

# Classified information

*Mel Larsen* finds ways of reconciling segmentation – a key principle of marketing – with diversity

There was a time when the word ‘segmentation’ used to feel a bit too close to ‘segregation’, but we know nowadays that targeting can mean better communication, service, representation – and less marketing spend.

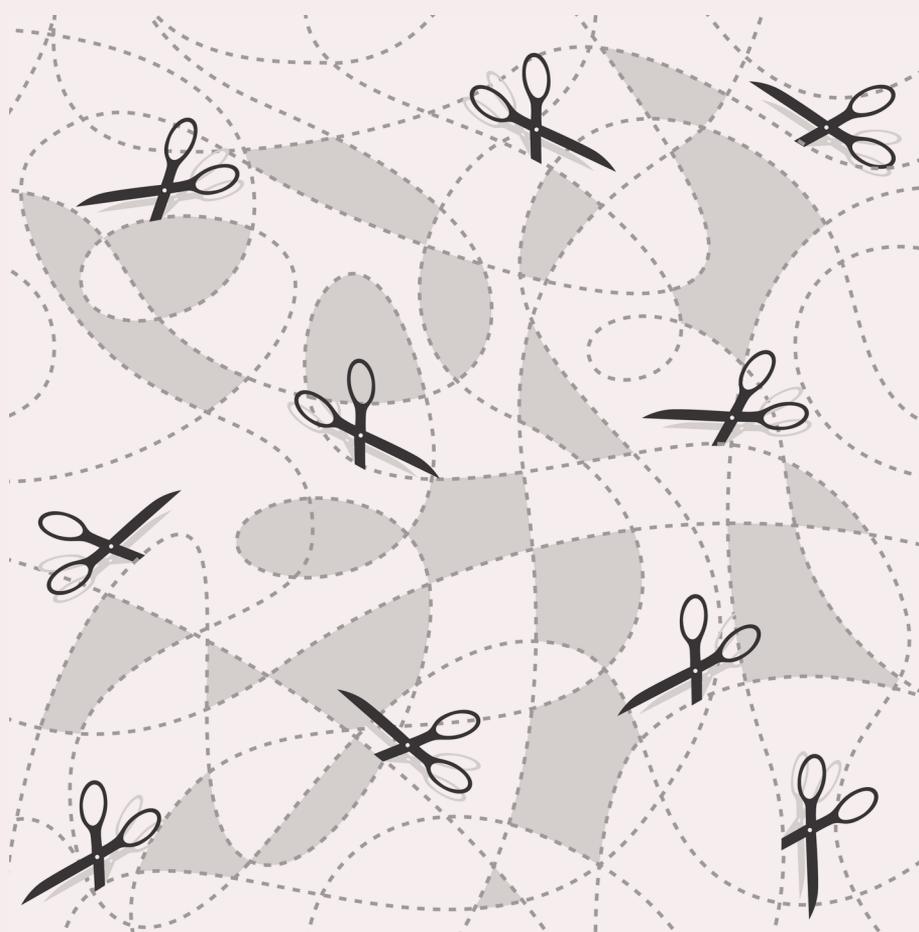
So much for the ideal but as a practice, segmentation brings challenges. Finding commonality is not so simple any more, as we can all align ourselves with any number of different collective identities. Ethnicity does not necessarily dictate one’s cultural choices and neither does age, income or gender (some 60-year-olds behave like teenagers ...).

Ethnicity is a complex differentiator on which to segment, as is ‘culture’. Cultures – be they based on ethnicity, faith or geography – on the one hand are light, constantly evolving and self-defined. On the other hand, cultures are weighty, have lengthy histories behind them and people literally die for them.

## A way through the maze

How do we find a way through this fabulous morphing maze of difference? A useful start is to look for people who share (or could be persuaded to share) a similar perception of our brand. Love it or hate it, they will be groups of people looking for similar experiences.

All obvious stuff of course but this approach often gets lost inside our tight budgets, frantic schedules, shorthand descriptions and assumptions of difference or familiarity. Let’s remember to find out how customers perceive our organisations rather than automatically deciding that we know where they fit.



## Understanding audiences

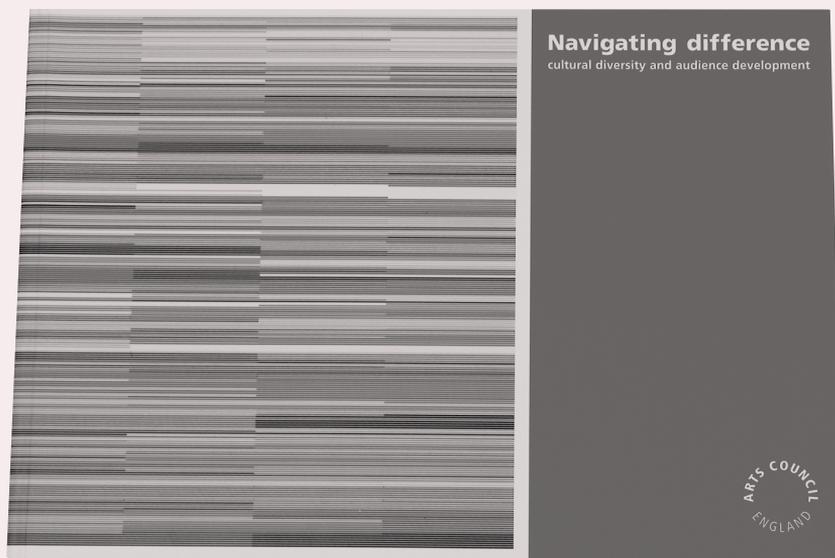
The main challenge for arts marketers is often simply attracting the first-time visitor who does not match the ethnicity of our current core audience – often because we have (unconsciously) made decisions from values and lifestyles that we are personally familiar with.

Often talk of targeting minority ethnic markets doesn’t seem to go much beyond ‘attracting Black and Asian markets’ in the same way that one might refer blandly to ‘the women’s market’. There’s not

much sub-segmentation evident, partly due to the difficulty in accessing information that goes beyond the general.

From general information that is available (e.g. the census), broad distinctions can be made between the British, African, African Caribbean, South Asian and white population regarding areas such as age, income and geographic location.

Psychographically, there are a variety of self-defined groups around the notion of ethnicity and cultural heritage. These cultural



choices can influence purchasing interests: clearly there is evidence of culture-specific products such as newspapers, food and beauty products and arts experiences offered by specialist promoters.

All of these factors could potentially support the planning behind arts programming and marketing. There is plenty of evidence to show that there are some definable minority ethnic art markets and that specific targeting does work.

### Accessing information

Some useful information on lifestyle is available from commercial reports. Mintel and MORI have a number for sale – they are expensive but can be accessed at major libraries like the British Library.

A range of information is also available from local authorities or the Commission for Racial Equality and much audience research has also been undertaken by UK venues as a result of various diversity initiatives.

It's also helpful to consider the observable strategies used by the people who are reaching the audiences we want. How does this compare to how we do things? Working in partnership with different leaders and networkers within target communities is a good strategy, especially if resource sharing is mutual. Community networkers

known as Arts Ambassadors have proved their value in this respect and are worth considering at the start of a push for new audiences.

### Information from the box office

When first-time audiences attend, the box office data provides a chance to look at what choices attenders are making in relation to the programme.

Even at the point of data capture there is still another challenge: how to classify attenders while remaining sensitive to the fact that people want a night out and not a full-on enquiry into their ethnic status. Questionnaires are fine for a limited period but obtaining data over time is not an easy task.

As a database builds up, it may be more useful to segment on the basis of purchasing behaviour rather than ethnicity. However, most of us have to keep cultural diversity visible in the box office records just to ensure that Black and Asian audiences stay on the agenda and are served as well as everyone else.

### Putting it into practice?

Honouring individuality is important to remember when planning, even if just to keep one's own stereotypes at bay; yet the most practical and affordable way ahead is to find group identities – those defined by the groups themselves or as demonstrated by box office records.

You may ask, how can anyone possibly address all of this complexity? Good question. Going beyond broad generalisations about the market and beyond morphing social identities can be difficult. Navigating around difference is always going to be challenging but it's also inspiring. Let's celebrate the fact that we are not all clones (... yet).

It's up to each of us to draw a new road map for the future. Let's start with the simple version: there are people out there of all backgrounds looking for entertainment and education and we have something to offer them. If we have a genuine desire to connect with and to serve our target markets, the route will gradually become clearer. ■

*Navigating Difference* is an Arts Council England publication, available via their website at [www.artscouncil.org.uk/publications/publication\\_detail.php?sid=4&id=497](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publications/publication_detail.php?sid=4&id=497)

It was devised and co-commissioned by Network [www.audiencedevelopment.org](http://www.audiencedevelopment.org) member agencies, Arts About Manchester, Audiences Central, Audiences London and Audiences Yorkshire.



**Mel Larsen**

Independent marketing consultant  
e [mel@melanina.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:mel@melanina.wanadoo.co.uk)