CASE STUDY NO 4

BATTERSEA ARTS CENTRE – using DONATE in a live performance context

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• Ease of donating resulted in guests giving multiple times via SMS and web app
• SMS/text giving accounted for 56% of donations compared with 44% via web app BUT
• Web accounted for 73% of total raised, plus an extra 16% of value added in Gift Aid
• Large number of donors agreed to share some personal data including email address
• Donations displayed on a screen in real time sent a powerful message to donors and encouraged competitive giving between audience members

THE ORGANISATION

Since opening in 1980 in Battersea’s former Town Hall, Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) has supported theatre makers to create ground-breaking work and invite audiences to participate in the development of new theatre across the building, in London, the UK and beyond. Many of Britain’s most exciting and successful companies, from Complicité to Punchdrunk, have presented work first at BAC. It is a world-class theatre and a truly community venue, a place open to everyone and that gives back through the wide range of youth and community activities it runs.

THE CAUSE

The Homegrown Beatbox Academy is part of BAC’s successful strand of youth programmes which engage annually around 1,500 young people who live in and around Wandsworth.

‘Beatboxing uses the most primitive and basic of musical instruments - the human voice – yet is one of the world’s newest, most vibrant art forms. The members of Beatbox Academy are vocal athletes and auditory illusionists, creating multi-textural walls of noise using just their mouths and a microphone. It is like a magic trick that you can dance to.

Tom Parkinson, director of the Beatbox 2014 show Futures

Beatbox Academy has been running since 2008, founded by world-class beatboxer Shlomo. It is open to all 13- to 21-year-olds, giving them the opportunity to develop their beatbox, MC and vocal talents through weekly term-time drop-in sessions, open mic nights and through creating shows with professional musicians and artists. Over the coming year, BAC’s beatboxers are ambitious to grow the Beatbox Academy and build its profile. They want to raise £5,000, which will go directly towards:

1. Showcase – to enable them to showcase their talents at external gigs, raising Beatbox Academy’s profile within the industry and giving them the experience of performing in professional contexts
2. Training – so that they can achieve arts awards qualifications and get training as workshop leaders
3. **Next generation** – to fund a programme of workshops in schools and youth clubs in surrounding estates, enabling BAC to find and inspire the next beatboxing generation.

**THE BEATBOX ACADEMY FUNDRAISING EVENT**

A live performance by young members of the Academy showcased the energy, confidence and variety of musical skills they had developed. The target was to raise £1,500. The event was run to test the use of the DONATE platform to facilitate giving during a 90-minute live performance with 40 guests seated cabaret style, creating an intimate atmosphere. It was a non-ticketed free event and guests were primarily BAC members and friends.

**WHAT NFS & BAC DID AT THE EVENT**

The DONATE app was set up to run in the BAC venue with a screen and Wi-Fi connection. The cause was introduced by BAC and the Beatbox Academy performers shared their personal stories and encouraged guests to donate instantly to support the Academy’s future plans. Guests could give one-off donations via web app (of any amount above £3, with no upper limit) and £5 text donations via mobiles and tablet devices. NFS provided a number of dedicated web addresses and QR codes for each table. The information was also printed onto individual table cards (*below left*).

All donations were projected in real time onto a screen throughout the evening to show the overall total, number of donations and total raised per table, providing instant feedback on the success of the campaign. The screen also included the amount of Gift Aid captured. During the event guests donated via their own mobile devices and volunteers were on hand with iPads to assist in the donation process.
THE DATA

- Number of donations to date (as cause remains open): 91
- Total amount raised to date including pre- and post-event DONATE gifts: £1,318
- SMS/text giving accounted for 56% of donations compared with 44% via web app BUT...
- ...Web accounted for 73% of total raised, plus 16% of value added in terms of Gift Aid
- 87% of donors agreed to share some personal data including email address

THE ORGANISATION’S PERSPECTIVE

Interview with Kane Moore, Senior Development Manager, BAC

How is the National Funding Scheme/DONATE working for you?
Like any fundraising platform, DONATE works very well when it is used as part of a direct ask. We had initially trialled DONATE as part of our Grand Hall production Orpheus – handing out small business cards to audiences asking them to donate to our organ restoration campaign. However without being linked to a direct ask by the performing company, Little Bulb, donations were minimal, totaling only £40.

On 28 May we trialled the DONATE Events tool for our Homegrown Beatbox Academy. During the evening young people from our Beatbox Academy performed extracts from their most recent show, Futures, interspersed with the young people talking about how they got involved with BAC, the difference it has made to them and their ambitions for the future.

Guests were encouraged by the young people to give to support these ambitions and, over the cause of the evening, we raised close to £1,100 from the 40 guests present and other supporters who could not make it on the night. The event was, for us, a great success; it felt like a step change for both our producers and our young people in understanding the power of asking for direct support.

How does DONATE fit with the BAC wider fundraising strategy?
Like many arts and cultural organisations, we feel we could do more to highlight to our audiences and our visitors that we are charity and need support. DONATE is a fantastic platform for communicating our fundraising needs and highlighting parts of our activity, like the Beatbox Academy, with which our regular audiences rarely come into contact.

We want everyone at BAC to be a fundraiser – guided by our development team but free to test and develop creative ways of asking for support. We’ve spoken quite a bit with our producers (who commission productions and run our outreach projects) about how we can take an approach to fundraising that’s close in spirit to busking; DONATE and DONATE Events is a perfect conduit for doing this.

How have you marketed DONATE across your causes so far?
The Homegrown Beatbox event was marketed and described on the night as a ‘scratch’, a work-in-progress, run in collaboration between NFS and BAC.
Looking forward, do you think DONATE could be successful for your institution for other campaigns/events?
We think there is a lot of mileage in using DONATE as part of a direct ask at the end of shows, especially those coming out of our young people and family theatre strands where there is a strong ‘charitable’ purpose behind the work that audiences can respond to.

What, if any, have been the internal challenges with adopting DONATE as a tool?
The main internal challenge has been a fear, amongst our producing team, of asking their audiences for money and, on the flip side, asking their artists and outreach participants (of who they feel rightly protective) to ask audiences for support.

The Beatbox Academy event felt like the first step in overcoming this hurdle. It made a big difference to have the money raised on the evening going straight to the Beatbox Academy rather than to our general running costs; it helped our producers see the value in DONATE as a fundraising tool, amongst many, that they have at their disposal.

Do you think the DONATE digital giving platform has reinforced physical donations?
We are still waiting to see as we have only recently adopted DONATE. The Beatbox Academy has however spurred a group of our supporters to find a corporate sponsor for the project, which is testament to how clearly the fundraising needs for the programme were articulated on the night.

What risks did you perceive in Beatboxers themselves asking directly for support?
We were worried the young people would be uncomfortable asking for money. However by involving them in setting out how the funds raised would be used, we were able to bring them fully on board with making the ask. It helps that our Beatboxers are not at all shy! We were also worried about how the young people would respond if the evening was not a success.

Although we only raised £1,100 towards their first target of £1,500 on the night, the young people were incredibly empowered – they would never have thought they could go into a room and command over £1,000 in 90 minutes. At the end of the evening, they were already talking about how they could make a similar ask during their gigs over the summer and at their show in the autumn and discussing getting t-shirts printed with the text code on them!

We also revealed to the young people at the end of the event that they had been invited to perform at the Big Noize Festival over the summer and that some of the money raised would be going towards paying for rehearsals for getting them ready for it. This helped really reinforce what a difference their fundraising can have on the Beatbox Academy.

What were the key lessons learnt from running this event?
Speaking to guests, everyone really enjoyed seeing their donations coming through live – it was very powerful. There were two things guests felt could have been improved on:

1. The event was very fast moving and guests had almost not enough time to make a gift – a pause in the middle for 20 mins would have overcome this and would have, we believe, resulted in more repeat gifts
2. Although the DONATE app allows people to make donations of any size, we felt the maximum 'tickable' amount of £25 stopped guests from making gifts above this threshold. For DONATE Events to really work, it would be great if these amounts could be customized; i.e. on the evening we would have preferred to have £25 as the smallest gift amount.*

**How could the event technology be replicated or adapted to other causes at BAC?**
We are excited about adopting DONATE as part of a direct ask at the end of our family theatre and young people/school shows. Though the Beatbox event cost about £800 to mount we are interested going forward in how we can hook DONATE in to shows already programmed, at next to no additional cost. We think there is room to hold similar free performances where guests have a commitment to donate for their ticket, alongside more asks at the end of performances, where we have worked closely with the performers to devise the shape of the ask. We are interested in how we can use busking, with an encore only happening when a certain fundraising goal has been reached.

* NFS notes: This functionality was built into the DONATE platform from its inception but not yet made live. Anticipating this need has been validated by BAC’s real-world experience and this functionality will be enabled subject to further demand from the sector.

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**KEY WORDS**

- **Organisation type:** theatre
- **Location/Region:** London
- **Cause Codes:** BAC003-8
- **Cause Type:** live performance, talent development, outreach

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