

Benefits-led marketing

... with London's Orchestral Marketing Consortium

Tackling such questions as 'How big is the potential audience for symphony orchestras in London?', 'Why don't audiences come back more often and cross over between venues and orchestras?', 'What is the best approach to engage new audiences?' and the million-dollar question 'How can we help audiences to see more orchestral music in London?' brought a group of London orchestras and venues together to form the London Orchestral Marketing Consortium in 2008. By interrogating shared box office data through Snapshot London Performing Arts initiative, and combining their experience and know-how, this group have not only learnt how to work together effectively but have been testing out new collaborative approaches for growing audiences. The first of these was the *Music to Remember* campaign targeted at infrequent orchestral attenders, and the most recent; their *Student Pulse* app.

Consortium partners recognised that audiences attending on a one-off basis or infrequently made up over 60% of their total attenders on average. Given that these were clearly in the market for orchestral music (having

attended at least once), gaining a better understanding of their needs should reap rewards. Following initial investigations using box office data and adding into the mix findings from the individual organisations' own on-going research, a benefits-led pilot marketing campaign was developed to meet those needs.

What was clear was that a collaborative approach to such a campaign made sense. The target audiences were neither venue nor orchestra 'loyal', and in attracting these attenders the orchestras and venues were not in competition – as they were infrequent. These two factors gave the group the confidence to proceed, and more importantly the evidence to engage (and get sign-off from) CEOs to work together on a public-facing campaign, *Music to Remember*.

Two key areas of need were addressed, which one comes first you can decide. As cultural attenders but not necessarily classical music specialists, lack of knowledge about the music, the artists, or the differences between the orchestras, meant that deciding what to choose could lead to paralysis i.e. not going at all. These are people who

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS: HOW THE LONDON ORCHESTRAL MARKETING CONSORTIUM COLLABORATE FOR ONGOING AND SHARED SUCCESS

The London Orchestral Marketing Consortium's most recent collaboration, *Student Pulse*, grew out of a digital marketing initiative of the London Symphony Orchestra, *LSO Pulse*. In 2011 the LSO was awarded funding from Arts Council England, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Nesta's Digital R&D Fund for the Arts to develop a new piece of technology for its existing student ticketing scheme. An app was created that combined easy paperless ticketing on the mobile

channel with a loyalty scheme, social sharing functions and geo-location services. During the development process the LSO's Digital Marketing Manager, Jo Johnson, worked with the University of Salford on a research project that looked into the attendance patterns and motivations of a student audience, one that every arts organisation is keen to nurture as part of their future audiences. During focus groups it was discovered that, like many of the 'infrequent' attenders targeted in the *Music to Remember* campaign, they were not

loyal to one orchestra or venue, and took advantage of several of the London orchestras' separate student discount schemes. Students told the researchers that what would improve the *LSO Pulse* would be to have more concerts listed in the app.

So we began to think: if we were to collaborate on one joint orchestra- and venue-wide student scheme and run it through this one central piece of technology, would we be able to reach more students? Would it actually make attending orchestral concerts easier? Rather than having to keep

would not be signed-up to individual orchestras' email lists or Facebook page, nor would they seek out printed brochures and read them cover to cover to make their choices. Lack of knowledge was further compounded by a lack of confidence in attending orchestral concerts. A lack of familiarity with concert halls, or the format of (and expected behaviour at) orchestral concerts – when to clap, can you take drinks in, what happens between pieces? Most of their attendance was most likely to be by recommendation from friends or other independent trusted sources.

Music to Remember sought to mitigate these factors. A partnership with *Time Out* provided a trusted source, and endorsement to help potential audiences navigate the options and make their decisions. An edited list of concerts from the forthcoming season across the venues was offered, to cut down the choices. These concerts were presented as a sub-site of the *Time Out* website within the classical music section, introduced by the Music Editor. Information was also added about what to expect at a concert. Finally, the concerts were classified as 'chill

out', 'be adventurous', 'go on a journey', 'feel romantic', 'be blown away' or 'be uplifted', designed to match moods, connect on an emotional level and give an insight into the experience offered by different kinds of performances. Copy for each concert was free of jargon, and full details of the venue, orchestra and artists were available for those who wanted them. The site was also populated with images, videos and interviews relating to the concerts. Once chosen, browsers could link through to the online booking for each concert (as this was in the days before *Time Out's* ticketing service).

As a discrete, time-limited campaign focusing on driving previous infrequent attenders to concerts to the *Time Out* website via direct postal- and e-mailings, the campaign gave a return of 57p for every £1 spent. In direct mail terms the response rate was higher than the average, with 4% of those contacted visiting the website and 3% of households contacted buying at least one ticket. A quarter of unique visitors to the site also made a return visit.

The *Music to Remember* campaign was developed by Rachel Escott, Director of Client Services at AA, and the

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track of several different schemes, prices, incentives and dates, having one listing with one set of loyalty points might actually remove some of the layers of difficulty which put off people attending our concerts.

There was also a financial consideration. Collaborating on one student scheme could also mean potential savings for the consortium partners – particularly in the area of student recruitment and marketing. In previous years, every September most of us separately booked stalls at several universities' Freshers' Fairs around London and produced banners, flyers and merchandise to market our separate student schemes. The result was always a long line of

orchestras' stands, with students approaching each and asking 'What's the difference between the LSO, the OAE and the LPO?' Having one scheme would mean we could pool our budgets, buy one stand at each fair, be able to afford many more fairs and therefore reach many more students. We would also only need to produce one set of banners, flyers and merchandise.

The London Orchestras Consortium partners were approached by the LSO in late spring 2012. Together with KODIME Ltd, the company who developed the original *LSO Pulse* app, the consortium worked hard on adapting it to work for several different partners. As well as renaming

the scheme to become *Student Pulse*, they adapted both the front end and back end technology in order to work for multiple organisations. What was most important was that each partner could retain their own set of data for their own ticket buyers, and ensure that they could still market our concerts in a way that meant each would retain some individual brand and style outside of the main *Student Pulse* umbrella brand. Although they were collaborating, no-one wanted to lose the notion of who was playing which concert!

The database was constructed with 'Chinese walls' – initially on sign-up the student would go into one pool of data, to which *Student Pulse*

‘It is difficult to find the correct information about classical music on other websites but this website makes it possible to consider a number of options and make a choice without having to spend hours looking for alternatives.’

‘a little bit more pzazz. not so bland’

Comments from users (through an e-survey)

Student Pulse app was devised by Kodime. The London Orchestral Marketing Consortium includes four venues: Barbican Centre, Cadogan Hall, Royal Albert Hall and Southbank Centre, eight orchestras; BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment, Philharmonia Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra plus the BBC Proms.

The initiative for sharing and comparing audience information, Snapshot London Performing Arts, is currently being developed into a nation-wide audience development programme devised and delivered by The Audience Agency – The Audience Focus programme is funded by Arts Council England. For more information on the programme and how to be involved visit www.theaudienceagency.org ■

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communicates under the *Student Pulse* brand (monthly newsletters, Twitter and Facebook). Once the student buys a ticket to a concert, they then enter another data set belonging to that orchestra or venue, which is then allowed to communicate with the student themselves. As they continue to buy tickets to other partners' concerts, they get added to each partners' data set. No partner can see who is in whose data set, and the partners cannot see each other's sales reports.

Six months in, *Student Pulse* is ticking along nicely. As a result of pooling resources for Freshers' Fairs we were able to attend four times more Fairs than in previous years, spend fewer hours staffing the stands,

and were able to afford advertising in student magazines. The app has achieved high engagement levels with students, with most students buying more than one ticket each (an average of 1.8 tickets bought each). The app has been downloaded nearly 3,000 times, with 2,000 of those having gone on to register in the app and nearly 2,000 tickets sold.

The Consortium's next step is to elect a steering group in order to take forward the app and the scheme – 'design by committee' is one of the major challenges of the London Orchestral Marketing Consortium collaborations, and getting the whole group of nine partners together often proves nearly impossible! Things to consider include new developments



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in technology (Near Field Communications for payments, for example) and devices (new phones, better screens, faster 4G networks), as well as looking at how we can better market the scheme as a whole and individually. And do we want to expand out the offer from the nine existing partners to other orchestras and venues, and indeed, art forms? Watch this space! ■