

Joanna Baker, Managing Director, Edinburgh International Festival

A Tailor Made Approach

Joanna Baker joined the festival in 1992 as marketing and public affairs director after having been head of marketing and press for Welsh National Opera and for Sadlers Wells Royal Ballet. She has been a member of the Scottish Arts Council from 2000 – 2006, chairing its Dance Committee from 2000 – 2004 and of the Scottish Office Arts and Tourism Task Force (1995-1998). She is now managing director of Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) and a board member of the British Arts Festivals Association.

A Tailor Made Approach

Joanna began by acknowledging the stimulating previous presentations and said that this session would concentrate more on the practical application of those ideas.

The EIF is celebrating its sixtieth birthday this year. It is a programmed festival, around which have grown other festivals, the Fringe Festival, Book Festival, Mela, Tattoo, Jazz etc.

Edinburgh has not always been recognised as a festival city:

‘a city with no international record for display of any kind’

Artur Schnabel, pianist, on learning of Edinburgh’s plans to stage a Festival in 1947

But ... 60 years on the festivals have become really big business.

- Over 2.5 million attendances in August
- Summer Festivals generate over £135 million for Scotland’s economy and sustain over 2,500 jobs
- Year round Festivals (including Hogmanay) generate over £200 million

Nevertheless, the festivals operate with tiny resources, so how do they continue to attract audiences in the face of increasing global competition? There are four key areas for EIF.

- Genius of place
Beautiful city and its place is integral to the success of the festivals. This was a consideration when it was set up.
- Clarity of vision and mission
”To be the most exciting, innovative and accessible Festival of the performing arts in the world, and thus promote the cultural, educational and economic well-being of the people of Edinburgh and Scotland.”



This is not an easy task, but it is the central reference point, constantly revisited and discussed, and a fixed point at the centre of a changing annual programme.

This mission has to be translated through brand and informed programming whilst understanding the audience.

Mission, Brand, Audience

The power of the brand: festivals must be special.

This festival's job is to present work which is unfamiliar and different in some way for local, national and international audiences. If it is something that easily can be seen elsewhere, or at another time of year, there's no reason to come to the Festival. The core of the Festival brand therefore is to do something different, special and unfamiliar.

Focus groups seem to support this idea, suggesting that what audiences like about the festival is that it challenges them and that change and reinvention are constants.

Selling the brand requires consistency of communication, but there is a constant practical tension between campaigns which support the overall brand, particularly in national and international markets and tactical marketing aimed at bringing in people to individual events. This pressure is particularly acute when audience targets are as broad as the EIF's.

Understanding the audience

Knowledge of the audience is difficult for a festival, as people attend at one particular point in the year, some only visit once every few years and they're not a homogenous group:

- There are the people who like opera
- The people who only like dance
- The people who live here
- And those who visit from America
- Those who come to 20 events a year

However, learning more about the audience and its behaviour can lead to more informed programming to maximise attendance and on the positive side, festivals are able to be more flexible than many arts organisations in this regard. It can use events as catalysts for audience development and adapt many of the surrounding aspects such as starting times to attract specific audience groups.

For example, research showed that opera attenders were high arts consumers generally – they are much more likely to also buy tickets for music, theatre and dance. And they book early. So although opera may be a relatively expensive art form to programme, its impact on attendances at other events in the Festival is very high.

Dance audiences on the other hand book later, and are the least likely to be adventurous with other art forms. However, dance attracts a much wider audience mix, and offers interesting audience development possibilities.

Another piece of work focused on start times of classical music concerts. This resulted in a perhaps obvious finding that different times suited different people – but this has provided useful background knowledge to increase the audience share of, for example, young working people.

The purpose of research

This kind of research is key to the way in which the EIF thinks about the festival. It's not about asking people what they want.

- Getting to know them provides ammunition to realise programming ambitions
- It's not about dictating the programme, it's about understanding how the audience behaves in order to plan smartly and maximise attendance
- It helps to identify who's not coming, so that they can also be better understood

The EIF doesn't spend much money on research, but that which is carried out, is well used – across the organisation, to inform planning as well as marketing.

Deep mining of the festival database by Baker Richards (consultants) produced all sorts of interesting analysis.

- 15% of bookers accounted for 50% of sales
- 35% of bookers accounted for 35% of sales
- 50% of bookers accounted for 15% of sales

This breakdown led to a change of perspective on the audience – not just as theatre bookers, or opera bookers, or locals or visitors, but as a much more complex mix which demanded a highly segmented and individual approach to planning and marketing.

Artform Crossover

- Segment 1 (15% who account for 50% of sales)
 - Very high cross-over
 - 10% only went to music, but 87% went to more than one artform
- Segment 2 (35% who account for 35% of sales)
 - 38% only went to music
 - 27% only to dance
 - 22% only to 'lates'
 - Highest cross-over from opera
 - High cross-over from theatre, mainly to music & dance
- Segment 3 (50% who account for 15% of sales)
 - Very low frequency, therefore little cross-over
 - Most likely to go to Dance (36%). Much less likely to go to Music
 - Dance attenders most likely only to go to Dance (88%)

Looking further at how each segment of the audience booked their tickets, 72% of Segment 1 bookers made bookings during the first few weeks after booking opened. However, 33% then booked again, at the last minute. And 13% of these key customers didn't book until the last minute ...

All this information, and much more, came from box office data analysis and is used to inform the planning of the programme, and the way it is marketed.

... and then there's the marketing ...

.. the leaflets, brochures, letters, email campaigns, websites ...

This is always done with the aim of reflecting the vision and mission of the festival, supporting the brand, persuading people to have an active experience, and making them aware of their opportunity to engage.

The bigger picture

EIF is just one of a group of festivals which make up the Edinburgh Festival experience. Each Festival makes a unique creative contribution – one which cannot be homogenised into a neat administrative unit.

In order to deal with this, Festivals Edinburgh has been established to work collaboratively on issues where a collective voice is important. Its major challenge will be to promote the Edinburgh Festival brand without diluting the personalised approaches each has developed.

Pulling these bodies together is daunting, but market sectors are already being identified where collective marketing and branding is more relevant.

There is soon to be a major research project undertaken on the strategic marketing of Edinburgh's Festivals. The work will look at ways of retaining and promoting the competitive advantage of Edinburgh's Festivals. The key will be ensuring that every aspect of the Festival experience, from the programmes of the festivals to the tourist support services to the infrastructure of the city, is looked at from the individual's perspective and is tailored accordingly.

Joanna Baker finished by playing a promotional video for EIF as an example of the way in which it brings its different activities together as one brand.