CREATIVE SCENE

ARTIST@WORK:

CREATING DEMAND FROM THE ARTS THROUGH WORKING WITH LOCAL BUSINESS

STAY IN TOUCH

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INTRODUCTION

Creative Scene aims to make art part of everyday life in North Kirklees, a cluster of former textile towns including Dewsbury and Batley. As people spend most of their time in businesses and public sector organisations, through work or play, we are keen to work with them to find out how we can create an environment where people regularly engage with the arts. Our Artist@Work strand, launched in October 2014 started to explore the possibilities.

THE PROCESS

To start the process we did an open call for local businesses willing to host an artist in their organisation. 8 came forward - 2 cafes, a restaurant, a rugby club, a museum, a market, a shopping centre and a biscuit factory. Each had their own reasons for getting involved: to try and engage new customers, to create a positive work environment for their staff or simply to try something new. Together we created briefs for artists to respond to, shortlisted and interviewed. The resulting projects were wide ranging including:

- A playwright in residence at Batley Bulldogs Rugby Club;
- A digital artist working with Fox's employees to share the stories from inside the factory on the exterior of the building;
- A faux drag queen taking up residency in Bagshaw Museum, and
- A musician based in Matthew's Coffee House.

Through this process Creative Scene became the facilitator, balancing the needs of both business and artist and enabling them to take risks. Often businesses came to the process with an idea for a set outcome, usually a visual artwork. Working with a Creative Producer they were able to develop a brief that captured the core of the idea for artists to interpret:

"*We thought we knew what we wanted through this project, but having met the artists today, that's not what we want at all*". Tom Phillips, Operations Manager, Fox's

Once appointed, artists and businesses came together in a meeting facilitated by Creative Scene to further develop the project. The role for Creative Scene was to ensure that the artist has an understanding of the business's motivation, the business gives artists the space to be creative and that both are focused on finding new ways to engage people in arts activities.

The artist then took up residence in the business, meeting staff, undertaking relevant training and understanding the businesses processes. This not only serves to build trust with the business but is also a research exercise for the artist, both to inform their project and to identify other potential opportunities for developing a broader infrastructure. For example promoting local arts events at Batley Bulldogs games, running trips to events for Foxes staff and linking with groups run by customers of the café extending the network of people we are able to access through the programme.

LEARNING TO DATE

Not surprisingly the projects that have been most effective have been where we have been able to find outcomes for business that link directly to outcomes for the arts. It is perhaps most useful therefore to consider the learning in terms of these synergies:

Business Outcome: Increasing the dwell time of customers in the retail environment

Arts Outcome: To engage and promote arts activities to new people

It is perhaps not surprising that when people spend longer in a retail environment the amount they spend goes up[1]. Businesses are therefore on the lookout for activities that encourage customers to spend longer in their environment.

At the same time retail environments provide opportunities for artists to engage with people in environments they are already visiting. There is also scope for targeted audience development here by identifying the customer profile of retailers.

EXAMPLES:

Dewsbury Market: 3 artists took up residence on a stall at Dewsbury Market, working with shoppers and traders to build a pop up museum inspired by their stories and by 'hacking' products that can be purchased on the market.

In addition to increasing the dwell time at the market the project drew attention to the range of products available. Engaging customers in creative activities also provided the chance for artists to have conversations with shoppers and in this way promote other arts events that they may be interested in.

The Mill Outlet, Batley: Textile artist Cassandra Kilbride began crocheting at The Mill Shopping Outlet beside a woolly bike she had created for 2014's Tour de France. The bike provided a talking point for shoppers and as they spoke to Cassandra she engaged them in crafting to create a mural for the centre. The residency was promoted through social media:

"Cassandra's social networking efforts have most definitely brought new customers to The Mill who wouldn't normally come. [...] It has encouraged people to treat The Mill as an experience and exploit the experience economy so it's not just seen as a shop. It has definitely increased footfall and brought new faces in." – Paula Hamilton, Marketing Manager, The Mill

[1] Time is Money, Path intelligence White Paper, 2007

Business Outcome: To increase staff motivation and loyalty

Arts Outcome: To increase the profile of arts activities and build new audiences

The relationship between staff perceptions of their employer and employee motivation and loyalty has been well documented.[2] There are a number of ways that employers can create a positive working environment, amongst these are social activities and training and it is within this area that we have been working through this programme.

For us a business with a lot of staff provides opportunity for mass arts engagement and reach, especially if the reach can be extended beyond the employees themselves to business colleagues of family members.

Example

Fox's biscuit factory is the largest single site employer in Batley, most people living in the town will know someone who works there. It still has the feeling of a family friendly employer with many generations of the same family still on the factory floor. Artist David Boultbee started his residency in December and was immediately put to work handing out tins of biscuits to all 800 members of staff as they came for their Christmas Lunch. He has gone on to engage workers in conversations about their memories of the factory and working with them to present these on the exterior of the large imposing building that overlooks the town. The recognition of this often unseen work behind the factory walls has had an impact on staff:

"The staff are really enthusiastic, they are excited that people are wanting to capture memories of the past that they don't want to lose. They are relaying it in their home life and bringing stuff in." Paul Carbutt

The potential reach of the project here is vast and we are now looking to bring back an old Fox's tradition of coach trips, providing cultural outings for employees and their families, and using their employee newsletter as a means of promoting arts activities. By engaging people in groups we seek to remove some of the nervousness associated with attending an arts venue for the first time alone, raise the profile of the activities going on and provide social opportunities for Fox's staff, which in terms reaps rewards for the business in terms of staff perception of the organisation and increased motivation and loyalty.

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[2] Maslow, 1943 & **Causal Impact of Employee Work Perceptions on the Bottom Line of Organizations** Perspectives on Psychological Science July 2010 5: 378-389

Business Outcome: To access personal data in order to build a relationship with customers

Arts Outcome: To access personal data in order to build a relationship with audiences

Personal data has become currency in the 21st Century for businesses, it enables them to build stronger relationships with customers therefore increasing repeat sales. Engaging customers in arts activity and equally in conversation means that customers are more likely to give permission for their personal data to be used, particularly if this is tied in to the arts process in some way, such as an invitation to an exhibition of the resulting artwork.

Building partnerships with businesses enables us to access existing customer databases, a quick way of getting the word out to a broad range of people about arts activities going on in their area, with a business they already have a relationship with.

Example
At Aakash restaurant digital artist, Rozi Fuller, is creating caricature portraits of customers and then animating them live in the restaurant. Rozi uses free to download software so that customers can also have a go and continue their exploration after leaving the restaurant. The portraits are then displayed on screens around the restaurant building a digital gallery of customers. Customers then have the option to have their portrait emailed to them.

This last part of the process was crucial as by offering an incentive for leaving their email address it is hoped that the number of people giving permission for a continued relationship is increased. Customers are also encouraged to share their own creations through social media connecting with both Creative Scene and Aakash.

By tracking participants engagements we have identified that many continue to access arts activities either by attending events that Creative Scene have been able to promote to them or by signing up to classes where the activities have ignited a new passion.

MOVING FORWARD

The identification of these synergies has provided a useful platform from which to build the creative scene in North Kirklees;

- Engagement in cafes, restaurants and markets will continue to provide us with a street level profile in the towns with artists able to engage people in entry level activities, stimulate conversations about the arts and signpost people to other events.
- We will continue to look at the customer profiles of businesses in the vicinity to look at collaborations that make sense for customers and businesses. For example we recently worked with clothing retailer bonprix on their mother and daughter marketing campaign, inviting customers to take part and see Complicite's performance of Like Mother, Like Daughter.
- We will work with local employers to understand local people's social and leisure habits. We recently launched a survey of Fox's staff to understand where they spend their leisure time and what they would like to take part in. Results of this survey will both feed a further collaboration with Fox's and our wider programming.

- We will run a second phase of the programme which will see a more streamlined action research programme with businesses. Through this we seek to explore the potential working with businesses has for developing a new infrastructure for the arts by answering the following questions:
    - How can artists work with businesses to develop audiences for the arts?
    - Why would and how can organisations make arts part of the every day life of it's employees?
    - How can we work with businesses to raise the profile of the arts?

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CREATIVE SCENE

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