

Arts Survival Training: An AMA Podcast

Show Description:

Arts Survival Training is a podcast from the Arts Marketing Association about creating stronger, more resilient arts organizations. In each episode, you'll hear UK arts professionals weigh in on the skills and mindsets our field needs in order to survive in the face of social, political, and environmental challenges. *Arts Survival Training* is hosted, edited, and produced by Hannah Hethmon.

Episode 2: Our Environment, Our Problem

Episode Description:

In this episode we're talking about how arts organizations can be a positive force in protecting our environment. You'll hear from two arts professionals on the challenges they face in making environmentally-friendly choices and how our field can make small choices that add up for a big impact.

The voices in this episode are Alex Turton and Jake Young. These interviews were recorded at the 2019 AMA Conference: Rewire – Culture, Audiences and You.

TRANSCRIPT

Hannah (Scripted): *On July 25, only two weeks after this year's AMA conference, the Cambridge Botanical Gardens measured the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK.*

The climate is changing, and it's going to impact the UK even more than the changes already recorded here. That's not an exaggeration or up for debate. It's the official line from the government and scientists.

As citizens of earth, we're facing a century of rising temperatures and sea levels, disruptions to wildlife and agriculture, extreme weather patterns, and of course the humanitarian crises that these changes will precipitate.

And we're not ready for it. The Committee on Climate Change has warned that the UK is not prepared for the increase in heatwaves that is expected with global warming.

What about arts organizations? Are we doing everything we can to reduce carbon and limit the catastrophic consequences of climate change? Are we using our voices to raise awareness and remind the public that we have to act now. Are we using our infrastructure to develop and promote new approaches to the arts that have a positive impact on our environment?

Is your organization positively acting to fight climate change or are you contributing negatively by clinging to practices that are part of the problem?

[Theme Music Plays]

You're listening to Arts Survival Training, a podcast from the Arts Marketing Association about creating stronger, more resilient arts organizations. I'm Hannah Hethmon.

[Theme Music Ends]

In this three episode mini-series, you'll hear the voices of AMA members, collected at the 2019 AMA Conference: Rewire – Culture, Audiences and You.

In this episode we're talking about how arts organizations can be a positive force in protecting our environment. You'll hear from two arts professionals on the challenges they face in making environmentally-friendly choices and how our field can make small choices that add up for a big impact.

Alex Turton: Look around at what you're doing. Ask yourself why you're doing it. If you don't know why you're doing it, then ask the person in charge why they are doing it and if they don't know, then you should change it and do something different.

Hannah (Scripted): *Alex Turton is the marketing office at Arts Admin, an interdisciplinary arts organization based in East London.*

Alex Turton: Yeah so we as an organization encourage artists take risk and make bold statements on climate change and take action on climate change and inspire action within audiences as well. And obviously as marketers, we're the part of the organization which can generally produce a lot of stuff. And marketing can be quite wasteful. We like obviously create a huge amount of print and a lot of material. So yeah, there's a lot of work to be done for us in terms of trying to streamline that, make sure that we're being as responsible as we are with what we're putting out into the world.

Hannah: Talk to me about how you solve those challenges. What are you doing to make your organization and the world more sustainable and making sure that your organization and the arts and the world is around in a few years?

Alex Turton: So definitely like a large part of that is having conversations with other organizations and having conversations with artists. So a lot our producing work, we try to embed that conversation around waste carbon footprint, energy consumption at very early stages within artist projects. And then as a marketing team, we have recently done a big audit of all of our print and what we're producing. And we have managed to reduce that by about 70%. So we've managed to reduce that right down and also kind of be much more streamlined and targeted in our marketing at the same time. And our budget for digital has vastly increased our budget for print and that kind of media has decreased a lot in the last few years.

Hannah: So I'm going to be a little bit of a devil's advocate and say, okay, so you're not printing as much. In 10 years? Will that have made a huge impact?

Alex: Obviously it's what, that's one kind of small microcosm of what we're doing as an organization, but I think that leading by example and having those conversations publicly with other people can actually yeah, there's power in numbers. If you can kind of leverage print companies to say, okay, what are the more sustainable solutions to printing? Can we use based inks? Can we use recycled materials? Like, if all of us are kind of pushing suppliers for those kinds of things that then becomes a priority for them. And by kind of demanding those things, you can sort of slowly try to shift the goalposts a bit and move things forward. It is a small thing. But I think as part of the bigger picture for the sector as a whole certainly with kind of key funders, I know that it's something that they are becoming more and more aware of certainly in the last three years. And certainly with things like Extinction Rebellion earlier this year, it seems to be a really, really urgent conversation for lots of people now, which is a brilliant thing.

Hannah: What do you think arts organizations should be focusing on? What...how should that conversation happen in these organizations?

Alex: I think a lot of it is to do with just getting internal buy in within the organization. So obviously having policies in place, but also just at the very early stages of conversations between artists and producers, but also within my own role within marketing, making sure that that's always kind of on the agenda at the early stages so that you can kind of foresee where you might be producing stuff or using energy or flying or whatever it may be.

If you can kind of identify those things really, really early on in the pipeline, then you can kind of start to mitigate those things later on by having the conversations early.

Hannah: Yeah, making it part of the conversation rather than an afterthought.

Alex: Yeah. So not just, yeah, it's not a kind of bolt on at the end. I think that a lot of questions around the...the theme of this conference is also wellbeing, but a lot of those things kind of are an afterthought and at the end everyone panics and goes, oh, well we're going to be reporting on this week. We need to prove that we're doing these things. Trying to do that retrospectively doesn't work and it doesn't actually shift the culture within your organization, I think.

Hannah: Yeah. What would you say to arts organizations that are like, yeah, we want to be more sustainable. We know climate change is real and it's important, but we have a small budget and we have to focus on fulfilling our mission, doing art, making art happen, whatever it is....we just don't have the capacity to focus on this issue.

Alex: I totally get that. I get the position that everyone's in, in terms of standstill funding in terms of resources becoming much more and more limited for artists, particularly in terms of space and time. What I would say is that once, once you start to think about those things, actually it actually can make budgeting easier. It can streamline things in a way that's actually quite simplifying in a positive way.

So for example, a large part of our budget was print. So we've actually managed to reduce costs by doing this, by getting through this process. I think the difficult thing is time. So I think just having conversations with other people in the sector, we work very closely with Julie's Bicycle who are a sector support organization and they part of their kind of role within the sector is to help arts organizations and artists who operate in a more sustainable way. So having conversations with them, having conversations with the Bush Theater do amazing work around environment. There are lots of really great people in the sector who have amazing ideas. And I think just having those conversations is really, really important.

Hannah: And I guess having those conversations allows us to keep each other accountable, right?

Alex: Yeah, exactly. And kind of check each other and also, yeah, be inspired by each other, but also kind of see, okay, they're doing this. Is there a way that we could do that better?

Hannah: Unlimited budget, unlimited buy-in. What would you like to see happen in your organization or in the field? What would be the vision if you could be let loose?

Alex: So I think it would be amazing, as a kind of individual organization, I think it'd be amazing if we could be carbon neutral. I think that that is something that we are working towards. It's obviously a huge, huge process to get there. But I think that's what we should be aspiring to if we're not going to damage the planet any further than it already is damaged, which you might argue is beyond repair at this point. As a sector, I suppose the aim is that with many things, so with lots of social political issues, the aim is that actually we don't need to be as artists or as organizations making work about the subject anymore because it's so embedded that actually it's just part of our practice and we're just, we're exploring other other pressing issues in a sustainable way because that conversation is so embedded and we've got to the point where we no longer need to lobby through our art or through our creative practices to get there.

Hannah: Working with the environment, working with issues of climate change is really overwhelming. Like oh, maybe the world is going to end and we're all going to die and, or we'll watch people dying. And we're already watching a lot of trauma happening, a lot of people suffering because of climate change. And it can be really hard to stay connected and also stay grounded.

Alex: Yeah, I mean in terms of kind of wrestling with such, such kind of horrible and extreme subject matter, I think that it can be very, very hard to relate and a lot of people kind of think quite conceptually about it or think about the ice cap melting or have those kinds of like very kind of media-propagated images in their head. I think the privilege of working in the arts is that artists are telling human stories and if a human is telling a story about their own experience, be that being displaced by climate change be that to do with air pollution, whatever it may be. If there's a human telling you a story, it's much easier to process and digest that and actually take urgent action in response to that. We're quite privileged to be able to listen to that human story in the arts. And I think just making sure you're making sure you're listening and listening actively is really important.

As with any kind of subject matter which is troubling, it's important to be able to, to reflect, digest, but also have space away from those things. How do I do that? That's a good question. I think humor is a really important tool in that respect within work teams, having a sense of knowing the seriousness of the conversations that you're having and the work that you're doing, but also being able to kind of hold a space which allows for lightheartedness, allows for humor and allows you to kind of see positives in situations as well. I think that's really important. Yeah. I think, yeah, humor is is the best medicine for that.

[Transition Music Plays]

Jake Young: Think twice. Before you do something and you're gonna claim that you're doing it with a sustainability hat on. Look at both sides of the story. It's not necessarily true that, for example, the recycled thing is better from the renewably sourced thing. Just take like 10 minutes to, to do some research.

My name is Jake, Jake Young. I'm the design manager at the AMA. I also work as a freelance designer for about half of my week. At the AMA I'm responsible for all of our print production sort of maintaining our brand and sourcing all of our materials. So for a conference like this everything physical that you see has probably come from my desk.

There are a ton of small things that we can do as an organization and that any organization can do, but I think the main sort of challenge is not so much a barrier, but it's to be aware of kind of greenwash. There's a lot of things that you can do that are kind of just superficial aren't actually deeply sustainable. Such as...I don't want to attack any specific initiative, but, you know, at the moment in the media, there's a lot of a lot of emphasis on things like plastic straws and getting rid of plastic straws and well of course that is a really important thing and that's something that an organization can implement, it's really important to try and...

Hannah: It's kind of a token, right?

Jake: Yeah. It can be seen as a token. I mean, I don't, I don't want to like say that it's not valid to do that because it absolutely is. And it's something that is really easy to implement. But doing that isn't, you can't just do that and then stand up and congratulate yourself and be like, we're sustainable now. It does go a lot deeper than that.

I'm sure a lot of people listening to this will be familiar with sourcing print design and think, okay, let's get a recycled paper. But if you start digging into doing some research, that recycled paper isn't necessarily better than a paper, a new paper that sourced from a sustainable source.

Cause if you take a little deeper, you're looking to the trees that have been planted specifically for that paper and the carbon they've sequestered from the environment is now locked up in your piece of print, which can then go into the recycling chain, which does need to be replenished if you want to keep getting recycled paper, you can only be recycled so many times. Yeah, I just encourage anybody listening to really do some, do some research and make sure it's not so tokenistic gesture that they're making because I think people are starting to see through those things.

So I've said, you know, getting rid of plastic straws could be a tokenistic gesture, but of course that is laudable for an organization to do. At this year's conference at the AMA, I know our events team have tried to get rid of all disposable cups and encourage people to bring their own bottles. All of the print that I source make sure is from FSC-certified sources and reducing the amount of lamination that we use on our printed materials because those are very tricky to recycle. It's the same problem with coffee cups that we hear about every day in the news. Once you spray some nice soft touch laminate onto it, it becomes really hard to dispose of.

I suppose one of the big things for conferenceis Danny talking to you? Danny, the AMA events head of events? No. I know that each year she tries to arrange kind of travel deals for our delegates to reduce reliance on cars. So all of these things kind of add up to that. They're all quite small things, but we try and make sure whereas environmentally sustainable as possible.

Hannah: Okay. dream scenario, no budget constraints, no naysayers, what do you, what would you like the AMA and the field to be doing? To be more environmentally sustainable, to be more sustainable as organizations and to make your communities and you know, the country and the world more sustainable?

Jake: I think that despite the fact that sustainability and environmental issues are taking up a bit more of the sort of the conversation in the media and beyond... despite that, I still think education is the key thing. All of these arts organizations have a fantastic platform. I'm sure a lot of them are already, you know, promoting the good message. But I think the more of that, the better, the more we can, the more we can educate and the more the AMA can help our members understand that that sort of depth, that depth of research that needs to go into environmental issues to really understand it. A bit of green astroturf on your innocent smoothie fridge, something that they did a few years ago, it looks great and makes you think, oh, that's nice...fields and cows, but it's made of plastic. That's a classic example of greenwash. So yeah, education, education, education....but that is key. That is key.

Hannah: I mean to follow up on that, do you think organizations, arts organizations, the AMA and its members have a responsibility to take a stand on climate change and to make bold statements about its reality and the necessity of doing something now?

Jake: Absolutely. I think they do. Every individual that understands or is concerned about climate change... you know, the louder we shout, the less the naysayers can be heard. So you know, if your organization has reach and has people listening, definitely shout about what you're doing. It's not, it's not about preaching to people, but it's about saying we're doing this because we believe in this. And I think the louder you shout about it and the more people will get onboard.

[Outro Music Plays]

Hannah (Scripted) *Thanks for listening to Arts Survival Training, a podcast from the Arts Marketing Association. For more resources and tools to help you make better connections with your audiences and achieve more impact in your work, visit the AMA website at [dash m dash a.co.uk](http://dash.mdash.a.co.uk) and follow the AMA on Twitter at [@AMAdigital](https://twitter.com/AMAdigital). Also check out the AMA's free resource website, Culture Hive, that's culturehive.co.uk AMA members get training, exclusive resources, and opportunities to network with other arts marketing professionals. Join today by visiting the AMA website. Again, that's [dash m dash a.co.uk](http://dash.mdash.a.co.uk).*

This episode was written, edited, and produced by Hannah Hethmon.

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