

Case study
Cleopatra
Northern Ballet



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Background

Northern Ballet is a powerhouse of inventive dance. We are renowned for creating inventive narrative ballets and for touring these throughout the UK and overseas reaching audiences who might otherwise not have access to world class dance.

In 2011-12 we gave 164 performances a year, over 26 weeks in 18 different towns and cities across the UK, including all the 4 UK capital cities (Edinburgh, Cardiff, London and Belfast) reaching an audience of 124,000 people.

In 2009 the Company celebrated its 40th anniversary and in October 2010 moved to a new purpose-built headquarters in central Leeds.

In September 2010 Northern Ballet launched a new brand and in February 2011 premiered a new full-length ballet Cleopatra.

Cleopatra was the only ballet we toured throughout the spring/summer 2011 season, (as opposed to the 2-3 ballets we would normally tour in a season) making it possible to try a new 'national' approach to our communications campaign.

Through funding from Sustain, the ACE programme, we were able to try new and different approaches to our communications campaign focusing on building audiences and growing box office income.

One of our business objectives was to create more on-line material and grow subscribers to our e-newsletter and social media platforms so we could engage directly with our audiences regularly and develop a relationship which would extend beyond our annual visit to their theatre.

Objectives

- To sell £832,000 of tickets (gross)
- To create an integrated communications campaign with an emphasis on new and different activity
- To take a national approach to the campaign
- To increase traffic to Northern Ballet website
- To increase numbers of subscribers to Northern Ballet's e-newsletter and social media platforms
- To raise the profile of Northern Ballet, the new brand and Cleopatra
- To maintain current audiences and reach new audiences

Target audience

- Traditional ballet audiences
- Other arts attenders
- Arts Council segmentation: Fun, fashion and friends and Dinner and a show

Process

We approached Cleopatra as a comprehensive integrated communications campaign featuring online, print and press advertising, outdoors advertising and media & PR which increased brand profile and allowed us to target a wide range of potential customers, attracting a new audience and offering value for money.

As well as traditional promotional activity we focused on 3 areas: partnerships, on-line activity and PR. We wanted to develop a campaign which appealed to peoples' lifestyle.

The campaign was split into 2 phases with 2 peaks: the world premiere in Leeds in February and performances at Sadler's Wells in London in May.

Amongst a host of other activity these were some of the key elements of the campaign:

Working with a new photographer, Jason Tozer, we created strong publicity images which would appeal to press and be eye-catching to the public.

- We launched Cleopatra at Sadler's Wells in November 2010 to attract early press attention, group bookers and potential sponsors
- We released an on-line Cleopatra trailer in 2010 and making-of documentary in early 2011
- We organised a Cleopatra themed event aimed at women's glossy magazines in partnership with Harvey Nichols in Leeds
- Our premiere dancers performed at a Vogue/Tatler event at Westfield Shopping Centre organised by Naomi Campbell
- Azendi jewellers supplied jewellery for the publicity photo-shoot, donated a prize for an on-line competition, gave out Cleopatra postcards in-store and created a series of ballet charms to raise money for the Company
- We ran online adverts through a blind network campaign as well as on national rail, BBC websites, Guardian, The Telegraph, Time Out and Evening Standard websites
- We texted 10,000 O2 members who had indicated a preference for opera and ballet with a special ticket offer
- Cleopatra featured on BBC Radio 4's Front Row; and the Radio 2 Art Show with Claudia Winkleman and received online editorial from BBC News and BBC Entertainment and Vogue magazine's blog
- With 5.5 million listeners a Classic FM co-promotion provided effective national coverage of the Cleopatra tour to a relevant ABC1 audience, through adverts, live reads, in magazine, and website activity
- We launched a premiere package in Leeds in partnership with Gaucho restaurants. The dinner/ticket package could include a 'meet the dancers' backstage experience
- First Direct included a Cleopatra competition in their e-newsletter. The Company also hosted guests at the Gaucho dinner/ticket package

We worked with Upfront TV, a celebrity booking agency, on inviting celebrities to our London press night. 19 celebrities attended.

Outcomes

- Cleopatra was the most successful opening of a new Northern Ballet production in Leeds ever and the second most attended ballet by Northern Ballet in London
- We sold £867,000 of tickets (gross), exceeding target by £35,000
- Monthly visits to our website almost doubled from 11,000 in October 2010 to 20,700 in May 2011 (monthly visits have generally been maintained at this higher level)
- We saw an increase of 5200 no. of e-newsletter subscribers, 1402 twitter followers and 1466 Facebook followers
- The Cleopatra trailer has received nearly 26,000 views
- Our new brand reached a wide and diverse audience
- Our on-line adverts received almost 4million impressions
- We achieved press coverage in, amongst others, Metro (London), The Evening Standard, The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Mail on Sunday, The Independent, The Guardian, The Sun, OK magazine, Vogue, Grazia, Woman & Home, The Lady
- International press coverage included Abu Dhabi National
- Classic FM Total coverage of Cleopatra included in print in 40,000 magazines and to 450,000 e-subscribers. The competition received 110 entrants, there was a significant increase in sign-ups to our e-newsletter
- Editorial coverage generated in excess of £2.2 million (AVE) / £6.6 (PR value) of coverage
- Celebrities attending the London press night tweeted about the event, this reached in excess of 200,000 of their followers. Overnight ticket sales exceeded the cost of the celebrity event
- Lorraine Kelly ran a quarter page feature in The Sun on the Saturday, that evening in London we had a 95% capacity audience.
- First Direct have continued and increased their association with the Company
- Press contacts established through the campaign have developed and have positively affected coverage for our new ballet The Great Gatsby

Key points for effective practice

- Investing in photography and film was key to the success of the campaign
- Constant monitoring and evaluation throughout the campaign meant that we were able to have a better understanding of which activity had the desired impact
- The O2 text messaging campaign was unsuccessful because we were unable to geo-target it so the net was spread too widely and it took place too close to the event, so people were unable to make arrangements in time or had already booked
- The celebrity event was a risk. Internally the Company was sceptical about its benefits; it was also possible that there could have been a backlash about public funding paying for celebrities

The premium package with Gaucho's was a lot of hard work which didn't really receive the return on investment. We have since worked with Harvey Nichols on a dinner/ticket package which has been highly successful. The partnership with First Direct has developed.

Conclusion

- By trying a wide range of new activity and by monitoring and evaluating this activity we have been able to make informed choices of where best to invest our resources
- Identifying partners who reflected our own brand values, and who had similar audiences to our target audiences, allowed us to reach a wide new audience with enhanced third party endorsement
- Investing time in partnerships which, although may not have had immediate impact/benefit at the time, can have long-term benefit and create unexpected results
- Partnerships are time consuming, we have learnt to step away from those which do not have the desired impact or where the partnership is not invested in equally

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