



Building Relationships without Technology: Ambassador Schemes

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Ambassador Schemes:

- what they are
- where they're most effective
- what the difficulties or challenges can be
- case study examples



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A definition:

‘a community networker who spreads the word about arts and cultural events and/or represents the views of a particular target community’

(based on a definition created by the Arts Ambassadors Unit, Arts About Manchester)



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- someone who can speak personally to your potential customers
- is representative of, and trusted by, your target audience
- their personal endorsement can help overcome barriers to attendance
- whilst it happens naturally, an Ambassador scheme can encourage it and be targeted towards particular groups or communities not normally reached



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Two main models:

The Promotional Model:

The Ambassador functions as a promotional tool – they act primarily as sales representatives for the organisation

The Audience Development Model:

The Ambassador functions as a two-way bridge between the arts organisation and the audience – acting as an advocate for the arts organisation, but also for the target community



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What type of person makes a good Ambassador?

Quality is better than quantity!

- enthusiastic, outgoing people with busy social lives
- they care about the arts and your organisation
- they have time to commit - the busiest people often make the best Ambassadors
- good communicators and good listeners



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Benefits

Tangible: free tickets, special invitations, training, paid for their work

Intangible: kudos, networking and social opportunities, deeper engagement with the artform and organisation

Important to get the benefits right!



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Where are they most effective?

- helping to establish relationships with new attenders and new types of attender – think about what they are most likely to respond to
- their approach is personal, individual and persuasive
- it is a two way process and helps you to understand your audience and their needs



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What are the likely challenges or difficulties?

- time and commitment!
- resources
- the need to make changes
- lack of appropriate programming or relevant work
- looking after your Ambassadors – be clear on their role from the start
- people can end up with a relationship with the Ambassador rather than the organisation

But... the rewards can be worth it



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Case Studies

- Bradford Theatres
- Arts Exchange
- Sheffield Museums and Galleries



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Bradford Theatres – The Aim

- Alhambra Theatre, Studio Theatre and St George's Hall
- the South Asian population within the catchment area is huge
- no history of regular and consistent Asian attendance
- the aim - key organisational objective – to be more representative of the local community



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Bradford Theatres – The Methodology

- recruited two advisory groups to give us feedback and input into the process
- they became Ambassadors for the project
- the first visit was focused on a Test Drive – offering people free tickets to attend as a first step in building a relationship
- the Ambassadors helped us with research
- we supported them in acting as Ambassadors



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Bradford Theatres – The Results

- all available tickets taken up – 70 young Asian people attended a performance of Happy Days and excellent feedback
- the Ambassadors were vital in feeding into the evaluation
- Arts Exchange picked up on many of the strands of this initial work and Bradford Theatres created a new post of Development Worker, Asian Performing Arts
- But... they found it difficult to sustain the Ambassadors in the long term



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Unsuitable Girls - The Aim

Their mission:

‘ to get the word out about Unsuitable Girls, handing out leaflets and spreading the message about what the show is all about. To get this message to the people who will really like the show, but who might not hear about it elsewhere: young people, Asian communities, women’s groups, people who like a great night out, but who wouldn’t normally choose to go to the theatre’



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Unsuitable Girls - The Methodology

- co-ordinator – recruited and oversaw the work of the Ambassadors – young Asian woman with good contacts and a good understanding of the arts
- 5 – 10 paid Ambassadors in each city – their job not simply to distribute print, but to talk to people about the show
- over 10,000 leaflets distributed to bars, shops, restaurants, arts events and community groups



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Unsuitable Girls - The Results

- total audiences of around 3,000 – exceeding our target, several performances sold out
- many new attenders
- the Ambassadors made a big impact on audiences. In Bradford 33% had been influenced to attend by a recommendation



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Sheffield Galleries and Museums – The Aim and Methodology

Time Out project:

- targeted busy young working people through the workplace
- series of special events – late night opening, music, drinks, talks
- recruited 20 Ambassadors – they met on a monthly basis, input into the events and publicity, helped with print distribution and word of mouth



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Sheffield Galleries and Museums

‘it’s just another way of getting involved with the cultural scene in Sheffield and meeting people, being able to go to exhibitions and having your say’

‘it’s nice to be involved in something like this... if it’s something that you love anyway, to be that closely involved in the galleries is something that you don’t get very often’

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Sheffield Galleries and Museums

‘if it just comes with Sheffield Galleries or something, most people are just going to trash it straight away’

‘do you know, I actually remember seeing these and thinking what is it?’

‘they’ve been in the break out areas where the coffee machine is, I’ve not really taken much notice, to be honest’

‘there’s been some posters... enough to make me think I should go but not enough to make me go’

‘word of mouth is always best. If somebody tells you about something and they liked it’



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Sheffield Galleries and Museums – The Results

- very successful – over 1,300 individuals attended 16 events
- 41% were first time visitors to the galleries
- Ambassadors were key in building an understanding of visitor needs
- Ambassadors were key in persuading people to visit
- Sheffield Galleries and Museums are still using Ambassadors in other audience development projects



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In summary

- can be very effective in reaching and helping to establish relationships with new audiences, often where no other methodology is likely to work
- Ambassadors can help you to understand new types of audience and provide a communication channel
- technology has a role to play – but it must be appropriate to the needs of the audience
- don't forget we're talking about people – personal contact will always be important!