

A Short Guide to Copy Writing for Dance Artists

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This short guide was created by Rosie Neave of The Roost Communications and is an introduction to writing marketing copy and press releases for companies or artists who make dance productions particularly for touring. The guide is part of a package of marketing support for venues and theatre makers engaged in a dance initiative run by house theatre. This initiative aims to share more quality dance performance and grow audiences for it, across the south east and east of England. More information at housetheatre.org.uk/dance/

The advice could be used by dance-makers generally in the promotion of their work. As with any resource, you are advised to check before carrying out any of the guidance; house theatre cannot be held responsible for the misuse of material it publishes.



Marketing Copy

The importance of writing good copy to promote your work can't be overestimated. Combined with a strong lead image, its purpose is to capture the imagination of the reader to find out more and ultimately buy tickets. Writing copy doesn't need to be complicated but there are some things to bear in mind so we've developed this document to support you to write compelling, successful copy.

Consider and define your audience

Who is going to be reading this? Every word you choose should clearly reflect who your potential audience is and make it easy for them to understand your message. Don't waste their time.

It's important to clearly define your audience to yourself before you start writing copy. Be confident in who the show is for – is it for families? Children? Is it edgy and contemporary or historical and narrative? It's easy to think that your work will appeal to everyone but it is much more effective to segment your audience and target them accordingly.

Each venue will have slightly different audiences based on where they are, their local demographic, venues nearby and so on, so think about how your copy will work on tour and adapt it accordingly if needs be.

Keep it concise and snappy

While people read books, people scan marketing and web copy. Therefore, you need to write marketing copy in a way which is straightforward and easy to digest. Short, succinct paragraphs of no more than four concise sentences are more reader-friendly and will engage people more quickly.

Describe your work in a way that's relatable and accessible but try not to talk down to your audience; treat them as intelligent people. Plain speaking will allow your message to come across more strongly than technical terms and jargon.

Tour venues will often need copy of varying length, typically 50, 100 or 200 words. In each of these lengths it's imperative to include the most of them so think about how you can edit your copy, whilst retaining all its strongest points (see pg. 5 for examples).

Give your readers what they want

Readers want to know about the show and what they can expect from it. Keep things simple and write how you speak – you don't need to sound smart or use unnecessary jargon. Your readers may not (and most probably won't) have in-depth dance knowledge so avoid phrases that they may not understand. Don't be too wordy or go into unnecessary detail and avoid hyperbole. Feedback from venues that sell dance successfully is that audiences like to know what they're going to see on stage, so be truthful and don't try to appeal to a wider audience by making claims that are exaggerated or aren't genuine. This won't build long-term audiences.

If the process of creating the piece was unusual or interesting or there is a deep and resonating and personal theme you'd like to talk about, it's more suitable to write a supplementary blog post specifically about it, rather than including it in marketing copy.

When the work is more conceptual, do take care to balance the copy more towards the audience experience they will have. Though it is tempting to explain the genesis or philosophy of the piece, don't be afraid to hold back and let the work



Marketing Copy

speak for itself on stage. Remember to be clear about what the audience member will see/experience for their ticket purchase.

Don't forget to include necessary performance information

Make sure you include dates, times, how to book tickets, price, venue etc. If they can't access these vital details straight away they may not bother.

It's also important to list any accessibility features like relaxed performances, children's matinees, audio description or captioning and to think carefully about whether you need to include age guidance or trigger warnings (e.g nudity, graphic scenes, strong language sexual content etc).

Finally, consider what your objective is. Does the copy want to make you take action accordingly? (For example, if your objective is to sell tickets, would you buy one on the strength of the copy)?



General dos and don'ts

DO

Keep information succinct and to the point

Speak to touring venues to understand their audiences, especially audiences for dance. Consider who is going to be reading the copy and tailor it accordingly

Explain the show and what the audience will see. What's the story? What does it look like on stage? How might I feel?

Include only very short press or audience quotes, or quotes from the script

Make sure you have all the performance details correctly listed

Proof read everything twice before signing it off. It's good practice to ask someone else to read it too to check for mistakes. And even better, ask someone outside the arts world to read it and describe back to you what they perceive the show to be.

DON'T

Overwhelm the copy with unnecessary jargon. It's fine to practise the art of plain speaking

Make claims about the show or the experience that aren't true

Be too vague – if you want the show to be a surprise for the audience, that's fine. But make sure you give them some idea of the style of movement, mood of the piece and details that outline what they're going to see on stage. If it's too vague, you're not actually saying anything or helping them to make a decision

Be longwinded or repetitive



Examples of Marketing Copy

(based on a made-up show)

200-word marketing copy:

Hansel and Gretel

Brother and sister Hansel and Gretel can't stop squabbling! Playing at the edge of the forest one day, they're arguing so much they don't realise how far into the trees they're going and soon they are hungry and lost in the dark, mysterious wood. They meet an eccentric old woman who tempts them with tales of her wonderful cottage made from gingerbread and cake.

Despite warnings from a wise old owl who has followed their journey, the greedy children take a dangerous leap into the unknown and will need all their wits and ingenuity to escape. Can they work together to outwit the spooky witch? By casting aside their differences, Hansel and Gretel learn about the beauty of friendship and how two heads are always better than one.

Based on the classic fairy-tale, this new dance adaptation blends contemporary hip hop style with comedy and music to transport children into a vibrant world where nothing is quite as it seems.

Age recommendation: this show has been created for 4 – 7 year olds but there's nothing unsuitable for younger siblings.

Duration: 55 mins (no interval)

100-word marketing copy:

Hansel and Gretel

Hansel and Gretel can't stop squabbling! Playing at the edge of the forest one day, they are soon hungry and lost in the mysterious wood. An eccentric old woman tempts them with tales of her gingerbread cottage and the greedy children take a leap into the unknown.

Can they work together to outwit the spooky witch?

Based on the classic fairy-tale, this new dance adaptation blends contemporary hip hop style with comedy and music to transport children from the ages of 4 - 7 into a vibrant world where nothing is quite as it seems.

Duration: 55 mins (no interval)

50-word marketing copy

Hansel and Gretel

Can Hansel and Gretel work together to outwit the spooky witch? This new dance adaptation blends contemporary hip hop style with comedy and music to transport children from the ages of 4 - 7 into a vibrant world where nothing is quite as it seems.

Duration: 55 mins (no interval)

Press Releases

Press releases are information about you or your show that are sent to journalists to provide them with all the information they need to be able to write about you and / or your tour.

They should be short and punchy – journalists are sent hundreds every week so try and make yours as captivating and to the point as possible.

Journalists will often lift copy directly out of a press release and use it without editing, so consider who your target audience is. The readers of a niche magazine or website will be very different to those of a local paper so tailor your releases according to who you're sending them to. For example, readers of *Dancing Times* are more likely to have specialist dance knowledge than readers of say, the *Brighton Argus* or the *Guardian*.

Consider your angle – what is it about you / your show that's going to grab the attention of a journalist? What's the story? Is there an element you can link to a local paper? Does it use new technology? Is it telling a socially relevant story? Is it a departure from work you're known for doing? What sets it apart from other, similar shows? Think about how you can pique the journalist's interest. When you read news stories, what pulls you in?

When sending out press releases you need to get organised. Daily newspapers and websites have a relatively short turnaround so they can be sent releases a month in advance of the show you're

promoting. However, magazines – especially prominent glossy ones – work months in advance. Typically, they're working on Christmas issues in August / September so you need to plan ahead.

Make sure you include all the details the journalist will need. If they can't find them quickly, they won't bother looking. Things you must include are:

- Title of piece
- Dates of performances
- Venue
- How to buy tickets
- Who to contact for further information



Example of a Press Release

(based on a
made-up show)

[Insert your company logo here]

3 December 2019

For immediate release

Vibrant new adaptation of *Hansel and Gretel* to tour the South East in Spring 2020

A new adaptation of *Hansel and Gretel* will premiere on 14 March at Farnham Maltings, performed by XX Theatre. Exploring themes of friendship, team work and resilience, four multi-talented performers will bring an enchanting mix of dance, comedy and music to the stage. The new production has been specially produced for children between the ages of 4 – 7 years old and they'll be transported on a magical fantasy journey through a deep, dark forest into the eccentric and erratic world of the spooky, old witch.

With sets and costumes by Alex Foxton and a commissioned score by Kit Maplethorpe, the production will be a light-hearted and relatable re-imagining of the classic fairy-tale. After its premiere at Farnham Maltings, it will tour to three venues across the region with opportunities to meet the cast after all shows.

Talking about the production, director Matt Wagstaff said: "I've always thought the dynamic between Hansel and Gretel was an interesting one. At the start of this show, there's a lot of sibling rivalry and they're really not very nice to each other. However, by the end, despite some twists and turns, they've learnt the importance of working together and have realised how much they mean to each another." Ticket prices range from £7 - £12 with discounts available for groups of 8 or more.

–ENDS–

For further details and images please contact:
[Insert press contact and contact number]

Tour dates:

Venue 1

Date

Web address / Box Office number

Venue 2

Date

Web address / Box Office number

Venue 3

Date

Web address / Box Office number

Venue 4

Date

Web address / Box Office number



Example of a Press Release

(based on a
made-up show)

[Insert your company logo here]

Notes to editors:

XX Theatre:

Established in 2012, XX Theatre creates inspiring and imaginative performances children. Based in Norwich and led by Artistic Director James MacDonald, XX Theatre tours to small and mid scale venues through the UK and beyond.

It is particularly known for its larger, outdoor festival productions and was the winner of the 2015 Innovation in Theatre Award.

Production credits

Director:

Set and Costume Designer:

Composer:

Lighting Designer:

Voice Coach:

Producer:

Production Manager:

Supported by:

Arts Council England, Cockayne Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.



house theatre

house theatre was established in 2012. It is a venue network and touring initiative based in the South East of England, delivered by Farnham Maltings with support from Arts Council England and an advisory group of venue leaders, programmers and producers from the region.

house supports venues by improving the range, quality and scale of contemporary theatre presented across South East and East England. It does this by supporting venues and artists to develop audiences and by helping to create a long-term infrastructure for touring.

housetheatre.org.uk

The Roost Communications is a strategic communications consultancy championing the performing arts independent creative business.

theroostcommunications.co.uk

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