

Case study

RSC on blogging behind the scenes

Royal Shakespeare Company

Kate Feld in conversation with

Danny Evans, RSC Content manager



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*At the RSC, a few actors from the cast of each production volunteer to blog about their experiences through rehearsals at <http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/blogs>. You really get a sense of the bloggers' individual personalities, as well as a fascinating insider's perspective on the work of making theatre at one of the world's preeminent classical companies. Writer and blogging consultant **Kate Feld** spoke with **Danny Evans**, RSC content manager, about how it all happens.*

Kate Feld: What is the general aim of the RSC blogs?

Danny Evans: To give people an insight into the process, to see behind the scenes and learn things they wouldn't otherwise know about. I think it just gives a really good insight into what life is really like for an actor. The actors make the whole process seem more human, they talk about what they're worried about. The actors we tend to get blogging will often have understudy responsibilities as well, so it's always nice to read about that process.

KF: How does the blogging process work?

DE: When the actors are cast in a show usually there's an opportunity to meet them early on. I go along and do a little spiel about writing for the blog. I try to make it clear that it's not a huge time commitment because they're very busy. I produce some basic guidelines that cover how they need to be careful what they reveal from the rehearsal room and in terms of what photos they use, but they can police that themselves as they're in a position to check everything. I encourage them to make sure they use their own voice in their writing. They send everything through to me and I upload it all to the blog. If I haven't heard from them in a while I'll give them a little nudge, or try and encourage them to take more photos.

KF: How do you sell the actors on blogging?

DE: I think one thing that appeals to them is that blogging gives them a bit of writing experience. Acting's quite a difficult profession so it's always good to have another string to your bow. Blogging is a good way to raise their profile, and they can promote their posts on social media. A number of actors have written books based on their blogs, some have been self-published. I think they enjoy the opportunity to talk about what they do.

It can be hard work. I'm aware that I'm trying to get other people to do work that they're not paid to do and they've got a much more important job to do – acting in the show. Something I'd really like to do is get people working in other areas of the production blogging; I think that could be really popular and really interesting. But that's a hard thing to do because everyone is so busy. Actors are often keen to promote themselves and their work, and tend to be more confident writing, so it's a good fit.

KF: How do you gauge the effectiveness of the blog?

DE: We can check things like hits. I think the best ones we tend to get more comments on. We don't get tons of comments, though, and that is something I want to encourage more. We need to do more with making our blog easier to find within the website. We do try different things from time to time. If a blog relates to a particular show, we can promote it on the page related to that show, or we can put it on the news scroller on the homepage. If someone gives me a blog post that I think is especially good and I know people will respond well to it, I'll draw attention to it on social media. I've noticed that once we've managed to draw in more people, they do keep coming back to the blog for a while.

KF: What kind of edits do you make to the bloggers' writing?

DE: I try not to edit stuff too much; I iron out grammatical mistakes as we will get criticism in the comments about those. Generally, we let them get on with it. It's not meant to be really polished. Occasionally we run into little issues with things where I read something and think, oh, I'm not sure they should be saying that. It can be difficult and I have had bloggers getting a bit cross. In the end, I had to say 'I'm sorry, we're just not able to publish it.' I take advice from my colleagues in Communications. I'm not trying to censor the bloggers, but we have to be careful – to protect them as much as us.

KF: Do you give bloggers any guidelines on length?

DE: I suggest a couple of hundred words for each post. If I get anything really long, I'd write back and say this is really lovely, could we split this up into two or three posts?

KF: How often do you post?

DE: It totally depends. I could have a fortnight where I don't get anything from anyone. But then I think about where they are in the life of the show and realise I can't really hassle them right now. Last week I got about four entries, so that was great.

I have to check all the text and load it all into the CMS and there are lots of fiddly bits with that. I have to get the photos and resize them. They're not always great quality, so I have to improve them a little bit. There is a bit of tinkering around as I want to make them look good. I try to space the posts out evenly.

KF: How much time do you spend on the blogs?

DE: I'm the content manager at RSC, so I'm responsible for commissioning and coordinating content across the site. I probably spend an hour or two a week on the blogs. There are some times when it's a lot more than that.

KF: What's your approach on comments?

DE: I moderate them. Normally they're fine, though recently I had one commenter who was having a go at a blogger's grammar in a way that wasn't very friendly. Generally the comments are really nice and enthusiastic, people writing about how much they enjoyed the show. Sometimes the actors comment back as well, so we have a bit of a dialogue going, which is really nice.

KF: What are your biggest challenges with the blogs?

DE: I think getting people signed up in the first place and making sure I'm in the right place at the right time to get that commitment. And then actors who are quite confident with the writing aspect may not be good with photos, and sometimes they don't send any. Occasionally I can use production photos if I have to, but I really feel that a blog needs a photo to lift it a bit.

KF: What are your future plans for the RSC blogs?

DE: I'd like to promote them more widely. I'd like people to be able to follow them. I'd like to be publishing video blogs. And as I mentioned before, I'd like to get people in other behind the scenes roles blogging as well.