

Using single events for Audience Development

The most important question to ask when considering the Audience Development potential of any one event, is 'who will it appeal to?' Ideally, you'll be programming over the longer term with consistent genres or themes, to build your audience over time, with associated marketing and community engagement strategies. Not every event will be suitable to attract first-timers, if that is one of your Audience Development aims. That is a judgement you will need to make about each event, knowing your local community. Not every event will present themes that provide easy links with existing community interests or groups. But you should look for issues and themes that might be of interest to local community groups, wherever possible. Here are some of the further questions you might answer to help your thinking about Audience Development.

Is this event suitable for targeting first-timers to come a second time? What events have we presented in the last 2 to 3 years that might be similar? You should follow the advice given to segment your audience using the Vital Statistics software, if you have it, to identify the group of ticket buyers who've been once previously, to a similar event. If you don't have Vital Statistics, you can pull lists of people who have been to previous similar shows, and email or mail them.

NOTE: Remember never to address or refer to 'first-timers' on your database as first-timers in communications with them: they may have been to an event with a friend or family member previously, who bought the ticket for them. (If you have duplicate customer accounts in your database, remember this can also result in false 'first-timer' accounts.)

In addition to crafting copy with content describing the event you're marketing, for people who we assume to be first-timers, you should include extra information about getting to the theatre, avoiding the interval drinks queue, etc. You need to aim to make them feel welcome. Consider including a free 'welcome back' drink (wine, beer, or soft drink) for every 'first-timer' who returns as a second-timer.

Is this event suitable for targeting people who have not been to your theatre?

People who haven't been to your theatre probably won't be on your database, so the promotional methods you need to reach them are social media, editorial or advertising (newspaper, radio, magazines), flyers (in bookshops, cafes, cinemas, community buildings) and posters (bookshops, cafes, cinemas, community buildings, etc), or other organisations' mailing or emailing lists. Other organisations e-newsletters can work well if they have a similar demographic to your audience.

These promotional methods should therefore be designed to primarily appeal to people who are not regular theatregoers: they will want to know 'what the event's

about' and 'how it will make them feel'. A starry cast, awards, the playwright's or composer's reputation, etc. are likely to mean less to them than the experience they're going to have in the theatre. So perhaps devise a tagline for the event, and use other descriptions of the event (if it's a play, describe the 'story', but no spoilers!), in these promotional methods. Description of the cast or awards can be used as part of the guarantee of a 'good night out'.

Opportunities for collaboration with other venues in your state or region, on Audience Development:

Sharing audience attendance data

If the event you're marketing is part of a tour, venues early in the tour could check information from their Vital Statistics reports and share this with their colleagues later in the tour:

* what percentage of first-timers is being attracted? - If it's a high percentage of first-timers, later tour venues could step up their efforts to attract new audience members, through radio, newspaper, posters, and social media.

*what shows have people attending seen before? – If a high proportion of audience members for the tour event have previously seen one or two events that also toured, this information could help later tour venues target email campaigns to audiences from those previous events.

*what ticketing strategies/special offers have worked? – If a special offer has worked particularly well for the tour event, this should be shared with colleagues later in the tour: was it to a particular community group, that might be replicated elsewhere? was it a joint promotion with a local book shop or cinema? Sharing successful audience development ticketing and marketing strategies will ensure everyone learns from them and can implement them later.

Online resources for Audience Development:

http://www.canadacouncil.ca/development/ontheroad/presentershandbook/finding_an_audience/ah127742889945365861.htm

<http://www.americanorchestras.org/knowledge-research-innovation/audience-engagement/churn-presentation.html#lifetimers>

and on Audience Engagement:

<http://www.artsjournal.com/leadorfollow/2012/01/what-does-audience-engagement-really-mean/>