Death by Curation

(Why the blockbuster exhibit isn't quite so special anymore)

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The myth of the Blockbuster exhibit

It sounds nice, but here's what's really happening…

1. Misunderstanding
2. Dependency
3. Alienation
4. Depravation

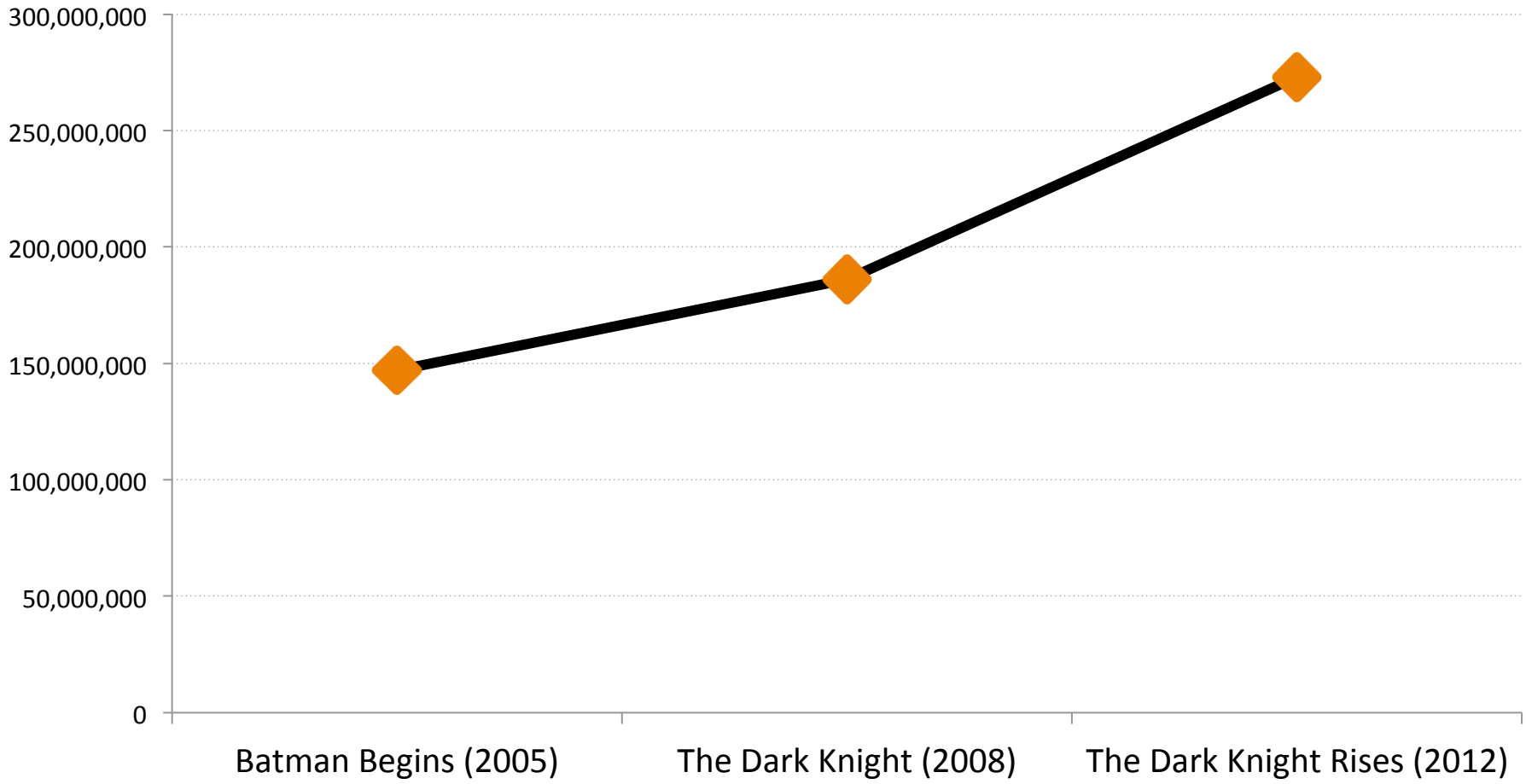
Misunderstanding

- The museum comes to believe that it can only make more money/attract more people if it has a "blockbuster" exhibit
  - See attendance spike, want more!

Dependency

- If the exhibition is successful, then the sequel must be more grand (and usually more expensive)

Sequels (almost always) cost more!



* Cumulative inflation between the release of “Batman Begins” and “The Dark Knight Rises” was 17.25%. Production costs increased by 186% within the same duration.

Alienation

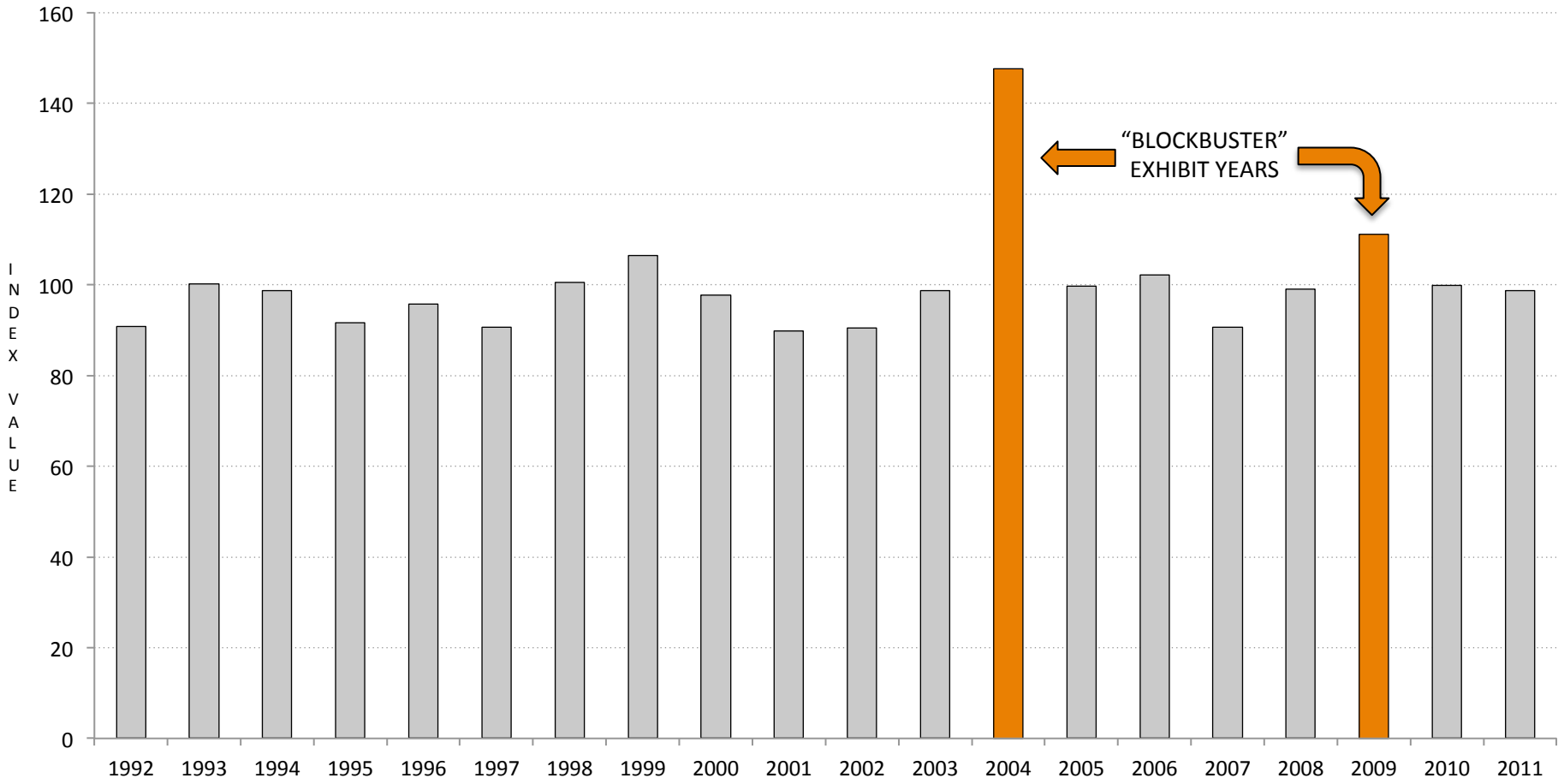
- The museum trains audiences to respond to blockbusters…NOT to develop relationships with permanent collections
  - In a study of 5 art museums between 2007-10:
    - 21.8% saw “majority or entire collection”
    - 50.5% only saw the special exhibit

Depravation

- The museum's membership also becomes reliant on bigger and better exhibits
  - National Awareness, Attitudes & Usage Study – Published 2011, Updated 2013
    - 88.6% of lapsed members will renew "when they next visit the museum"
    - Of those, 62.5% say they will defer their next visit to "when there is a new exhibition"

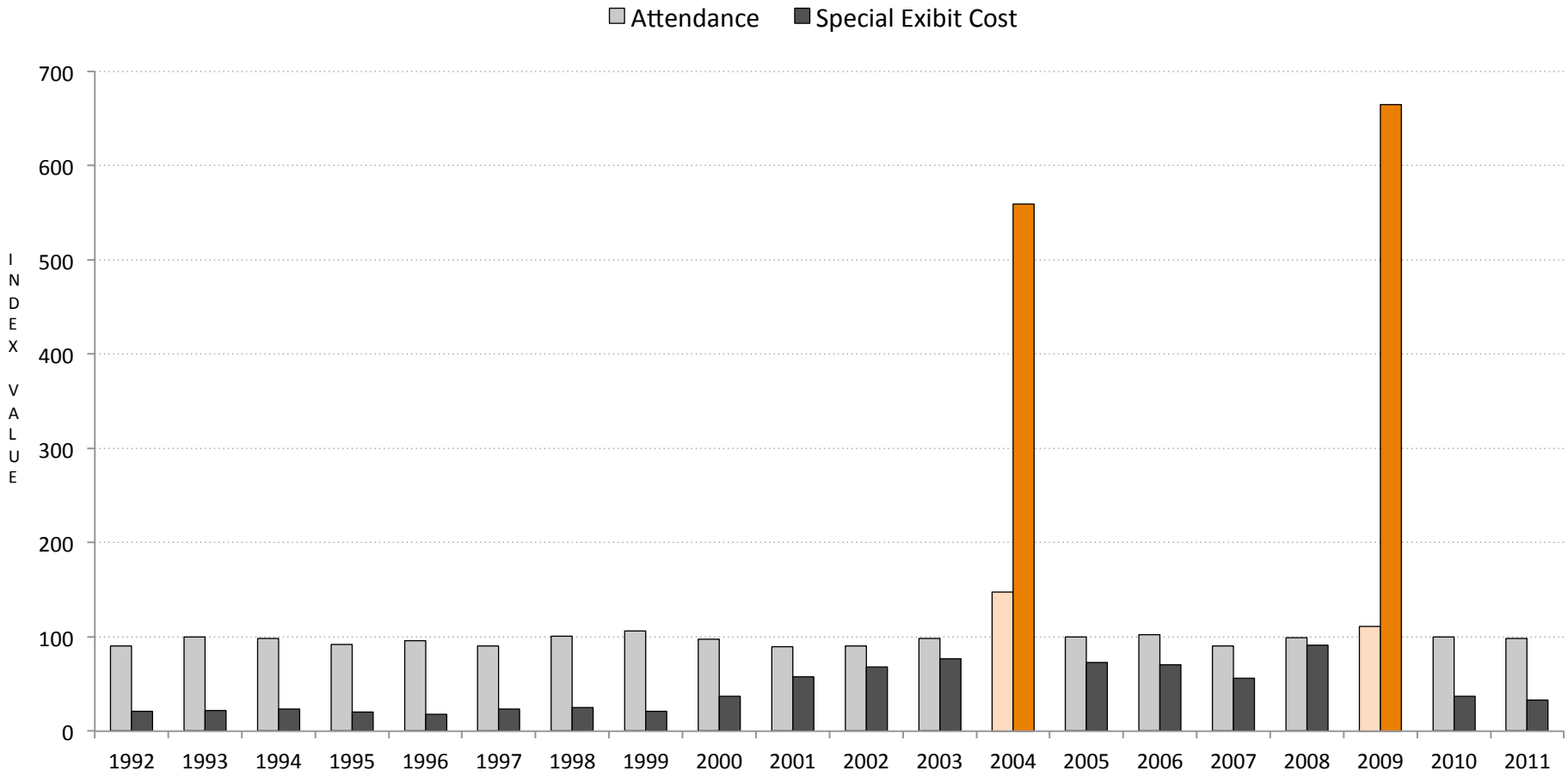
Attendance by year

(indicated as an index value whereby 100.0 represents the 20-year mean)



Attendance and exhibit costs by year

(indicated as an index value whereby 100.0 represents the 20-year mean)



Alternative use of funds to increase satisfaction and build more sustainable connection to museums?

Have questions or ideas?
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