In many ways museums are a marketing bargain for corporations. Their money works harder in museums.
sells Sue related products to each venue. McDonald’s franchises provide marketing promotions and cash gifts to the venues that book “A T. Rex Named Sue.” Considering the cost of traveling exhibitions and advertising, McDonald’s sponsorship is vital to the educational institutions that participate as well as the overall success of the tour. As the Field Museum’s website explains, “McDonald’s local affiliate works closely with each venue to create and support a strong local campaign of advertising, marketing, in-store promotions, and media relations to drive museum attendance.” By utilizing each of their assets the two partners created a venture that accomplishes their separate objectives while simultaneously providing a valuable educational opportunity to numerous communities.

Suggesting a tour enabled the Field Museum to acquire the needed funds to purchase Sue, however, it ultimately accomplished much more for the museum. First, the two traveling exhibitions directly relate to furthering the museum’s mission, part of which is to foster a, “greater public understanding and appreciation of the world in which we live...by serving a diverse public of varied ages, backgrounds and knowledge” (The Chicago Field Museum Web Site). The venture also generates an income from the fixed exhibition fee and the Sue related products. Furthermore, like McDonald’s the tour helps enhance the museum’s brand through organizational visibility and advertising. [See Appendix A, Fig. 5].

The interdependency of the partnership really characterizes the tour as a social venture as apposed to a philanthropic exchange. The Field Museum depends on McDonald’s to offset the excessive costs associated with producing a successful traveling exhibition. In return, McDonald’s also depends heavily on the Field Museum for a number of reasons such as their access to low cost highly skilled talent, relationship with
other museums, ability to get positive press, and their scientific knowledge just to name a few. Perhaps McDonald’s most crucial need is simply identification with the institution. The reputation of the Field Museum as a leading natural history museum gives validity to McDonald’s involvement in a dinosaur exhibition. For instance, if McDonald’s purchased Sue on its own and created a tour to build stronger community relationships the venture would have been much less successful, a fact Disney realized from the very beginning.

As mentioned earlier, Disney was already interested in acquiring Sue before McDonald’s approached it about the Field Museum partnership. However, a very important need prevented Disney from pursuing the dinosaur on its own. According to Bob Lamb, the man in charge of creating Disney’s Animal Kingdom, “We didn’t have the Field Museum connection or a connection with any other scientific institution and without that connections, this was not a good thing for Disney. Outbidding a museum for Sue and merely displaying her in DinoLand USA would have been a public relations nightmare” (Fiffer 203). Therefore, Disney agreed to support the acquisition of Sue by the Field Museum in exchange for the creation of a cast to be displayed in the new theme park. [See Appendix A, Fig 7] Once Disney’s need was met the theme park became a silent partner (Sadler Interview). In this particular case the only asset that the Field Museum could leverage was its reputation.¹⁴

Reducing Risk

¹⁴ The Field Museum leveraged many of their assets in order to make Sue a profitable social enterprise. Many of these assets are discussed in the next section.
Another important element of a social enterprise is risk management, especially reducing the risk of your resource providers. According to Dees, “Smart social entrepreneurs manage the risks and uncertainties in ways that make investing more attractive for potential resource providers” (90). One of the major risks involved in the Sue acquisition was a lapse of time. Since the unveiling of Sue would not take place until the year 2000, the Field Museum needed to devise a way to maintain the buzz related to Sue during the three years following the dinosaur’s purchase. Although McDonald’s planned to capitalize on the turn of the century unveiling to highlight the company’s millennium campaign, it was concerned about the lag time between events. Furthermore, the success of the exhibition was in no way guaranteed. As a solution to these types of problems Dees encourages nonprofits to offer the investor immediate benefits that do not depend on later success (90). Therefore, the Field Museum set to work preparing the Colossal Fossil Education Kit, which McDonald’s would distribute to 60,000 elementary schools for free. This project is a perfect example of the partnership that existed between The Field Museum and McDonald’s because, as McCarter explains, it was accomplished by, ‘leveraging the museum’s knowledge and curriculum development skills and McDonald’s mailing list, packaging, and financial support” (Lowell). During this time all three partners also decided to create two fossil preparation labs, one sponsored by Disney and located in Florida, the other sponsored by McDonald’s and located in the Chicago Field Museum. [See Appendix A, Fig. 8 & 9] These labs enabled visitors to observe the preparation of the fossils throughout the entire process, and brought people to the museum long before the permanent exhibition opened.15

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15 Interestingly, Disney only used their fossil lab to stimulate interest in Sue during the interlude between
However, even before the labs opened in 1998 the Field Museum’s creative staff developed other ways to manage the lapse in time between Sue’s purchase and unveiling. Based on the popularity of a small display of Sue’s teeth presented to the public soon after the auction, the Field Museum decided to create two temporary exhibits that would precede the unveiling Sue. First, the museum mounted a two-month-long “Sue Uncrated” exhibition, which displayed bones in various stages of preparation and offered a vide-tape explaining the history of Sue. [See Appendix A, Fig.10] The exhibition began on November 18, 1997 just one month after the museum placed the winning bid for Sue. Then on May 29, 1999 after the museum conducted extensive research on the dinosaur and obtained a CT scan of Sue’s skull, the Field Museum opened “Sue the Inside Story,” an exhibit based on the museum’s initial scientific findings. [See Appendix A, Fig. 11] Both of these exhibitions helped maintain an active interest in the T. rex while it was being prepared and mounted.

Beyond developing all of these innovative activities to reduce some of the risks associated with investing in the acquisition of Sue, the partners also developed a way to manage one risk associated with the traveling exhibitions. Both the museum and McDonald’s only committed themselves to a 15-city tour, a number based on the amount of interest already expressed by educational institutions. Therefore, if the appeal of the tour later waned McDonald’s would not be obligated to continue its sponsorship. As explained in Dees book, nonprofits should allow partners to invest incrementally based on the success of certain venture milestones (90). Fortunately, the tour proved to be a

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the dinosaur’s purchase and the installation of their dinosaur cast. Disney closed the Florida lab in 2000. McDonald’s on the other hand established the Field Museum’s lab as a permanent fixture in the museum,
national hit, and McDonald’s agreed to continue support as long as the dinosaur was popular (Haskell Interview). The level of commitment by McDonald’s, demonstrated by its continued involvement in the tour, its funding of a permanent fossil lab, and many other smaller activities, illustrates an important transformation in the partnership between this corporation and the Field Museum. In Sagawa’s terms this transformation signifies the creation of a New Value Partnership, “a long-term, high-yielding alliance between businesses and social sector organizations” (213). However, this type of partnership does not develop overnight. New value partnerships are the product of relationship development, a type of development characterized by good communication, a shared vision, involvement at multiple levels, a willingness to change, and the creation of new value for both partners. Perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of this development is the partners’ willingness to change and adapt to meet another’s needs. Sometimes these changes are in direct conflict with the culture of the organization.

Cultural Conflicts:

According to Segawa, “cultural difference is one of the most often cited problems in cross-sector partnerships and the second most common reason for alliance failure” (204). During the growth of their partnership the Field Museum and McDonald’s encountered and overcame certain cultural differences related to work style and productivity. For instance, as a McDonald’s representative explains, “We’re accustomed to working in drive-thru time, while museums move in geological time” (Fiffer 216).
The concurrence of the scientific research and the exhibition development became one of the first challenges for the partners. The Field Museum was used to creating an exhibition after conducting the research, but McDonald’s want immediate results from both. Obviously these differences required compromises on behalf of both partners, and the Field Museum had to guarantee that these compromises did not jeopardize the integrity of the institution.

**Legal and Ethical Issues.**

In fact, as a member of the American Association of Museums, the Field Museum had an obligation to follow the procedures outlined in the association’s “Guidelines for Museums on Developing and Managing Business Support.” The guidelines are based on the AAM’s principle of adhering to an ethical standard that exceeds legal minimums. According to the document museums must act in a manner consistent with the museum’s mission, maintain control over all museum activities including exhibition content, avoid conflicts of interest, and adhere to an ideal of transparency (AAM).

When the Field Museum’s corporate support was initially announced, many people worried that the corporate/museum partnership would focus on the business of dinosaurs to the detriment of the nonprofit’s mission. However, no Sue Happy Meals or T. rex theme parks were created around the dinosaur. McDonald’s primary interest in Sue related to brand enhancement not marketing, (although marketing is an aspect of creating a strong brand). Sue activities were founded on a scientific and educational view

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17 For instance, McDonald’s want the traveling exhibitions to remain at each venue for just two weeks, a tactic that would expose the exhibition to a wider segment of the population in a shorter amount of time. The Field Museum, however, required a two-month exhibition period followed by a month of deinstallation, a condition that abided traditional museum practices.
of the dinosaur. Furthermore, the Field Museum maintained control over all Sue related content. Although McDonald’s name is subtly displayed on all Sue exhibits, McCarter explains, “we own the content, and we get to tell the story the way we want to tell it” (Halpert). He believes the key to partnering with others involves setting boundaries. “Every time I talk with a potential sponsor,” he notes, “I explain that we are asking for financial support and involvement. And then I explain that we will decide on and own the intellectual content” (Young 5). In fact, the educational portions of the Sue exhibitions were paid for by private foundations not McDonald’s (Sadler Interview). The Field Museum also avoided the conflicts of interest that often arise between corporations that fund exhibitions directly related to their cause, by getting support from a company completely removed from the world of dinosaurs.18 For instance, if the Field Museum mounted an exhibit on hamburgers or theme parks and received support from McDonald’s and Disney then their activities could be viewed as unethical. According to Haskell, to prevent these types of relationships from happening “the Field Museum has a clear policy for handling business support, and it is constantly mindful of the risks of diluting its reputation” (Interview). All of these factors demonstrate the Field Museum’s strong commitment to the AAM guidelines in their activities related to Sue.

**VII. More Dino Dollars**

On May 17, 2000 Sue’s real skeleton went on display at the Field Museum. [See Appendix A, Fig. 12& 13] Museum attendance increased from 1.6 million in 1999 to 2.4 million in 2000. This was likely due to the popularity of Sue, the 68 million year old T.rex. 

18 For instance, in 1998 the Solomon B. Guggenheim Museum in New York mounted an exhibition called the “Arts of the Motorcycle.” BMW, a major manufacturer of motorcycles, sponsored the show (Fiffer 225). While this funding relationship is not necessarily unethical it does open a museum up to public criticism and can potentially place the museum in a conflict of interest.
in 2000 as a result of the new exhibition (Sadler Interview) The dinosaur’s popularity provoked the Field Museum to engage in other income generating activities beyond those involving McDonald’s and Disney First the museum created two logos for Sue. [See Appendix A, Fig 14] According to Sadler, “protecting the image of Sue was crucial to the dinosaur’s financial success” (Interview). The museum then created an extensive line of retail items related to Sue. Products can be purchased online or in the museum store and include several styles of Sue T-shirts and sweatshirts, Sue baseball caps, a Sue coffee mug, a mini T. rex skull, a cast of a tooth, a cast of a claw, and a brass Sue ornament, just to name a few [See Appendix A, Fig. 14] The Field Museum also co-published seven books related to Sue. In addition to these activities the museum even allowed corporations to dine with Sue in the Stanley Field Hall. [See Appendix A, Fig. 16] About 200 external special events are held at the Field Museum each year and having Sue as the museum’s centerpiece helped raise the number of these profitable endeavors.

All of the activities mentioned above involved leveraging the current assets of the museum to create new forms of revenue. While the profitability of licensing, retail, and special events may appear self-evident, these undertakings actually require a huge amount of support and are heavily influenced by the market. Therefore, the Field Museum must constantly invent ways to maintain an interest in Sue in order to make their earned income activities worthwhile. Currently the institution is planning Sue’s fifth year anniversary celebrations. Sadler sees this as, “an opportunity to re-launch the dinosaur in the marketplace,” but she realizes that every business enterprise has a life cycle (Interview). Fortunately, dinosaurs, especially the T. rex, appear to have an extremely long life cycle. Furthermore, as the largest, most complete, and best preserved
*Tyrannosaurus rex* every unearthed, Sue’s competitive advantage should help maintain her popularity for years to come.

### VIII. Conclusion

Whether people first heard about Sue because of the extensive legal battles relating to her ownership, or thanks to the 8.36 million dollars paid at Sue’s high-profile auction, or the Field Museum’s commitment to preparing the dinosaur for public display, Sue is quite possibly the world’s most famous dinosaur fossil. The Field Museum turned the popularity of Sue into a profitable social enterprise. The acquisition of Sue represented a sustainable new resource that supported the museum’s mission. Devising new ways to leverage the museum’s existing assets and through the development of strategic partnerships, the Field Museum was then able to engage the dinosaur market to work to the advantage of the organization. The money generated by Sue created unrestricted revenue, which provides the museum with greater flexibility. The success of Sue as an entrepreneurial venture depended on a number of factors. To put the enterprise in the terms of Bill Shore, the founder of Community Wealth Ventures, the success of Sue depended on, “the intersection of three essential components: organizational capacity, marketable assets, and market opportunity. Without any one of these components to anchor” Sue “in the reality of a competitive marketplace” the dinosaur would have failed as a social enterprise (Community Wealth Ventures). Luckily the Field Museum possessed the organizational capacity to handle a social enterprise of this caliber and, through the purchase of Sue, also possessed a marketable

Furthermore, the history of dinosaur exhibitions proved that a market opportunity existed.
The creative staff members at the Field Museum were able to bring all of these components together to create a profitable social enterprise.

Social enterprises play a crucial role in museum management today. In order to survive these cultural institutions must possess an entrepreneurial staff simultaneously committed to identify new ventures and upholding the integrity of the organization. These types of enterprises are complicated because they involve a double bottom line and a balance must always be maintained. As Cuno explains:

There has been and will continue to be a welcome role for the social entrepreneur within the not-for-profit sector as long as the measurements of success are not allowed to be reduced to mere numerical and financial calculations. We must be constantly vigilant that the market does not usurp the authority of the mission...(125)

Despite the risks of a social enterprise, if preformed appropriately their financial and social rewards are truly incredible. The *T. rex* named Sue is a prime example.
Appendix A:

Figure 1: Drawing of Sydneham Park exhibit

http://www.unmuseum.org/vdinos.htm

Figure 2: First mounted dinosaur skeleton displayed at the Academy of Natural Sciences in 1868

http://www.levins.com/mount.shtml

Figure 3: The Exhibition, “The Lost World: The Life and Death of Dinosaurs”

http://www.s-t.com/daily/05-97/05-30-97/b02li066.htm
Figure 4: Announcement of partnership between McDonalds and the Field Museum
http://www.fmnh.org/sue/default.htm

Figure 5: Advertising for the sponsors of “A T. Rex Named Sue”
http://www.ahhamuseumservices.com

Figure 6: “A T. Rex Named Sue” exhibition at the Pacific Science Center
http://www.ahha-museumservices.com/museumphotos/PacificSciCenter/TRexSue
Figure 10: Part of the “Sue Uncrated” exhibition
http://www.fmnh.org/sue/timeline5.html

Figure 11: Part of “Sue the Inside Story” exhibition
http://www.anglepark.com/projects_0.html

Figure 12: The Unveiling of Sue
http://www.fmnh.org/sue/timeline5.html
Figure 13: Sue on display at the Field Museum
http://www.fmnh.org/sue/timeline5.html

Figure 14: One of the Sue logos
http://www.fmnh.org/sue/timeline5.html

Figure 15: One Sue related product for sale
http://store.fieldmuseum.org/browsedetail.cfm?view=exhibit&nExhibitID=1
Figure 16: Using assets to generate an earned income
www.carlynberghoffcatering.com/venues.html
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