

Case study



A model for sustainable arts marketing in the education sector



Photo: Windmill Theatre, Adelaide, Australia

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Windmill Theatre is a not-for-profit performing arts company that creates and presents unique and contemporary theatre shows inspired by the vibrancy, modern sophistication and inventiveness of young people, and showcases these works to an ever-increasing national and international audience.

Windmill strongly believes that capturing the imaginations of young people early in their development helps to establish a life-long love of the arts. It is also one of the primary ways young people learn about life, actions and consequences, customs and beliefs, and about themselves and others. This belief is embedded in our holistic approach to arts education.

Since Windmill's inception in 2002, it has implemented and evolved its award-winning **Arts Community and Education Program** based on a strong commitment of linking professional theatre making with student learning. This comprehensive program provides interaction with our works, using educators as the facilitators of a direct dialogue between artists and young audiences. Projects include Artists in Residence (AIR) programs, participatory workshops, university-based research projects and a Schools' Education Program targeted wholly at the Australian education sector.



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Objectives

Our **Arts Community and Education Program** broadly aims to:

- Position Windmill Theatre as the company of first choice for children and families attending quality live theatre.
- Communicate the value Windmill can offer as an authentic learning space alongside traditional performing arts programs.
- Provide teachers with comprehensive educational tools to provide sound learning outcomes for their students.
- Be a viable source of professional learning for teachers.
- Encourage a view that a trip to the theatre can be a holistic experience for adults and children.
- Contribute to a sustainable, organisational-wide audience development model of engagement with young audiences.

Target audiences include:

- Teachers
- Pre-Service Education Students
- Families

Process

At the commencement of each year, we undertake a methodical approach to planning. We hold a series of focus groups with our target audience, analyse key marketing trends and technologies, and formulate comprehensive plans based on a wide variety of marketing channels and learnings from previous projects.

The marketing of our Schools Education program (a central offering of our wider Arts Community and Education Program) is multifaceted in its approach, and involves the following activities:

Development

1. Seek out contacts of arts-orientated teachers in all schools beyond the nominated “drama” contacts.
2. Systematically invite teachers to sign up for the Windmill distribution list to ensure they receive regular communications

Deliverables

3. Provide a quarterly Education newsletter that gives a broad range of information to educators – productions, curriculum material, wider sector news, events and special offers.
4. Provide teacher learning notes that link the themes and ideas of each production to the relevant curriculum frameworks.
5. Provide unique professional learning workshops that give educators access to the creative process of productions, attendance of which contributes to their own professional learning requirements.
6. Provides complimentary tickets to targeted schools (socio-economic and geographically disadvantaged; arts poor) as part of an established equity program.
7. Invite pre-service education students to participate in post-performance workshops on a voluntary basis, allowing them to hone learnt skills in a supportive environment.
8. Deliver well-resourced free post-performance theatre education workshops following select productions.

Outcomes

- **Teachers:** receive free, arts-rich learning resources that facilitate in-depth tailored learning programs.
- **Pre-service students:** receive an authentic teaching experience in a supportive environment and a certificate of participation for their curriculum vitae.
- **Families:** benefit from a deeper engagement with the performance via attendance of post-performance workshops. These facilitate dialogue between adult and child and give space to create a tangible memory object for children and the adults with them.
- **Organisation:** benefits from a sustainable audience development model, whereby return ticket buyers grow into a loyal audience base

Key points for effective practice

- Establish ongoing relationships with teachers and educators.
- Ensure key contacts are kept updated in a centrally-located resource/database accessible by all staff.
- Ensure communication is regular and in a format compatible to educators resources; ie confirm preferred communication channel – such as electronic, hard copy or web-based.
- Invest in quality educational resources for educators
- Invest in core arts education staff and encourage professional development, involvement in industry committees, etc.
- Provide opportunities for educators to “get hands on” with the project; ie offer artistic briefings with the creators of the work.
- Establish a relationship with the School of Education at local universities to leverage volunteer pre-service education students for program deliverables.
- Invest in the professional profile of key education personnel; ie attending conferences, network meetings, etc.
- Assume limited funding in the delivery of programs – develop reciprocal strategies with other like-minded organisations; ie the Windmill Arts Education Manager delivers drama workshops to pre-service teachers, thereby gaining access to workshop volunteers.

Risks

- Departure of key personnel can leave a void.
- Cost pressure on families means they have to prioritise spending – more pressure on the Equity Program.
- Changing methods of communication – social media takes more effort/time.

Conclusions and recommendations

The success of this program relies upon:

- A solid communications strategy, with a personalised approach; ie a qualified educator talking to other educators is crucial.
- A quality product/work/performance to market.
- Strong relationships within the education sector.
- Experienced staff with a robust understanding of the arts education environment.
- An established profile with pre-service education students.
- A high level of engagement with the education and arts sector, which aids profile and respect.
- A demonstrable commitment to social justice and arts education.

Additional information

<http://windmill.org.au/educate>