

Seminar: Audience Development - Unpacking the Baggage

Ivan Wadeson, Arts About Manchester

Having become Director of an Audience Development Agency, it did feel quite timely to look at this subject, so this is very much a personal journey.

I went for a job many years ago and I was asked this question about management: 'There's a coin and there's two sides: one is people, the other is process. Where are you, people or process or somewhere on the edge?' I don't know what I answered but I didn't get the job. It's troubled me for nearly ten years now what the answer was and thinking through this presentation I now think I know.

I'd like to start by asking how many people were at the first AMA conference in 1994 and at the 1998 conference in Edinburgh? These were two seminal events in the history of the AMA: the first conference and the other, by all accounts, the conference where arts marketing grew up.

Don't you hate it when people talk about events that you weren't at? I wasn't at either of those conferences, like most of you, but I will be talking about both of them because I think there is a theme to this presentation that is 'nothing new under the sun'. I think both of those conferences have got very important things which either we need to touch on again or which we need to learn from.

So this was my starting point:

'Audience development. I wish the phrase would disappear from the lexicon. It gets in the way. It does more harm than good.'

This was from somebody who works in audience development and it troubled me why we have such a problem with the phrase. So I'd like to do is take you through my personal journey looking at how audience development and arts marketing relate and whether we can unpack or sidestep the baggage around the phrases to enable us to do our jobs better.

At this point this quotation seemed appropriate:

"When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more or less.'"⁵

⁵ Alice Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll

So, for the purpose of this presentation, 'audience' means any visitor, attender, participant, reader and this is where I started in defining the problem – is it that we don't know what 'audience development' means? So where do you turn for answers? Obviously the internet. So I conducted a little search of the web and I went to the following sites:

- Arts Council England
- Scottish Arts Council
- Arts Council of Wales
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- Re:source
- New Audiences website
- Network
- Arts Marketing Association
- Arts About Manchester

None of them have a definition of audience development. Either the search won't find anything or you get reams and reams of documents that mention it. So I thought I might be on to something.

Again when you can't find something on the internet where do you go? Google. So, if you put 'audience development' into Google and 'I'm Feeling Lucky' where does it take you? It's Keith Diggle's audience development and arts marketing website encapsulating Keith's three books on the subject. However, that was about all I could find. Shouldn't there be more?

This led me to think about other definitions. Can we define what marketing is? And what about arts marketing? Here are two standard definitions:

'Marketing... encompasses the entire business. It is the whole business seen from the point of view of the final result, that is, from the customer's point of view. Concern and responsibility for marketing must therefore permeate all areas of the enterprise'⁶

'The means by which unfulfilled needs are identified by organisations and are converted into business opportunities thereby creating satisfaction for others and profit for them'⁷

These are two of the very early definitions that you come across in textbooks all the time. But they're slightly different. In fact there's at least three different generic types of definition.

⁶ Peter Drucker

Is it a process, a concept, a philosophy, an orientation, a function? I looked at Professor McDonald's lists in *The New Marketing*.

So where does this leave arts marketing? So, back to the man who put the words together in the first place – Keith Diggle in 1984 in the *Guide to Arts Marketing*:

'The aim of arts marketing is to bring an appropriate number of people into an appropriate form of contact with the artist and, in so doing, to arrive at the best financial outcome that is compatible with the achievement of that aim'.

Keith has modified this later, but that was the starting point. Here's a much later definition:

'Arts marketing is an integrated management process which sees mutually satisfying exchange relationships with customers as the route to achieving organisational and artistic objectives'⁸

Again you can see some differences creeping in, but generally this is arts marketing that we know and love: 'appropriate contact' becomes 'mutually satisfying exchange relationships', but it is still the same. Also the authors expand on this point: marketing also advances the artistic mission of an arts organisation:

'By integrating a marketing perspective into the artistic planning process it seeks to bring the audience into the beginning stage of the process as well as its culmination stage of performance exhibition or event'.

So, this is one of the major differences in arts marketing: it is not just 'bums on seats' or 'footfalls' but working to achieve our artistic aims. This is a major difference. We could have a whole seminar on this difference but I'd like to suggest we just step over this one and summarise the four components that makes it arts marketing:

- Not for profit
- Mixture of objectives – artistic, social and financial
- Quality of the exchange (self-actualisation – higher end of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs)
- The Product is sacrosanct (it must be shaped by the artist and the artistic team and it should be protected from market forces)

So, multiple definitions exist and there is a plurality of meanings but we generally know what we're on about when we're talking about arts marketing. So can you spot the difference? (At

⁷ Philip Kotler

this point Ivan described four examples of current work in Manchester and asked the audience to identify each one as either arts marketing; audience development; a bit of both, or neither. Delegates came up with a wide range of answers).

So, here is a room full of arts marketing and audience development professionals and we can't tell the difference. The most popular response seemed to be 'bit of both', so I wonder whether arts marketing and audience development are about similarities, not differences?

As part of this process, I went and asked some professionals. I sent a little email survey round to a group of arts professionals, some of whom were marketers who'd been working for at least ten years, some of whom were Chief Executives, and some of whom were programmers. My first question was:

'What is your personal definition of audience development, is it different from arts marketing and if so how?'

The first response was rather Humpty-Dumpty like: 'No, that assumes I think I know what you mean by arts marketing'

Here is one range of responses:

- 'It's a constituent part of arts marketing'
- 'I place audience development at the heart of arts marketing or vice versa. The entire interaction between the arts/culture and the consumer should be in the domain of, or co-ordinated by, those charged with 'marketing' or whatever term one chooses'
- 'Arts marketing and audience development should be interchangeable terms'

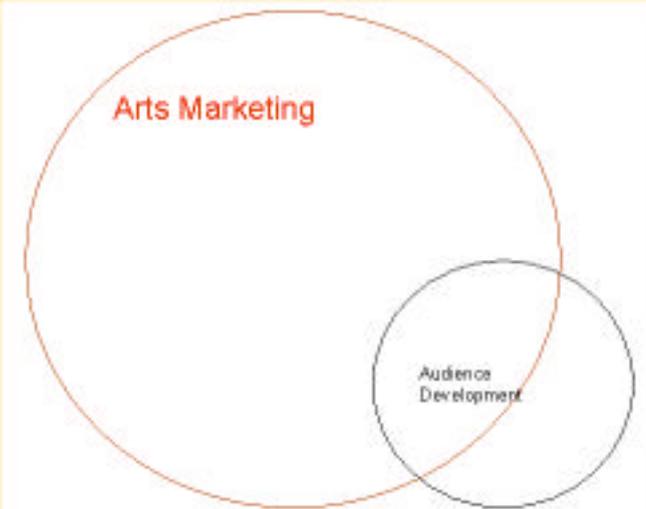
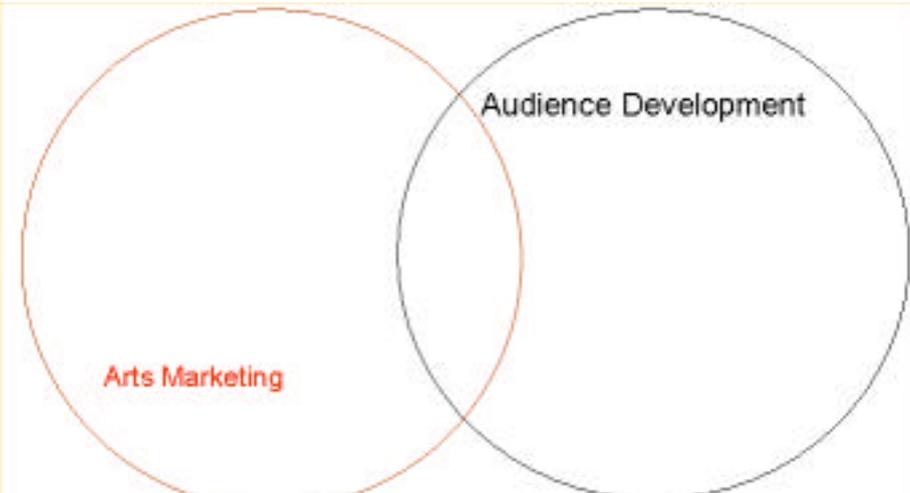
Here's another range:

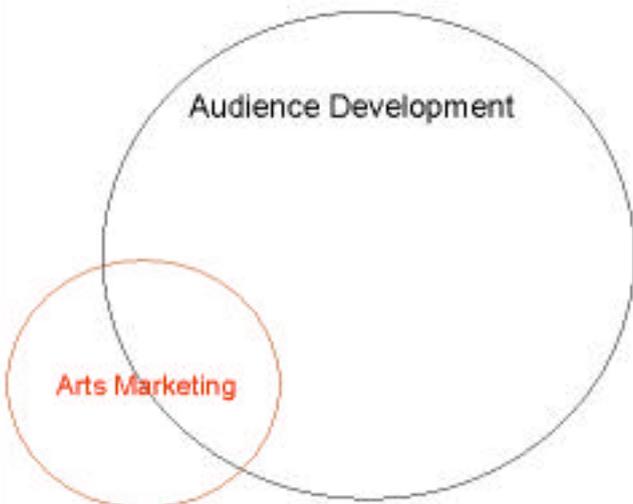
- 'Audience development is different because it's not about the mass market necessarily – more about reaching audiences through non-traditional means'
- 'Yes, different, because it is about investing in your audience and putting them at the heart of your organisation rather than simply investing in marketing tools and tactics'

As I was reading round the subject, there's some discussion about quantity versus quality and arts marketing described as a way of doing things, a means, and audience development

⁸ *Creative Arts Marketing*, Hill, O'Sullivan & O'Sullivan, 2nd edition, 2003

as a potential outcome, as the end. So, thinking about the relationship between the two, it seems to me that there are five possible scenarios for how the two might be related:

 <p>A Venn diagram with two circles. The larger, outer circle is orange and labeled "Arts Marketing". The smaller, inner circle is blue and labeled "Audience Development". The "Audience Development" circle is entirely contained within the "Arts Marketing" circle.</p>	<p>Arts marketing is dominant and subsumes audience development within it.</p>
 <p>A Venn diagram with two overlapping circles. The larger, orange circle is labeled "Arts Marketing". The smaller, blue circle is labeled "Audience Development". They overlap, but the "Audience Development" circle extends beyond the "Arts Marketing" circle.</p>	<p>Arts marketing is dominant but overlaps with audience development – i.e. there is some audience development activity that is not within arts marketing.</p>
 <p>A Venn diagram with two overlapping circles of similar size. The orange circle is labeled "Arts Marketing" and the blue circle is labeled "Audience Development". They overlap in the center, but neither is contained within the other.</p>	<p>The two are distinct but overlap, possibly equal and possibly not equal, but different.</p>

 <p>A Venn diagram consisting of two overlapping circles. The larger circle is labeled 'Audience Development' and the smaller circle is labeled 'Arts Marketing'. The two circles overlap in the bottom-left quadrant.</p>	<p>Audience development is dominant but includes some of arts marketing.</p>
 <p>A Venn diagram consisting of two concentric circles. The larger outer circle is labeled 'Audience Development' and the smaller inner circle is labeled 'Arts Marketing'. The 'Arts Marketing' circle is entirely contained within the 'Audience Development' circle.</p>	<p>Audience development subsumes arts marketing within it.</p>

Of course, despite the limited internet search, we do have definitions of audience development that exist. *The Guide to Audience Development* by Heather Maitland, updated 2000, says:

‘Audience development involves breaking down the physical, psychological and social barriers which stop people participating in or attending the arts. Artists, education workers and marketers share a belief that audience development is a planned process which enhances and broadens specific individuals’ experiences of the arts’

Heather goes on to elaborate the perspective of those three groups:

- Education workers
 - Focus on the development of the individual and the artform as a whole

- Usually involves participation although attendance at events may also be involved
- Artists
 - Tend to focus on improving audiences' understanding of their work
 - To bring more people into contact with it and ensure the audience has an understanding and appreciation of their artistic aims
- Marketers
 - Look for results that directly benefit their arts organisations
 - They aim to affect a change in the attitudes, understanding and behaviour of both existing audiences and non-attenders
 - Their projects tend to be carefully targeted at specific groups of people and have clear objectives

Here is another quote from the book:

'Arts and cultural organisations carry out audience development for different reasons. Overall, though, they see developing audiences as a way of achieving their objectives, whether these are artistic, financial, social or all three.'

This is the Arts About Manchester view, developed by my predecessors, based on The Ansoff Matrix, which is about matching existing and new markets with existing and new products:

	Existing markets	New Markets
Existing Products	1. Market Penetration	2. Market Extension
New Products	3. Product Development	4. Diversification

The Arts About Manchester view is that audience development is about all four squares of the matrix and that arts marketing is about all four squares. One can change Box 3 to talk about 'cross-over' or 'education and participation', Box 2 could be described as 'strategies for access' and Box 4 as 'strategies for inclusion'. But our view is that it is about all four boxes at the same time for both disciplines.

The first AMA conference in 1994 was called 'A symposium on audience development'. Two of the organizers were Gerri Morris and Jo Hargreaves from, then, Morris Hargreaves and this is their foreword:

'People, rather than pounds, provide a common performance indicator: more people, different types of people or more satisfied people is what we're after. So, Audience Development becomes an issue. How far is it the business of the marketing department and how far is it the concern of all departments? Is marketing a discrete function within an organisation or is it a way of thinking for the whole organisation? Where does marketing end and education begin? We have used the Product/Market Ansoff Matrix as our framework to support the Symposium's investigation of current approaches.'

At about the same time, Keith Diggle was updating his definition:

'The aim of arts marketing is to bring an appropriate number of people, *drawn from the widest possible range of social background, economic condition and age*, into an appropriate form of contact with the artist and, in so doing, to arrive at the best possible financial outcome that is compatible with the achievement of that aim.'⁹

The new addition is in italics. What Keith goes on to do, is to make the distinction between the available and the unavailable audience and how we needed to develop another string to our bow to show people how rewarding the arts can be – to change negative attitudes into positive ones.

So we've had these definitions of marketing that encompass audience development and definitions of audience development for a long time. Why is it still an issue? I went back to those professionals and asked them:

'What has changed over the last ten years?'

- 'Nothing. We have tried lots of new things and spent huge amounts of money and made no real difference because whatever we have learned is promptly forgotten when the person who learned it moved on'

⁹ *Arts Marketing*, Keith Diggle, 1994

- ‘Hot air and tantrums... probably some better marketing along the way’
- ‘I think a lot of stupid things have been done in the name of audience development. Too much short-term thinking being the biggest example.’

There are some more positive responses as well:

- ‘A resounding YES. The whole arts industry is much more professional from tip to toe... it seems we’ve travelled light years. But don’t forget there’s still a Universe to travel across.’
- ‘I think for the more progressive organisations, audience development has moved beyond the realms of work undertaken by an outreach team but it still has some way to go before it is seen as what we do daily.’

When I asked ‘Why is this an issue?’, several responses took me to the same answer:

- ‘The Labour government’s policies about access...’
- ‘With New Labour the gauntlet was thrown down: the country’s arts and heritage was to be made available to the many not just the few. This meant a major reinvestment in the arts – financially, psychologically and spiritually.’
- ‘Arts and cultural policy moved from the wings to the centre stage of economic regeneration, education and social welfare. The arts became not just something you witnessed, listened to, viewed, but they were starting to shape your lifestyle; and ‘participation’ or ‘engagement’ in the arts became the new buzz words as Labour traded on ‘cool Britannia’

Aha – a scapegoat! You might not agree with some of that but there’s a huge amount of truth in it. Let’s look at some of the evidence. This is the current Service Delivery Agreement between DCMS and the Treasury (2003-06):

- Objective 1: Increase participation in culture and sport and develop our sectors

Within this objective we have two strategic priorities:

- Enhance access to a fuller cultural and sporting life for children and young people, and give them the opportunity to develop their talents to the full
- Open up our institutions to the wider community, to promote lifelong learning and social cohesion

If you look at this in a bit more detail, under the second priority about the wider community there is a Public Service Agreement target:

'To increase significantly take-up of cultural and sporting opportunities by new users aged 20 and above from priority groups.'

There are six delivery measures and here are four of them that are relevant to our sector:

- Build on current work by the Arts Council of England targeting disabled people, black and ethnic minorities and socially excluded groups, to increase the take-up of cultural opportunities
- Increase by 8% by 2005/06 adult C2DE visitors to DCMS-sponsored national museums and galleries
- Attract a total of 500,000 visits to regional museums by new users, predominantly from social class C2DE and ethnic minorities by the end of 2005/06
- Attract a total of 100,000 visits by new users to the historic environment

That positive but plain language now has targets attached and the general feeling that I hear from the industry is that they're Specific, Measurable and Timescaled but not Achievable or Realistic.

Here is some more evidence from Policy Action Team 10, which reported in 1999. It was looking at best practice in arts, sport and leisure to engage people in poor neighbourhoods, particularly those who might feel most excluded such as disadvantaged young people and people from ethnic minorities. It was looking at how to maximize the impact on poor neighbourhoods of government spending and policies on arts, sports and leisure. This is an extract from their executive summary:

'Arts and sports bodies should acknowledge that social inclusion is part of their business. Equally, area regeneration schemes should explicitly incorporate arts and sport in neighbourhood renewal'

At the Glasgow conference in 2002, Anne Roberts and Heather Maitland presented a keynote address on the subject. These are their opening remarks on what they looked to do. They wanted to suggest that audience development is expensive, time consuming and usually doesn't work and that audience development, which is specifically designed to include the excluded, is so expensive and time-consuming that it is in danger of bankrupting the arts.

They went on to explain that:

'Some funders, especially Local Authorities, have simply added tackling social inclusion to the list of economic and artistic things they want us to achieve, like creating jobs and making ourselves less reliant on subsidy, and contributing to economic development. They want us to do all this, all at the same time. This is impossible. These goals require completely different artistic work and completely different approaches. The kind of compromise currently made by organisations that seek to achieve multiple objectives with single projects and approaches has a significant negative impact on the outcome. This places into question levels of money, staff time and energy invested in these activities.'

In some quarters this caused a bit of a furore at the time, but at the heart of what they're saying is, I think, a sound proposition: arts organisations should not take audience development money for the sake of it when it is unrealistic or unachievable or it is not part of their mission. So, is New Labour evidence-based policy making the downfall of audience development? I want to read an extract from a book *Balancing Act: 21 Strategic Dilemmas in Cultural Policy* by Francois Matarasso & Charles Landry:

'The dilemmas over culture and democracy have been complicated by the emergence of another concept of culture during the 1980s and 1990s: culturist development. In keeping with its civilising qualities, the tendency in most European countries has been to see culture as a self-justifying value connected simply to quality of life issues. A vibrant arts milieu, an attractive built environment, access to museums and libraries, high level of participation in sports and leisure activities: these have been seen as factors contributing to the overall quality of people's lives, especially in towns and cities. But during the 1980s, policy makers, artists and activists became increasingly interested in the impact of cultural investment. The value of cultural activity to social and economic vitality and to sustainable communities was recognized by landmark reports from UNESCO (*Our Creative Diversity*, 1996) and The Council of Europe (*In From the Margins*, 1997), building on research in individual countries including France and the United Kingdom. This has contributed to the emergence of the concept of culture as a tool for development. At its simplest, this has led to the use of cultural techniques to achieve non-cultural ends.'

Here is a further extract, from towards the end:

'The cultural sector cannot rely, any more, on a presumption of its worth. In future, that value will have to be monitored, tested and articulated in terms acceptable to those who are not its natural supporters, in the face of urgent competing demands on the public purse. The challenge was neatly expressed by the American curator Stephen Weil when he asked museums 'Are you really worth what you cost or are you merely worthwhile?' Recognition of the developmental role and social contribution of culture is therefore both timely and

important. It will not only enable the cultural sector to play a more central role in the lives of many millions of people, it will also help the sector itself to express its value in the context of the major social, economic and political issues of the coming century.'

So there are some big points here. Firstly, it's not just the Labour government. There has been a sea change internationally, in government, policy-making and in funding systems, with regard to the arts and culture.

We, and our predecessors, have been telling people that the arts are good for you for so long that we've been asked to prove it – hoist by our own petard. I would suggest that we are to blame, and we've had it coming for a long time.

Secondly, I would suggest, we've allowed others to define our phrase for us. We've had the definitions, the discussions, the conferences and we've had some of the tools, but the meaning has been co-opted from us. While we were arguing about 'arts marketing' or 'audience development', about 'quantity' or 'quality', someone took our phrase away and stuck some very crude targets against it. So I'd like it back, please. This was one of the arts professionals, backing up my point of view:

'In the Thatcher era the arts were backing themselves into a corner. Some arts organisations were content to be unaffordable, unintelligible, unfriendly and, for a while, then public funding bodies were happy with that.'

I think this point ignores the huge amount of good work done by so many people that doesn't fall into the category of unaffordable, unintelligible and unfriendly. However, I think this is why audience development, in a political sense, is such an issue and why it provokes such responses – because it questions at a basic level what the arts exist to do. It challenges our position in relation to society and to subsidy and forces us to justify it. Unfortunately, it does this in a crude unsophisticated top down approach that sets unrealistic, unattainable targets. And it isn't going to go away.

So what are we going to do? I'd like to suggest one very small step in a bottom up approach: let's try and unpack or sidestep the baggage. I'd like to give you a proposal towards a definition of audience development. My favourite definition of what we do is 'create and retain audiences'. It may be mundane but I think it encapsulates all we do, that 'By working with existing and new artistic offerings and matching these to existing and new audiences, arts marketing and audience development both seek to create and retain audiences.' Both disciplines work across all four boxes of the Ansoff matrix and it's what we're all about, whether it is marketing, education, learning, access or programming. This isn't definitive but a starting point, hopefully, for some common understanding. When we look at audience

development and arts marketing we're trying to meet the same aims. We may not all be equipped to work in all four boxes equally or, even, at all, but the four boxes encompass what the sector should aspire to do. So where does that leave the relationship between arts marketing and audience development? I'd suggest this:



That they are virtually overlapping. They might not 100% match but our definitions of arts marketing don't match completely. I'd like to get to point where we're synchronising closely, if not completely, these definitions. It's not arts marketing versus audience development, as it's pretty much the same thing at a macro level: audience development encompasses retention and enrichment; arts marketing encompasses access, confidence building and so on. Another analogy is back to my people/process coin dilemma – it's not one side of the coin or the other, it's two sides of the same coin. There's a response from one of the professionals that I think sums this up:

'A lot of debate seems to be semantics amongst the purists. Let's just get on and win over new audiences, participants, attenders etc. We have to accept that some people simply don't wish to get involved and no amount of coercion, government money or spin-doctoring of the figures will change that'

Here's another quotation I like and I think this explains some of the perceived differences between arts marketing and audience development and I think it might suggest a way forward for both:

'Relationship-marketing theorists go so far as to stress the need to create a relationship before exchanges can take place, rather than seeing a relationship as the result of such transactions' (Grönroos, *Management Decision*, 1994)¹⁰

¹⁰ Quoted in *Creative Arts Marketing*, Hill, O'Sullivan & O'Sullivan, 2nd edition, 2003

It is all about relationships and putting the audiences at the heart of what we do. This is a very small step in suggesting how we might reclaim audience development, and having suggested that we've had the meaning and intention of audience development taken away from us, I'd like to suggest that arts marketing hasn't been working properly. I'd like to share the following description of four scenarios where marketing is mis-interpreted and misused in organisations¹¹:

- Thrust Marketing
 - Sales becomes marketing, just about price and promotion, ignores what customers want
- Marketing Department Marketing
 - A specialist department, some improvement in practice but no innovation
 - A sort of fine tuning of the customer service function but based on existing product and customers
- Accountancy Marketing
 - Where CEOs have no direct experience of marketing: short-term returns at the expense of long-run survival
 - It replaces R&D and marketing, creates a downward spiral
- Formula Marketing
 - Control is more important than innovation
 - Stick to tried and true, a risk-averse strategy
 - Might have consumer research bias but it tells you about the past not the future

Do any of these ring any bells? I got some other responses from the professionals that backed this up:

- 'We've got lazy about using 'marketing' only to mean 'selling existing product to existing audiences'
- 'The problem with [trying to separate arts marketing and audience development] is that it has the potential to stop marketing managers from thinking about those other three boxes'

¹¹ Journal of Marketing Management, Stephen King, 1985

- ‘If it’s called something else then it might be someone else’s problem (like Education)....’

So, by narrowly interpreting, and failing to do, arts marketing, I think we’ve contributed to this issue of ‘what is audience development?’ We’ve failed to use and promote the definitions we had so they’ve been taken away from us. So, what are we going to do? Here are some small steps from an organisational level:

- Four Boxes, Not One (where possible and appropriate)
 - ‘I firmly believe that audience development for many organisations is only feasible and sustainable if they target the groups most likely to come *i.e.* middle class professionals. This just isn’t PC in the arts funding system. Most arts organisations can’t yet afford to target marginalized groups and sustain that activity and have not become effective at targeting those open to persuasion.’
- Avoid the Pitfalls (Heather Maitland’s *Guide to Audience Development* is useful here):
 - Don’t see it as a departmental function;
 - There isn’t a blueprint that works for everyone;
 - Look at the finance carefully;
 - Look at the project cycle – it should be built into what else an organisation does;
 - Look at issues around sustainability;
 - Avoid emphasis on quantity not quality.
- Be genuinely audience-focused
- Stop thinking departmentally
- Look to other sectors:
 - ‘This evolution has been slow to take place. The visual arts and museums are far better at it than the performing arts and I can’t quite pin down why this is the case. There are genuinely few, vision-led, audience focused, performing arts companies.’

- Stop re-inventing the wheel – again. The 1994 and 1998 conferences looked at all these issues so they are nothing new – we should go back to the work that has already been done.
- Seize the opportunities:
 - The sea change in thinking about culture as a development tool represents a huge opportunity and a potential source of huge amounts of new funding. It could enable us to reposition the arts in this broader definition of culture and it could allow us to have new relationships with new and different sectors of society.

The following is a summary of the most significant and challenging themes raised at the Edinburgh conference *Building the Future: How do we do it?* in 1998:

- Society, life and the world is changing rapidly, focusing on people's needs and desires, the technology that might support that and the precarious balance between work and home... These changes impose new demands and higher expectations on the arts, whatever our nature and art-form.
- The arts are not responding to these changes. We are not using our skills to harness and embrace this change even though our lives have changed. The arts will not survive, let alone thrive, if we do not start to change.
- One of the first things we could change is our attitude to all sorts of things – our definition of the arts, our audiences, our funders, our wider communities, our programme and our sense of self-worth – that we have a role in modern society.

The first of my two final points is a response from another of the professionals:

'My personal preference would be not to label work that we do as 'audience development' but to recognise the responsibilities we all have to develop audiences. In an ideal situation, arts organisations should have a range of target audiences and a range of programming options with which to target them...'

I'd like to challenge that notion of protecting the product. I don't think we should make it subject to market forces but it does need to respond to changes in society. If we really are practicing marketing shouldn't we be influencing and developing this product? Andrew McIntyre at the 2003 conference in Poole described a situation where he got a marketing/communications department to write down all the reasons why people would not go and see a particular play. They then took the list of reasons to the Artistic Director and took down all the animated responses to the concerns, honed them and used it as the copy.

Can we take that a step further? Can we look at the segments of society that we serve and don't serve? Can we do research on the perceptions of our venues and organisations by the current users and non-users and can we take all that to the directors, curators, programmers and set the challenge of coming up with work that serves their needs? If we do that I think we are doing arts marketing.

And a carrot is back to the section I read earlier:

'Recognition of the developmental role and social contribution of culture is therefore both timely and important. It will not only enable the cultural sector to play a more central role in the lives of many millions of people, it will also help the sector itself to express its value in the context of the major social, economic and political issues of the coming century.'

My final point is about 'connecting our histories'. This is a collective working in Manchester and I'd like to share their vision:

'Connecting our histories is a greater Manchester based members group consisting of professionals from museums and galleries, libraries, archives, freelance researchers, artists, audience development agencies and academics who are interested in building on knowledge about our culturally diverse collections and developing inclusive and pluralistic approaches towards our diverse local communities. Group members acknowledge that we have as much to learn from our local audiences as we have from our collections. We wish to redress the traditional Euro-centric approach to collecting, exhibitions and interpretation, and to promote a broader view of contemporary museums practice.'

These are the group's guiding principles:

'Connecting our histories is a democratic group. Each member is of equal status and has equal voice. We believe in co-operation, rather than competition, sharing models of good practice and advocating a generous and transparent approach to working with each other and our audiences, valuing and respecting the diverse skills and knowledge in our institutions and our local communities. We aim to focus on our collections, making them more relevant and representative of our collective cultures and histories, sharing information about them more widely and addressing the power balance between experts and communities in terms of access. We aim to develop new ways of reaching and consulting with our audiences in order to improve our mutual understanding. We will function collectively as advocates with peer groups, funding agencies, regional and national bodies in order to promote new approaches to diversity. We will seek to become sustainable.'

Is it arts marketing or audience development? It doesn't matter. This group has moved beyond that question as irrelevant. I hope that in ten years time we will be in a position where it doesn't matter.