

'Marriage material' - Built To Last



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There are over 500 theatre venues in the UK and this is small in comparison to the growing number of performing arts touring companies. Finding a performance space can be extremely difficult for some touring companies. It is essential that the small scale and medium scale theatre companies take the time to invest in a long lasting mutually profitable touring and venue relationship - 'marriage material'.

The Get In And The Get Out

Both touring companies and venues really need to explore effective ways of working together. This may mean both parties go that extra mile and perhaps even exceed the terms and conditions of their original contract. Your contract is like a pre-nuptial. We assume both parties have a vested interest and want this relationship to work. The reality is that when we invest more we benefit from a greater return.

Hopefully, I can outline some practical marketing and promotional tips that will lead to an increase in the box office - where everyone is a winner.

Understanding Your Target Audience

A good box office system contains a lot of information about a theatre venue's audience, such as:

- How they booked their tickets?
- How many tickets they booked?
- What performances they've watched?
- How often do they attend?
- How far do they have to travel?

Although touring companies, generally, do not have access to this information they can be very specific in the kind of information they send to their target audience. Did you know that 80% of a box office income comes from 20% of the audience? (I'm Not sure if this is entirely true of the theatre sector, but it happens to be a commonly used marketing principal known as the 80:20 Pareto Rule). Let's assume the 80:20 rule is true and every theatre venue has the ability to identify their loyal attendees.

The Loyalty Ladder

Here are the people that a touring company needs to communicate with:

*****Advocates - they provide free advertising for your productions.

****Clients - the venue and its employees

***Customers - the audience who often attend the theatre

**Prospects - the potential audience, frequent attendees

*Suspects - rarely or never attend

The further down the loyalty ladder the less intense your communication should be. For example there is no point sending a formal letter to a 'suspect' inviting them to attend your press night. This is because you're better off investing your resources in targeting your customers, clients and advocates, these groups will most likely respond positively to a special offer or an invitation letter. The higher up the ladder the more resources you invest (five star treatment for your advocates).

Reaching Your Target Audience

In every working relationship communication is the key. Touring companies will reap the benefits if they look at the venue as an important part of their target audience. We have passed the stage of sending the visuals, the copy, the flyers, the press pack and everything else... It's a bit like sending your 'lover' a bunch of flowers and not calling them for weeks on end.

No actor wants to perform to an empty room. So what should a touring company do?

Broad-scale Media

Local radio interviews and newspaper listings are examples of free publicity for a touring company, but they are not targeted media. It may reach the prospects and suspects, but you will need to work harder to grab the attention and stimulate the desire of the advocates.

Selective Media

Posters, window bills, leaflets, front of house displays will reach those who visit theatre venues regularly. The internet will only reach those who use the web and visit your website. You should ask the venue if they can provide a hyperlink from their site to yours. The link provides easy access to