



Keynote: delivering game-changing impact

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This conference is all about how we develop audiences now and how we might do it in the future. How can we engage a wider audience and engage them more deeply? How can we recognize and meet different people's *different* needs – and give individuals the kinds of experiences and outcomes they look to us for? How can we build broader, wider, deeper relationships *in order that we also* meet our organisation's own artistic, social and financial objectives?

During this conference we'll hear stories from a range of people who've significantly changed the game for their organisation – whether dramatically raising earned income, reaching new target groups, engaging people on a deeper level or transforming the impact their organisation has on their communities. What can we learn from *their* experiences?

Our sector has evolved significantly over the years and we've come a long way. And we've already learned a huge number of lessons in our search for approaches that work; through different governments and funding scenarios, but also through different social environments; rapid digitisation; changing public behaviour; changing expectations; and new and different definitions of cultural engagement. *And* some of these changes in environment *have* been a real jolt to organisations that previously saw themselves as the exclusive purveyors of culture.

Today, the very existence of our organisations has audiences at its heart. Whether through choice or originally through circumstance, audiences have become part of our business model but more importantly they have to be part of our philosophy.

This wasn't always the case, of course ...

For years in the 50s, 60s and 70s in the UK, government asked no questions of the arts. Funding was unconditional – one man and a dog could be attending and still you kept receiving the cheque. Those who appreciated the art would come and that was that. This all changed in the 1980s when the *last* conservative government came into power on the



1979

Wave goodbye
to your funding



promise of tax cuts – with the subsequent drastic reduction in arts funding. And more than 30 years ago we were first called upon to argue our case for funding – to prove we provided a benefit – in terms of economic impact. But also for the first time we were reliant on the market and income from audiences. Organisations consequently allocated publicity budgets and we set about the hard sell.

If you see only one show ... see THIS!

A somewhat heavy-handed approach of course wasn't the best for audience retention, since too often the experience turned out not to match the sales pitch (not every performance can be a global phenomenon – the best thing you will ever see – buy a ticket now or live a life of eternal regret).

The birth of arts marketing

But we learned from this and shifted from a sales approach to a marketing approach in the 1990s (and recognised marketing as a managerial function). We prioritised data capture. We invested in technology. Computerised box office systems started to provide us with data on our current attenders. And as we learned more about them we were able to develop more sustained relationships with our most regular attenders.

And Blair's Labour Government shifted the emphasis from being entirely about **economic** impact to include **social** impact of arts. At first encouraging demonstration of our contribution to other government priorities: impacts on health; social cohesion; community well-being and so on. The problem was this wasn't why we were doing the art in the first place – our mission had never been to serve other government departments in this way.

We'd never evaluated ourselves rigorously enough – nor against these objectives – so it was pretty difficult to prove. Not to mention distracting from our *actual* mission.



1997

Don't thank me until
you've read the
small print



Art for art's sake

But then they took this a step further – moving the emphasis from instrumental to intrinsic benefits.

Asserting the value of arts for art's sake (then culture minister Tessa Jowell's famous speech) talked about the ambition, shared by government that was now in '**Giving everyone the possibility of benefiting from what complex culture has to offer: an understanding of, an engagement with and the satisfying of the deepest of human needs**'.

So a greater focus on the audience led marketing to be elevated within the leadership team. And in the subsequent decade we began to adapt the *whole* of the marketing mix – not just communications – to satisfy the needs of audiences. And in practical terms for this to work, responsibility for audiences had to permeate beyond the walls of the marketing office. Starting (but hopefully not ending) with a big emphasis on all the visibly public-facing departments.

Programming by numbers

For a time in the 1990s that focus on audiences meant it had also looked like we might even be drifting towards a mainstream or commercially-led model – 'let's programme what past sales help us predict will be the most tickets' – the marketing tail wagging the artistic dog. But happily now we've regained confidence in our artistic vision and faith in the strength of our offer.

Tate weather project

Instead we said 'actually, let's take audiences on an adventure. Let's programme what we believe to be affecting – that which offers heart-in-throat moments, deep sorrow and unalloyed joy, new and wonderful pearls of wisdom. Meditation, contemplation, a seductive invitation to say the unsayable. Shared

memories for families; connection between friends; unforgettable first dates. That which improves the quality of people's lives.' That is surely, after all, why we're doing all this?



A rapid period of digitisation helped us embrace new ways of engaging audiences and using our content in new ways. And the cultural sector really *should* be leading the way in digital. We have the most enviable portfolio of content at our disposal that any corporate, multinational organisation would kill for! They go out of on a limb to fabricate elaborate, emotional, human stories to enhance the appeal of anything from broadband to department stores. But we've got the real thing!

[Jo played the John Lewis Christmas 2011 advert – For gifts you can't wait to give]

Digitisation though also helped accelerate our thinking around offers that could be both interactive and personalised. So broadly speaking our organisations started off being product-focused; then, faced with growing financial challenge, became selling-focused. As the market and consumers increased in sophistication we became marketing-focused and eventually must all become audience-focused.

It won't have escaped anyone's notice our current government has returned to the economic impact argument of more than 30 years ago. And it's been pointed out by several influential leaders that this argument is already substantiated and that we need to move on from it. This won't help us win the hearts and minds of audiences. This won't help us in our quest to engage and fulfil, excite and inspire, challenge and stimulate. Our evolution has taught us several important lessons that will help us become more resilient.

Customer Relationship Management

1. We've learned that selling, in and of itself, doesn't work. A sales-led approach only works for those core audiences who already want to buy the tickets and who have enough knowledge and experience to guide their decision-making. We need to focus on making ***meaningful connections and building relationships***

Vision led and audience focused

2. We've understood that the minute we stop being led by artistic ambition something has gone wrong – that is the point of what we do. We need to be led by our vision. But at the same time we still need to become increasingly audience focused. To deepen our understanding of audience needs so that we can create value for them – and present the most appropriate offer in the most appropriate way

Outcome-oriented

3. We need not just to believe in and value, but become *focused on* the *impact* we have on people. Our success shouldn't *only* be measured in numbers but also in outcomes and impacts on individuals and society. Whatever KPIs the government is using, *this* is what matters and will drive us to success.

Personalised

4. We recognise that if we want to help every audience member and potential audience member to engage fully, we need to provide more opportunities for personalisation. Instead of delivering

unified services to passive recipients, *individuals* need to actively co-design services to suit their needs. And of course this goes well beyond digital.

Interactively-engaged

5. We understand that we have to be open to a two-way exchange *with* our audiences. Recognise audiences as intelligent and imaginative: that they can be as creatively challenging to us as we want to be to them. We need to do this with them not for them. In fact the whole 'them and us' is quite unhelpful.

Interdisciplinary

6. And to do all this, every single person in our organisations has a potential impact on the audience experience. Responsibility for audiences should be hard wired into everyone's job description.

THIS MUCH WE KNOW.

So we *have* come a long way...

Let's hold onto this progress and continue to respond to these lessons. And let's look forward to set our future direction of travel.

The story continues ...

... because there are still some fundamental challenges that are business critical for us to resolve. We talk a lot about becoming *relevant* to the wider people. And I am not convinced we are really succeeding here. There has been a huge number of generic studies into barriers to attendance in the arts. And they tend to either conclude it's an intractable problem not of our own making ('it's the economy', 'it's the education system', 'it's the media', 'it's modern life') that prevents people engaging. Or else they focus on the reality of the daily hardships of the very hard to reach audiences who have the least potential interest in our art forms. But before we either give up, or set even harder to work on the rejecters, research shows there is in fact a huge silent majority that are latent, passive, disconnected ... but are open to persuasion.

So our efforts tend to focus on two extremes: the usual suspects who already come – and the funder-driven audience development and outreach schemes that focus on the actively resistant. In between these two extremes however is a huge reservoir of potential attenders who we routinely ignore (and who aren't felt to qualify for subsidised campaigns).

And do these people currently feel excluded? I'd suggest not. If you talk to them, you'll find they are quite happy. Right now they are sitting at home, *not* going to our theatres, galleries and

concert halls. Not because we are actively excluding *them* but because *they* are choosing to exclude themselves – because we've failed to give them a real reason to come. They probably have plenty of culture in their lives – just not our particular definition or brand of culture. Rather than rescuing them from desperate isolation perhaps it is we who are isolated and need rescuing? It's us, not them, which need to change our ways. We need to be able to talk about the experiences we could offer them in a way that resonates with their world. We need to be able to consider how (and if) the stories we tell are relevant to them and their lives.

If we're to meet our objectives, we need to take a more strategic approach to understanding and meeting *these* potential audience needs.

The world is changing at a frightening pace and many of our institutions were set up in very different times, for audiences very different from those we address now. Modern audiences attend at a fraction of the frequency of those they are replacing. Their lives are very different. We can't afford to hang onto infrastructures that were developed for a previous era if they are barriers to genuine audience development. Are we set up with processes that are designed to meet the needs of audiences and to build relationships – or are they actually designed to satisfy our needs as ticket sellers? How are we going to encourage a wider range of audiences to develop confidence, knowledge, experience and engagement in what we do – to be truly accessible?

- How should we build communities around our work and curate conversations about it?
- How are we going to need to adapt our communication – and also our delivery?
- Is our current distribution model fit for purpose?
- How are we going to ensure we become truly relevant?
- What role do we play – or could we play – in people's lives?

I am not saying our tools are all obsolete. But they do need refining or they will become less adequate every year.

Game change

We're not going to achieve this by being conservative. Do we need to grow a keener appetite for risk? Risk avoidance is perhaps the bigger risk? We need to be bold, innovative, creative and genuinely collaborative. If we're going to do more than pay lip service to engagement we can't do this all on our own in marketing departments. But it's not enough to just involve our traditional customer service departments. We need to work with our *leaders and our artists* in this pursuit, if we want to see a genuine connection between a wider audience and the art. Marketing and communications absolutely needs a seat at the leadership table but marketers also need to avoid

the temptation of fighting the 'I'm the marketing expert corner' or we could be scoring the biggest own goal. We need to bring these *other* experts to the party if we're going to lead this transformation – we can tackle this together.

I certainly don't mean to paint a glass half-empty picture. I have a firm belief in the talent within our sector. I know that there are lots of people throughout our organisations in different roles and at different levels with imagination and tenacity, ready to change the game.

So even if this is your first AMA conference, don't wait to be asked. Anyone can make a difference. If the people you need to collaborate with aren't knocking on your door – go knocking on theirs. This conference is all about innovating – not accepting the status quo. I believe as a sector we are ready to be strategic, really bold and really creative right now?

So let's take the next few days to look forward. Step away from the daily irritations. Think seriously about what we need to do to meet our long-term objectives. We've got a fantastic line up of speakers who are having real impacts in their fields to share examples of game-changing practice. But I have no doubt there are further examples within the room that are really worth hearing. So be curious and be generous with your experiences. Think game changing. And think what you will take back with you when you return to the office.