

Personally speaking

Howard Buckley looks at how to make print and design personal

As marketers we are constantly being told new ways in which to talk to our audience, how the old order has changed and that there is no such thing as a passive audience any more.

Yet, despite the changes that have occurred, our traditional methods of communicating to our audiences have remained. Brochures, leaflets and posters are the mainstay of our direct marketing methods, and with good reason. There is nothing as satisfying as seeing a healthy mailshot. However, while we have refined our targeting methods to almost scientific levels, take a look at print in many arts organisations and what is most striking is that we are still quite conservative when it comes to acknowledging our customer base. There is almost a stubborn reliance on telling our potential audiences simply what we have on rather selling an experience and using the audience themselves to achieve this.

It is as if the rules for writing arts copy were written in stone to be passed down from one generation to

the next. So, with tongue in cheek and Moses-esque gravitas, I give you . . . the Eight Commandments of the arts organisation brochure:

1. Thou shalt use nothing but show or exhibition images on your print (with the exception of the occasional 'audience' or 'young people laughing' shot). And whatever has the biggest target must go on the cover or else you will be smitten by poor sales.
2. Thou shalt use the phrases 'visually stunning', 'laughter and tears in equal measure' or some such other inane phraseology at least once in all printed material.
3. You must bore the reader to death with a lengthy description of plot or the 'work'.
4. You must use all quotes that lavish praise on the product even if it's taken from *The Ilfracombe Tribune* and you are based in Tamworth.

5. All brochures must have a welcome note from the general manager, chief executive, artistic director, curator, local councillor, etc., thanking everyone for their support and repeating what the next 20 pages contain.
6. The word 'branding' must only apply to the design of the logo.
7. All online booking and e-marketing information must be buried at the back of the brochure alongside a curiously small and in no way any use at all 'how to get here' map.
8. Staff (including the designer) should always like the printed material more than the customer.

Of course, I am being more than a little bit facetious and although you may wince at the familiarity of the above, it might be that some of the above is right for your organisation. What we do need to look at, however, is refining our thinking towards the traditional methods of communication that we employ.

First, look beyond the arts. Somewhere that has always helped me refocus my thinking is in the local supermarket. The food industry is a prime exponent of using self-projection to sell their products. Heinz is a wonderful example of this, even managing to stuff your little one with jars of their 'Mum's Own' brand,¹ taking the guilt out of feeding your child pre-prepared food by using recipes such as new mum Gillian Adamson's delicious Fruity Chicken Casserole or yummy Lentil and

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Figure 1

Vegetable Risotto from Sonia Jones. Suddenly you are not just buying food from a huge multinational corporation but from Gill and Sonia. What this shows is that essentially personalising communication is all about building trust and brand loyalty using a customer base.

This personal recommendation method is something that we have

adapted at Chichester Festival Theatre with our Community Critics² inviting members of the public along to review our shows. These reviews come from our audience; the venue isn't telling people how good a show is – our own audience is. There is a greater trust and these reviews can be used both online and in print. It enables us to start to control that

most elusive of things, word of mouth. Don't worry about bad reviews, you'll always find that even the harshest of audience reviewers melt with the prospect of their name alongside Michael Billington and a glass of house wine.

Don't be afraid of using copy that doesn't fall into traditional arts speak; many of your patrons are not experts,



Figure 2

and even they want words that will inspire them to book tickets. Figure 1 is a page from the *BROADWAY* in Barking's brochure. There is hardly any traditional show copy; it is directly talking about the experience of coming to the venue and there is only one actual show image on the spread, using posed audience shots instead. Figure 2 shows a page from the same brochure but targeted at a different audience using the same techniques. By using visual self-projection this way you are creating a comfort zone for your audience that they can relate to.

Newspapers and magazines are the most useful tool when looking to personalise your print for your audience. Ask yourself: have you regularly read magazines that are aimed at them or the national paper that they take? Once you open this

Pandora's box you will find many similarities between publications with target audiences at the opposite ends of the scale – *FHM* is not so different from *Sussex Life* if you look closely enough. One reader may be sending a mobile phone picture of their mate's head in a bin and the other a book review but it is all audience engagement that can be usefully adapted.

Finally, always remember who you are producing this material for. If you love the look of your print, but you are not representative of your audience it might be worth just popping into Tesco. ■



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1 www.tinytums.co.uk/products/baby_7_to_12_months/our_products/mums_own_recipe.aspx
2 www.cft.org.uk/interactive