

# How Dance Companies and Venues can Develop Effective Relationships

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This resource looks at the component elements that can enhance tour booking for dance companies, and in turn build more rewarding relationships with venues and more effective marketing to and engagement with audiences. Recommendations focused on an ever more challenging environment and how to adapt to it, building effective relationships with venues, including working to understand their audiences more, how to share the communications and marketing, engage with advocates and build partnerships with other companies, venues, agencies and across catchments.

*The Audience Agency is a not-for-profit organisation created out of the merger between All About Audiences and Audiences London Plus in 2012.*





# Developing effective relationships between venues and companies

## Background

*This resource was developed from sessions between dance companies based in London and some venues to which they tour, as part of a commission to Audiences London funded by Arts Council England, London. This project involved Audiences London providing support on audience development for London's dance RFOs.*

Companies involved in this discussion: Akram Khan Company, Candoco Dance Company, Cholmondeleys and Featherstonehaughs, DV8 Physical Theatre, Michael Clark Company, Rambert Dance Company, Random Dance, Siobhan Davies Dance.

Also involved: Dance Touring Partnership, Warwick Arts Centre (Director Alan Rivett), Hall for Cornwall and Dance UK.

Beth Aplin and Heather Maitland provided context with information about dance audiences for venues outside London – see the Audiences London resource 'Audiences for Dance' for further information – [www.audienceslondon.org/resources/](http://www.audienceslondon.org/resources/).

## Objectives

In a changing world, dance companies are looking for a more intelligent model for tour booking; a model which will lead to more rewarding relationships with venues and more effective marketing to and engagement with audiences.

## Recommendations

### 1. The environment is becoming more challenging... we need to adapt

- Knowledge is power – understand the venues and their audiences, don't make assumptions
- Identify and explore new opportunities – consider a more mixed economy eg. combinations of international touring, UK touring and working with festivals or in new contexts (outdoor, found-spaces etc.)
- Work together – companies with companies and companies with venues
- Break some habits ... as they're no longer matched to our audiences' habits – both in touring and marketing
- Think cross-artform – audiences and artists do, so we need to encourage venues and press to follow suit
- Experiment in the spirit of finding new ways of working
- Audiences are looking for experiences – can you offer them something new, can you put yourself in the shoes of the audience and describe your production in different ways?

### 2. Effective relationships

- Select some venues for a more strategic relationship – eg. either as a 'company in residence' or with the aim of developing audiences in collaboration – but think serial monogamy as these relationships will invariably be time-limited.

- Select venues which share an interest in dance and with whom you can develop a level of trust
- Make sure all potential venues are kept up to date with everything your company is doing throughout the year and send the information to the relevant people
- Check you have shared expectations – and understand what’s negotiable and non-negotiable within the relationship
- Before approaching a new venue – do your research on them, their programme and audiences.

Alan Rivett, Director, Warwick Arts Centre and Chair of DTP

## 2. Understand venues and their audiences

- Exchange information between companies about different venues
- ‘Sell in’ the work to venue staff
- Ask venues about who their audiences for dance are, how they crossover with other artforms, how frequently they attend etc.
- Use available desk research information to understand the catchment area for each venue you tour to:
  - use the intelligence available through the local audience development agency (visit [www.audiencesuk.org](http://www.audiencesuk.org) to find one near the venue you are visiting)
  - request the Target Group Index Area Profile Report for the catchment area of the venue from your local audience development agency
  - Reference the ‘Dance Touring Partnership’ audience research for audiences outside London – [www.dancetouringpartnership.co.uk/about](http://www.dancetouringpartnership.co.uk/about)
  - Reference ‘Snapshot of dance audiences in the East Midlands’ undertaken with Derby Dance [www.deda.uk.com/audience-development](http://www.deda.uk.com/audience-development)
  - Reference the ‘Audiences for Dance’ resource available through Audiences London at [www.audienceslondon.org](http://www.audienceslondon.org)
  - Refer to other resources available at [www.audienceslondon.org](http://www.audienceslondon.org) or [www.audiencesuk.org/data-and-resources](http://www.audiencesuk.org/data-and-resources)

## 3. Share the communications and marketing

- Based on the information about audiences, enter into discussions with the venue about what marketing could effectively be achieved by the company to attract audiences – divide up the marketing tasks appropriately
- Consider the ‘selling points’ of the piece of work for dance-interested and non-dance-interested audiences at the venue
- Consider multiple marketing messages to attract different kinds of audiences from the venues’ existing and potential audiences
- Check the copy with the venue – make sure it’s focused towards their audiences

N.B: for a best practice guide to tour marketing download the ACE guide by Heather Maitland: [www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication\\_archive/marketing-and-touring-a-practical-guide-to-marketing-an-event-on-tour](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/marketing-and-touring-a-practical-guide-to-marketing-an-event-on-tour)

## 4. Engage advocates

- How do we use the ‘notion’ of loyalty – your next venue audience may not be those who’ve attended before, but those who’ve received a recommendation
- Incentivise those on your company email or mailing list to bring a friend

- Are there other dance-interested organisations in the city or region of your tour venue eg. schools, youth projects, community groups or festivals

## 5. Partnerships

- Consider partnerships with other companies and across venues in a city or region
- Explore partnerships with local dance development agencies to engage audiences in a city or region
- Think regionally, but also according to the catchment area of the venue (which may not match the shape of the region)

### The Dance Touring Partnership model

- DTP was set up to fill a product hole around 1999/2000 for mid-scale venues.
- The principles are of research and exchange.
- The collaboration involves 10 venues (with a further 8 as guest venues) who meet regularly, see work and contribute money to the consortium.
- There are also meetings and briefings between marketing, technical and education staff.
- The work programmed is selected on the basis of the experience it offers and its 'unmissability'.

### Outcomes:

- The tours have increased audiences for dance at the venues, particularly in the age range 14 – 25 years.
- Venues' confidence in programming a range of dance has grown.
- Across the venues there is more dance at the small scale and in studios than there was before.
- There is an increased understanding of work and audiences across and between regions and venues.

[www.dancetouringpartnership.co.uk/](http://www.dancetouringpartnership.co.uk/)

## 5. Evaluate

- Reflect on experiences as a company and with the venue – what worked, what you would do again, who the audiences were etc.
- Research audiences during your venue visit if possible – in partnership with the venue or as a company – refer to Audiences London's resources on how to approach this research most effectively – [www.audienceslondon.org](http://www.audienceslondon.org)

### Audiences London Services

If you're looking to develop or reach new audiences through your next tour, get in touch and we can support you to consider how best to have an impact with audiences working in partnership with venues.

Contact Rachel Escott, Head of Audience Development Services, Audiences London, [Rachel@audienceslondon.org](mailto:Rachel@audienceslondon.org), [www.audienceslondon.org](http://www.audienceslondon.org)