



The following bullet points summarise some of the topics and discussions that took place at the NSDF/House 'Edinburgh 2013: Start Planning Now' IdeasTap Spa session.

Deciding whether to go to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival

- Come up with 10 good reasons, 5 isn't good enough.
- Be aware that with costs increasing you are facing a massive undertaking.
- Be aware that you can get good reviews, play to not bad houses and still be £10k in debt.
- Be aware that if you have a hit, you will have worked like a dog for 2 months prior, it does not happen whilst you are up there. It's 24/7 before, during and after.
- Be prepared to be a Producer – you need to take responsibility and get stuck in, no job should be too big or small.
- Decide on where you want your Edinburgh experience to lead to. Of course it's okay to just do it and not go in to debt but you can also use it to add to your career and the lifespan of the play. Make this decision before you go to the festival and if you do want the play to have a post-festival life consider writing a business plan detailing what exactly it is that you are looking to achieve post Edinburgh over an eighteen month period.

Once you've decided on going, what next?

Budget

- Start with a budget. Can you afford to do this? If not, stop right there and then.
- Work out what you need to do to break even. What will it cost all in to stage. What can you afford to lose? Even if it's a hit doesn't necessarily equate to a financial hit.
- Make sure you budget for absolutely every element...the more detail the better the budget and the less you will miss something. And make sure you know the difference between net and gross!)
- Work out where the money's coming from to finance the budget? You need to ensure your production is financially viable. If it's not, unless of course you don't mind losing money, consider not going. This is your biggest decision between now and Xmas. After Xmas everything starts snowballing.
- Be realistic on your expectation of ticket sales...remember that you will be giving away tickets to scouts, invitees and comps to generate word of mouth particularly in the early shows.
- You will be charged ticket printing costs by the Fringe so factor that in to the budget.
- As a contingency put in 7.5% which you might be able to reduce to 5% as the festival approaches and you feel confident with the progress of the show. Do not touch it throughout the life of the production before and during Edinburgh unless you absolutely have to. The contingency is there to take up the financial shortfall if something goes wrong.

- The budget focuses your mind and helps set the timeline.
- The budget is the intelligence behind any project and drives all planning and procedure.

Timeline

- Well worth drawing up a timeline, working backwards, make it as detailed as possible – including when all decisions have to be made by and with contingent extra time (print deadlines/copy deadlines etc always take longer than you might expect particularly if there are more than two parties who need to sign anything off).
- Planning ahead puts you ahead of the game. January comes round very quickly with venue/Fringe requests for copy etc. You do not want to miss deadlines or be struggling to meet them.
- While planning your timeline, give yourself more than enough time to get each job done.

Finance Raising

- In kind costs – once the budget is created, are there any elements you can get for in kind costs? This industry can be remarkably kind to it's peers, everyone knows there's never enough money to go around. Venues exist 24/7 so approach them for rehearsal space, workshops space. This in kind support will make a massive difference to your budget.
- Train times, booking early cuts the cost – this is simply good housekeeping - you plan now so you can make savings.
- Sponsorship – an example may be contacting venues for free rehearsal space/borrowing lights/props/costumes.
- Everyone in an Edinburgh venue gets the same basic rig, find out whether other companies in the venue want stuff so you can spread the cost. Put the message out there, productions can club together on van hire etc. That's producing, making it work as best as possible for as little as possible. The venues take a load of stuff up too – ask if there's any spare truck space.

Marketing Considerations

- For a new piece of work– choose a title that everyone gets the first time you say it. Keep it short. Title it with 2 or 3 words and it will help you hugely.
- When you go into rehearsal take production shots at the earliest possibility – this helps you have an array of production shots before you get to Edinburgh so if anyone asks you for them you have them up your sleeve. Arm yourself with these marketing tools.
- Your ability to hone down what your show is about and what you want to do with it into three sentences is incredibly important. Practice describing your show in as few words as possible. You don't want to miss out on opportunity by getting tongue tied or doing the show a disservice.
- On timeline, plan you marketing campaign whether you have a marketing budget or not. You should settle on all show description permutations and images ASAP. – have 20 words 30/50/100 that really sell the piece
- Take time from now till Jan to select the shows main image. Visuals are key and lots of companies fall down on that.

- Once you've selected your image – stick with it. But to get the right image give yourself time to really think what is best. Not too esoteric but eye catching and relates to the project and crucially works printed very small as well as on a poster.
- Marketing copy – you don't have to use the maximum word limit. If you can distil it down further, think about doing that. Short, pithy copy plus a striking image will appeal to people flicking through the Ed Fringe brochure or similar publications.
- Don't overuse superlatives, just describe what it is and mention if it's new or why it's necessarily interesting. Don't just say it's good. Let a quote if you have one, sell how good it is.
- www.housetheatre.org.uk will soon feature a resources section that will contain sample contracts, sample press releases, 'how to' guides, etc.

Venues

- The wrong time slot will kill your box office. It is key in making your show a success. The type of audience dictates the right slot for you.
- The big venues will push for theatre to be in the afternoon, comedy in the evening. But be aware of what else is being programmed in your selected/other venues.
- Also know what's going in before and after you for technical considerations. Don't lose your tech time because of another show. Producers need to know this so to find it out, badger, badger, badger.
- The bigger venues will say as part of their package that their press office will help you. However remember they have huge numbers of shows to promote and if your deal has included a minimum rental guarantee the pressure isn't on them. It's on you. So make sure you go to the press office and make yourself known. Connect with them, make sure they have the correct details and that the flyers are out and in the racks and the posters are up on a wall. There is so much for the staff/venues to do, don't assume that whatever's been written down is happening.
- Also make sure the BO, FOH, Press staff see the show – if they've seen it, they can enthuse about it.
- Be really nice and supportive of the tech teams, if they like you they may give you all important support/advice when you need it.
- Get your hands dirty, help with the get in and get out – this represents a good attitude to all involved. It endears you to them.
- With regards to venues, ask people who've been before, gauge their experiences. You want the space and the atmosphere to suit the piece. A 50 seat venue creates a tough budget but if it suits the project better seriously consider it.
- Don't go into a big capacity space just because it makes the budget income look better. Don't venue choose to make the sums easier to swallow. If you can make the budget work in a smaller space – go for it.
- Also a sell-out is a sell-out whatever the venue size – it has real marketing currency.

Deals with venues

- The worst deals with any venue in the entire world are in Edinburgh. Elsewhere the BO split is usually 80/20 or 70/30 or other deals in your favour but in Edinburgh it's always around 60/40 net. The majority of venues will expect a minimum rental guarantee and 60/40 (you/them) and receive whichever is the greater. If your work is good argue against the

guarantee. The danger being if the show is quality but doesn't sell well, you might think you had a good Edinburgh experience but then owe the venue the minimum rental, which suddenly has to be found/paid. The guarantee absolves the venue of risk. They are making sure that they are safe. Argue or find a venue that genuinely believes in your work.

Rehearsal venues

- Rehearse in the same type of space as the one you'll be performing in.

Is it good to do it for a shorter period of time than 3 weeks?

- If you do this don't go for the first week as there's less audience in Edinburgh and mainly just scouts and industry then, not audiences.
- When you run a budget for a 1 week run, as opposed to a 3 week run the only real saving is accommodation (especially as most companies and performers do the festival for minimum or no wages/fees).

Invites – Scouts & Reviewers

- Do not write late July and expect people to be available, scouts' schedules are normally sorted by mid June so do your first email blast to whoever you are looking to attend/impress well in advance then give it 3 weeks before following up then follow up then another mail blast then really push in July for last few slots. This way you will know in advance who is due to come see your show. But always show respect when inviting...keep the invite covering email distilled (not too long!) and vibrant and attach a really good image/copy/info pdf or jpeg to catch the eye.
- Attend all networking events to further push tickets to your show – breakfast networking events. May not be immediate but may have currency in the future. (Have fliers in your bag whenever you go to a networking event – showing people what you are doing is always better than just explaining...visual aids work best!)

Whether to hire a Press Agent or not

- A press Agent can talk the show up and send the info out, however, if you have no existing profile or tailwind behind you they won't likely be able to overcome the challenge anymore than you will.
- You can do press releases and push for photo opportunities yourself - the Fringe Society provides a media list for producers
- It's likely that you'll also be more creative because you have the incentive.

How do you know your play is ready?

- Taking work that's not finished is as important as the budget.
- Edinburgh used to be part of the development of a piece of work. This is not the case now. You cannot get away with it. Do not expect it to develop during the run. You have to be seen ASAP and the show needs to be as good as possible. Don't take 3 or 5 performances to get it right.
- Industry types will leave a show in first 10 minutes if they don't think it's there or ready yet.
- How do you know the show is ready - get honest audience feedback, scratch nights, go to colleges, local theatres, if your rehearsals can lead into some preview shows in June then

you'll have the time to go away and hone it in July. If it's new writing always have tried it somewhere else first before Edinburgh.

- You can invite audience into the rehearsal space at a stage when you still have time to keep working on it. Get trusted feedback from people you respect – they'll point out things you may have missed. This distance can make a massive difference.
- You need to arrive in Edinburgh, knowing your show is ready and as good as it can be. You can sit back as a collective and say that it's what you were aiming for. The ambition has been realised and you believe in it. The work has been done and you've rehearsed it enough.

When should you give the company a day off?

- Typically halfway through the run but not on a Monday as it's still considered part of the weekend and could potentially be busy. Tuesday is preferable as it tends to be a dead day. Then going into Wednesday onwards it starts getting busy again.

Producing Skills

- 'Politely persistent' is a very good phrase.
- Still use the phone, don't rely on email and paper. Speaking to people one to one is still key. 'People buy People'.
- If you have a question, find someone/somewhere who's done it and ask how.

Post Edinburgh

- To go on from Edinburgh and then tour stands you in very good stead in terms of future funding. It shows you've got your hands dirty and taken on Edinburgh and used it wisely. You are narrowing the risk through demonstrating your ability to produce a good show from top to bottom.
- If you're interested in touring the show after Edinburgh 2013 be aware that this will likely take place the following year (and the best time for UK touring is Oct to Nov 2014, then Feb to May 2015). So get your bookers in knowing this is the aim and timeline – the more ambition and clarity you have when pitching the more ambitious you can be.