



## Marketing tactics for regional venues according to regional venues

Throughout June 2014, house held a series of local network meetings in Salisbury, Newbury and Cambridge with representatives from over 20 organisations from the Isle of Wight to Norwich and from traditional to brand-new venues.

One thing that stood out from the meetings was the discussion of tips and tactics for marketing a show or increasing your venue profile generally, and here is a list of the top tactics, courtesy of our programmers:

### Use video and film to sell theatre

- For venues that also show films, or live screenings of theatre, trailers of upcoming theatre shows can be shown before the main film
- Sometimes just putting '& cinema' in your venue name can make it less intimidating, particularly to a younger generation audience member who might feel that a theatre is not for them
- Using TV screens with trailers or a slideshow of images in a foyer or bar catches and holds the public's attention better than static posters
- In mail-outs or on your website, an embedded video or even a link to a video is more successful than just an image
- Borrow ideas from film marketing, such as a print campaign where initial posters only show the words 'coming soon', then a torn corner teasing at content, gradually adding information until the whole poster is revealed

### Turn your venue into a community space

- Have an open day, inviting local people to come in and have a look around without having to buy tickets- maybe have a BBQ or integrate this with a season launch or fundraising activity
- If you are making changes to your venue, invite the locals in to share their thoughts and to engage them in the changes in their community- they could become your strongest allies
- Consider choosing a local brewery or café to run your venue's bar/restaurant as they have stronger links in the community and are often more committed to long-term growth than a chain
- Run backstage tours, free or ticketed, as many people are intrigued to get a glimpse behind the curtain- it's easy to forget how exciting that is to people not in the business
- Display exciting props, costumes, or artwork around your building to create interest, offer to create window displays for local shops, or decorate a hotel lobby- with brochures nearby, of course! If your cupboards are really full, you could even offer costume and props hire, especially around Halloween

### Use social media creatively

- Ask your members, staff and volunteers to tweet, email or post on Facebook about your upcoming show and if they do, give them a free ticket- if they're interested in a show, their friends probably are too. Don't just tweet and retweet about yourself.
- Use questions rather than statements to engage your followers in dialogue- you could even give them a choice and ask what shows they would like you to programme
- Contact the 'social planner', official or otherwise, of local companies with internal email lists and ask them to distribute a monthly email regarding upcoming events to the rest of the company
- Using free or single cost software to prepare and schedule Tweets and Facebook posts allows a weeklong campaign to be prepared in half an hour and allows information to be gathered about what days and times get the most response



### **Engage with young people and families on their own terms**

- Offer to buy an outdoor poster frame for schools in a location visible to parents during drop off and pick up, on the condition that you are then allowed to hang posters for upcoming family productions- you could even offer a special discount code
- Use parent-mail- many schools do a regular parent mail-out and may be willing to including information about upcoming family shows
- Try a 4:30pm show time to coincide with after-school; families can still be home in time for dinner
- Set up a table in a school to sell tickets directly to parents and students- school trips are becoming more and more complicated to arrange

### **Know your audience**

- This sounds obvious, but sometimes it can be really helpful for a venue manager to spend a night ripping tickets or serving drinks, to see patrons face-to-face and to see your venue as they do
- Host an open discussion with the venue manager, making people feel included and their opinions valued as well as providing you with invaluable audience feedback
- Customize your venue experience to each audience- an audience coming to see classical music may want a calm, peaceful atmosphere with attentive ushers in uniform, while a comedy audience might feel more comfortable with loud pre-show music, a relaxed atmosphere and casually dressed ushers
- Present a show outside of your venue i.e outdoor or at a community centre
- Add other elements to your offer i.e 'A Play, A Pie and a Pint' to make a show appeal to a specific audience