

ADUK resource sheet



Panning for Gold - a guide to collecting valuable audience information (in ticketed organisations)

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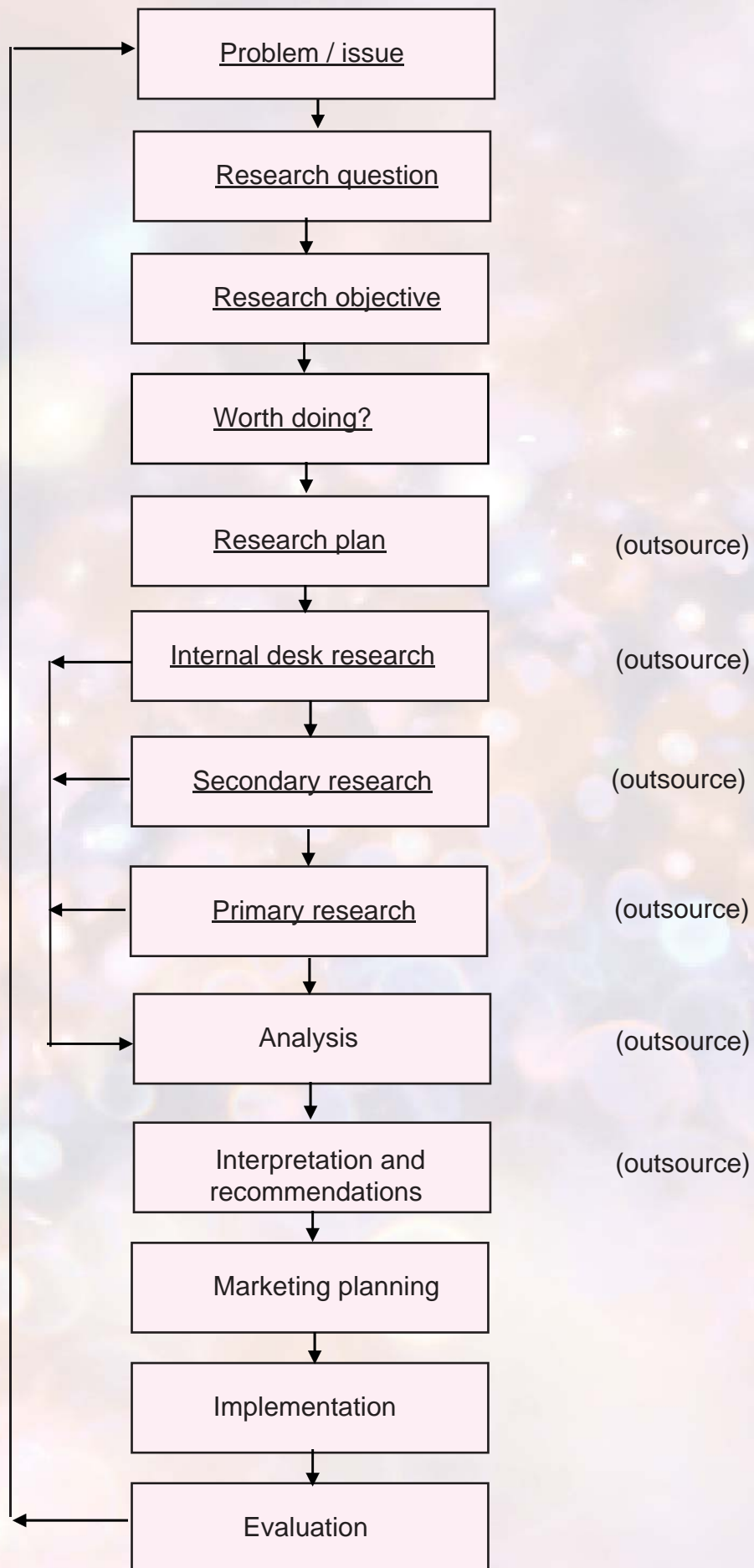
Although it's generally acknowledged within the field of arts marketing that research and data analysis should be central to marketing planning, it's often difficult to know where to start. This guide takes you through the research process step-by-step and demystifies some jargon along the way.

The flowchart below provides a framework to get you started. Click on each link to skip straight to the relevant section of the guide, although if you have time, it would be more useful to read through each section in order.

This guide has been developed for ticketed organisations. If you are interested in gathering information on visitors in non-ticketed organisations, click here for *Diving For Pearls*.

The guide primarily concentrates on the planning and data gathering part of the process. If you have already collected audience information and are more interested in analysing and interpreting it, then Hot Spots and Ice Blocks (coming to the website in autumn 2007) might be more useful for you.

The research process



What is the problem/issue?

Identifying the problem or issue is the very first step of the research process. Often, organisations don't realise there is a problem or, if they do, they try to implement a solution without equipping themselves with the information they need to help them make informed decisions. Let's take an example of an issue that is prevalent within many arts organisations:

There are lots of people on your database that have only attended once.

Research question

The purpose of research is to answer a question, or series of questions. In the case of this example the question is quite straightforward:

Why are first-time attenders not returning? And what can you do about it?

Research objective

However, in order to formulate a research plan, you need to transform your slightly vague question into a clear research objective. And like all objectives, it needs to be SMART

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Reasoned
- Time-bounded

Your objective, then, might look something like this:

By the end of the financial year, to discover the proportion of first time attenders who have not returned to x Concert Hall within a three-year time period, the reasons they do not re-attend, and the recommended way forward for x Concert Hall to increase repeat attendance among this group. The value of the expected repeat attendance must have paid for the research, plus any resulting campaigns, within 3 years.

Worth doing?

Now that you have a very specific objective, you are in a good position to determine whether or not is it worth embarking on this piece of research.

Can you afford the time?

Conducting research can be very labour intensive. Even if you decide to outsource, there is a good deal of liaison and management required. If you're conducting the research in-house, it can have serious implications for your workload. It's better to acknowledge this from the outset than to end up with a box of questionnaires under your desk that never get analysed, or an Area Profile Report that you can't even remember ordering. For more on this, go to *Commissioning Market Research* by Liz Hill.

Can you afford the money?

Get quotes from audience development agencies and/or consultants and/or freelancers (click [here](#) for approximate costs). If you are conducting the research in-house, consider costs of printing questionnaires, surveying costs, ordering research reports etc.

Will it change anything anyway?

If you do embark on this project, will you have the time and/or the inclination to implement a campaign to re-engage these potentially high maintenance customers? A common pitfall in conducting research is to only consider the time involved in gathering together all the information.

Don't forget that you need to allow for actually doing something with the results, so save some time and energy for this crucial part of the process!

If it is not you, but somebody else in the organisation that will have responsibility for acting on the research findings, how open will they be to embracing your recommendations? If your manager or director will be resistant to changing how things are done, be honest with yourself about whether or not this research is a good use of your time.

If it does change, will it make you your money back, (or fulfil another organisational objective)?

Will the benefits of the insight you have gained be greater than the cost of obtaining it?

In the case of the example, do some calculations based on how many customers you are aiming to re-engage, and the potential value of each of them over the three-year time-frame.

Market research plan

If you decide to go ahead, you will need to develop a research plan. This should incorporate the following elements:

Budget

This will be determined largely by whether or not you outsource.

Timescale

This should have two elements:

1. A timescale for the research project itself.
2. A timescale for the production of an action plan driven by the research findings. A month to digest the results and formulate a plan should be ample. Beyond this, there is a risk that you will lose momentum and the research report will find its way onto a shelf – possibly forever.

Internal consultation/PR

It is essential to take a consultative approach, right the way through the hierarchy of the organisation. Research is not considered very exciting by most, and the best way of winning your colleagues over is by involving them from the start. For further information on generating internal support for your research project click on *Diving for Pearls*.

Dissemination of results and decision-making

Ensure that the research results are assimilated into the organisation, with clear areas of responsibility noted.

Aim for continuous research

Putting together a research plan suggests that conducting research is a Big Project, (with a capital B and a capital P), something that you might do every year or so.

In fact, what you should be aiming for is knowledge-based decision-making. Data analysis and research should be part of the everyday culture of your organisation, informing your planning, tactics and control mechanisms.

Nuts and Bolts: the tools that are available to you

Some definitions:

Secondary research

Data neither collected by the user or specifically for the user but is relevant to their information needs

- Internal (also known as desk research)

Internal secondary data is information that already exists inside the organisation, often gathered by another department. Box office data is a prime example of this.

- External

External secondary data is gathered by a third party outside of your organisation.

Examples might be data from another venue, (benchmarking, click [here](#) for more), or an arts council report.

Primary Research

New, specific information that you collect for your own needs.

- Quantitative

Usually a survey. Deals in facts and figures. Large samples. Results are often provided as statistics in percentages (e.g. 25% of our audience comes from the Shrewsbury postcode area)

- Qualitative

More concerned with attitudes, opinions and preferences. Smaller samples but gives a much deeper insight into how people think or behave (e.g. why might they choose my venue over one closer to where they live?).

Doing things in the right order

One of the off-putting things about embarking on research is not knowing where to start. However, there's a fairly simple order of priority.

Start with internal desk research. The purpose of research is to fill an information gap. And you don't really know what information gaps you have until you have exhausted the data that's already available to you.

External secondary research, being considerably easier and cheaper than gathering primary data from scratch, is next.

Finally, when you know exactly what pieces of information you are still missing, look at conducting primary research.

Secondary research

Internal Secondary (Desk) Research

Box office

For ticketed organisations, the box office is really the main internal desk research tool, but one that's often under-exploited.

For example, think of instances where your organisation has decided to discount a show that's selling poorly, without using box office data to determine whether or not that's a good idea.

There are many tactical and strategic decisions taken regularly in arts organisations, completely independent of the knowledge needed to inform them. Next time you find yourself making a knee-jerk decision, try to find half an hour to equip yourself with some information that will set you in the right direction.

For more advice on exploring the treasure hiding in your box office, click:
Guide to Interpreting Audience Data

And for guidance on using that data for effective segmentation and direct mail, click:
Profiling and Segmenting Audiences/Visitors.

If you are considering changing your box office system, click:
Guide to Selecting a Ticketing System

If you are a receiving venue, or a touring company, also bear in mind data ownership issues. *Click Data Ownership Case Studies*

Other internal sources

Conduct an internal audit to unearth other useful information that may help answer your research question. This may include:

- Previous research (if any has been conducted)
- Funding applications
- Business plans
- Annual accounts
- Information held by other departments, particularly development and education.

External secondary research

There is a wealth of information about audiences and potential audiences that can be accessed free of charge, or at a surprisingly minimal cost, from organisations such as the arts councils and local audience development agencies, and on websites like the AMA, New Audiences and Office for National Statistics.

For a fuller overview of the secondary data sources available, it is recommended that you read the following:

Learning More About Your Catchment Area – a Brief Introduction to Area Profile Reports and

Audience Intelligence – A Guide to Desk Researching Audiences and Visitor Data

Some of the main external secondary resources are:

(Target Group Index) TGI

- Conducted annually by BRMB for a number of different clients.
- Sample of 25,000 across whole of the UK.
- Every year Arts Council England (ACE) 'buys' three questions about arts attendance.
- Gives a wealth of information about attendance behaviour, including crossover between different art forms.
- Broken down by different geo-demographic variables such as gender, age, social grade and geographic area.
- Also broken down by lifestyle variables such as newspaper readership.
- Available for funded clients of any of the arts councils or venues that receive work by funded clients.

- Good for a general overview, but regional sub-sample sizes are quite small, and it is based on people's perceived attendance habits, as opposed to their actual attendance habits (i.e they might think that they attend arts events more frequently than they do).

Area Profile Reports

- Available through Arts Councils (excluding Northern Ireland).
- Uses Census information, ACORN (see below) and Target Group Index (TGI).
- Provides demographic and lifestyle information for any catchment area in Great Britain (excluding NI).
- This can be determined by the client – e.g. radius in miles, drivetime or Local Authority boundary.
- Most usefully, it gives propensity to attend the arts.
- Broken down by postcode sector (e.g. CF11 7), and compared against the average, to help identify areas of high potential attendance
- Can be cross-referenced against an organisation's own box office data to highlight areas where it is under-achieving.
- Free or very inexpensive, depending on the location of the organisation.
- Click *Area Profile Reports* for more information

ACORN/MOSAIC

- Two different commercial profiling tools, fulfilling essentially the same function, which is to analyse social factors and buying behaviour to build a picture of UK consumers.
- Many data sources are used, including 2001 Census, loyalty cards, store cards, credit cards, completed questionnaires, credit checks and competition entries.
- Although the data sources are made anonymous, the postcode is retained. Therefore every full postcode (e.g. CF11 7AA) within the UK can be profiled and an ACORN or MOSAIC 'type' attributed to it.
- Each type (with names such as Skilled Workers, Semis and Terraces (ACORN) and Golden Empty Nesters (MOSAIC)), has its own comprehensive set of characteristics, including social background, buying preferences, life-stage and interests.
- You can have your database of bookers profiled in order to gain an in-depth understanding of all aspect of your customers' lifestyles. A number of audience development agencies offer this service.
- Even better, the database can be imported back into your system with the profiles attached, offering almost limitless opportunities for segmentation. Exactly who are your musicals audience? Previously, your knowledge of them probably wouldn't have extended beyond their attendance habits with you – what else they liked seeing, whether they brought their children, etc. Now you can know everything, from what charities they support to what magazines they read. This has benefits in terms of informing your direct mail, identifying cross-promotional opportunities, and helping to build a picture of other potential attenders.
- Click *Audience Intelligence - a guide to desk researching audiences and visitor data* for more information

Benchmarking

Benchmarking against comparable organisations is an easy way to get immediately useful and relevant contextual information. For more information click on *Guide to Benchmarking With Other Organisations*.

Primary research

Quantitative research

Quantitative research is dealt with comprehensively in these resources: *Identifying the Pearls* and *Stringing the Pearls Together*. Although written for non-ticketed organisations, the principals remain the same and it is recommended that you refer to them.

These resources advocate the use of face-to-face surveying and, although ticketed organisations have a database to mail or email, ideally you should aim for face-to-face surveying where possible. When it is conducted by fully trained and briefed interviewers, it is the surest (although not fail-safe) method of achieving a random sample, rather than a self-selecting one. Click *here for pros and cons* of using this and other methods of surveying.

Some rules whatever methodology you use

- Make sure that you have exhausted Desk and Secondary research opportunities before you embark.
- Have a clear research objective; otherwise your questionnaire will lack focus and you'll have lots of disparate results with no idea what to do with them.
- Establish who the results will be presented to, and how it will affect their decision-making.
- Random sample
- Consult and brief everybody who will be involved really carefully. There's nothing worse than a poorly executed survey, both in terms of the results you will get, and also how it reflects on your organization.
- For face-to-face interviews, make sure interviewers are well dressed and have a badge.
- Operate to the code of conduct of the Market Research Society, in terms of confidentiality, questionnaire storage, how to treat your respondents
<http://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/codeconduct.htm>
- Only survey one person per party or, with self completion or postal, make it clear that you only want one person to fill it in for themselves and not to consider the views of others.
- Have a plan for how all the questionnaires will be analysed. Don't let them languish underneath your desk.
- Whoever does the analysis, be very careful with the reliability of sub-sample results. 100% of 16 to 24 year olds might equate to fewer than 10 people. Don't make any big decision without checking the numbers behind the percentages.
- There are particular considerations to bear in mind when conducting any research which monitors diversity. Click here for *guidelines focusing on monitoring cultural diversity, disability and sexuality*.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is good for really getting to the crux of what people think:

- Why don't they come to your venue?
- What would encourage them to come?
- What kinds of shows would they like to see and why?
- What improvements would they like to see?
- What are the successes you should be beating your chest about?
- Good for testing marketing materials, e.g. what is their relationship with your brochure – straight into recycling or sit down with a cup of coffee and their calendar?
- Also good for testing perceptions of your brand.

Focus groups

- Focus groups are what are most commonly associated with the term 'qualitative

research'. In brief these are:

- Four to six small discussion groups with eight to 10 people in each.
- Each group meets just once.
- The group members are specifically recruited to fit defined criteria (e.g lapsed attenders, family bookers).
- Ideally, they are facilitated by an independent moderator, who will have the benefit of objectivity and the particular skills needed. Groups can be observed by the client.
- There will be a set of pre-defined questions, as agreed between the moderator and client, with a loose script based around them.
- The groups are structured, but fairly informal and free-flowing.
- They are tape recorded and transcribed, and usually last between an hour and an hour and a half.

Customer circles

- Customer Circles are similar to focus groups, except:
- Usually, the same group meets a number of times and various themes are tracked over time.
- The topics discussed are less focused and emerge more organically from the group themselves.
- They tend to be less formal and therefore easier for the organisation to facilitate on their own.
- They are particularly good for audience development as the participants feel a great sense of involvement and ownership.

Guidelines for qualitative research

- Aim for a representative sample within each group.
- Aim for 4 to 6 groups.
- Try not to have friends and couples. They skew the sample and chat among themselves.
- Work to the *Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society* – confidentiality is especially important.
- Give incentives to attend and pay out of pocket expenses.
- Give refreshments.
- 6.30pm tends to be a good time for people to attend.
- Choose a neutral space for non-attenders, as they may feel too intimidated to come into your venue.
- [If you're facilitating yourself]: Make people feel at ease; it should be a pleasant experience.
- Don't let anyone monopolise – make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to speak, and actively encourage it.
- Give some freedom but don't let them go off on tangents too much, otherwise you'll run out of time before you get to the bits you need.

Telephone research – the best of both worlds

Telephone research is an excellent way of engaging with your customers. How better to gain an understanding of their thoughts and behaviour than to phone them up and have a chat with them?

Telephone research has most of the benefits of qualitative information, but it's a cheaper means of achieving a really good sample than embarking on a series of focus groups.

- Aim to conduct about 100 interviews.
- You can do the research yourself by making a couple of calls a day, although it may be

more realistic to train ticket office staff and pay them for the extra hours worked.

- Don't cold call. Write a letter first and give people the option to opt out.
- When you call, don't assume people can talk then and there. Offer to call back if necessary, and arrange a time.
- Have a script/questionnaire prepared, but as well as tick boxes, make sure you have plenty of white space to write, and give people scope to talk openly. They will enjoy it more and you gather invaluable information this way.
- People are often more open on a one-to-one basis than they are in a group. You'll be amazed by what you learn about people's lives.
- Telephone research is great for audience development. People are rarely hostile to the call and are delighted that you care enough to phone and ask them what they think.

Don't forget the basics.

You have opportunities every day to gather information about your customers and their relationship with you, and all of them are free. Consider these:

- Question of the month – one question that box office staff ask at the end of a transaction.
- Feedback from staff – put formal mechanisms in place to allow your front line staff to feedback all that they learn in their dealings with customers.
- Comments book – it's quite easy to do a monthly breakdown of the types of comments made.
- Eavesdropping – take every opportunity you can to listen to what your customers are saying about you.
- Observation – try to see as many shows as you can. Although not very scientific, scanning the auditorium to identify each show's audience profile is better than not doing any research at all.

A final note

Don't leave research and data analysis languishing on your 'Big Things That I Should Probably Do One Day' list. Use this guide to help you identify one small task that will be the first tiny step in helping you to answer your research question, or even identify what your research question is. It could be something as simple as taking your box office manager for lunch, or clicking on one of the links above that you didn't have time to do today. Put it on your to-do list *now* and try to achieve it within one week. Then do the same next week, and the week after, and before you know it, research and data analysis will become as much a permanent fixture in your life as booking in your press ads.

Approximate costs for outsourcing research work

(N.B. These are indicative only. It is important to get quotes for your specific project before setting your budget).

Daily rates:

Freelancer - £200 to £350 a day

Consultant - £350 - £800 per day

Questionnaire design: £200 - £300

Set up questionnaire on survey software, and printing data tables: £150 - £300

Inputting per questionnaire: £1 - £2 each

Telephone interviews: £10 - £15 each

Reporting: expect approx three days at the quoted daily rate.