

Case Study

It Takes Two



Image courtesy of PDSW. Business Come Dancing 2015 © Darkveil Photography

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‘Strictly’-style fundraising event proves choosing the right partner can take you one step closer to fundraising success.

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the right partner can help achieve fundraising success

About Business Come Dancing

Business Come Dancing is a ‘Strictly’-style biannual fundraising event run in partnership by Pavilion Dance South West and Lewis-Manning Hospice. Featuring a dance competition pairing professional dancers with staff of local businesses, a gala dinner and after-show party, the event creates an annual income of currently up to £6,000 for each of the two charities.

The partners

Pavilion Dance South West (PDSW) is a regional dance development organisation operating across the South West of England with a venue — Pavilion Dance — in Bournemouth, one of only five purpose-built small-scale dance houses in England.

PDSW is currently an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation until 2018 and has committed investment from Bournemouth Borough Council until 2019. The organisation has worked hard over the last three years to reduce its reliance on public investment, but also recognises the need to further diversify its income streams to build resilience in the face of continuing pressure on public arts investment.

Lewis-Manning Hospice is a local charitable organisation, focusing on end-of-life care and care for patients with life-limiting conditions in Poole. They were looking for ways to further engage local businesses and individuals, and to cultivate these contacts into longer-term partnerships.



Image courtesy of Pavilion Dance South West.
BCD Summer Ball © Darkveil Photography

The challenge

When setting up a fundraising department in 2013, the challenge for PDSW was to raise funds into the organisation's core budget.

While PDSW has a successful history of nurturing solid partnerships within the dance industry, there was no previous history in cultivating local businesses and large parts of the local community are unaware of or unconvinced by the organisation's charitable status.

For Lewis-Manning there was a desire to add to their portfolio of events, to broaden the range of opportunities for their donor base and local business connections.

Both organisations wanted to create a relevant, sustainable and exciting fundraising opportunity for the local business community that not only brought with it a sense of achievement for participants but also had the potential of setting them on a continuing journey towards higher level donations.



Image courtesy of Pavilion Dance South West. BCD 2015 © Darkveil Photography

The event

‘Business Come Dancing’ (BCD) was the legacy of a small-scale partnership with Wessex Cancer Trust in 2013. PDSW chose its Parkinson’s Dance work as a case for support strong enough to stand alongside the Trust’s work in supporting those diagnosed with cancer and their families.

Dance is a form of therapy that provides strategies to cope with some of the symptoms of Parkinson’s (including difficulties with balance, co-ordination, posture and walking). It is also fun and provides opportunities to socialise for those diagnosed with the condition and their partners/carers.

PDSW has successfully run its model of Parkinson’s Dance — jointly developed by a dance teacher and a Physiotherapist — since 2012, and has recently begun to teach classes and train teachers beyond Bournemouth.

Both organisations saw the potential of the event but, due to restructuring, Wessex Cancer Trust decided not to take the project forward. When the opportunity arose to work with Lewis-Manning Hospice, PDSW decided to enter into a new partnership with them.

Lewis-Manning Hospice has an existing local business network, making it a strong partner for PDSW. In turn, PDSW has expertise in creating meaningful dance experiences and in producing high-quality theatrical events.

As Lewis-Manning Hospice also cares for people diagnosed with Parkinson’s this new partnership has strengthened the project’s case for support and provided a more concise message. The partnership has been so successful that Business Come Dancing has grown from an annual Christmas gala to a biannual event in 2016, now featuring a ‘Summer Ball’ in addition to the traditional Christmas event, which coincides with the broadcasting of BBC’s original ‘Strictly’ from September to December.

What does a 'typical' BCD event look like?

Recruitment of business participants begins up to six months in advance through networking and personal approaches. The recruitment process used to be led by Lewis-Manning Hospice but, due to BCD's growing popularity, both charities now recruit contestants.

Each business commits to buying at least one table of ten at the event, and each participant commits to raising at least £250 in individual sponsorship.

There are additional sponsorship packages available, offering brand exposure at different levels, including the launch event, both charities' social media channels, a dedicated website, press release and the evening itself.

Each Business Come Dancing event sees between ten and 15 couples competing. The professionals, who are paid a small fee of £100 each, are dance teachers associated with and recruited by PDSW. The couples are matched at the launch, approximately three months before the big night, to give them enough time to fit rehearsals into their busy schedules.

There is a mix of dance styles at BCD, including ballroom, Latin, Musical Theatre, street, contemporary, 1940s Social Dance and African, which makes the competition more fun to watch — and certainly no walk in the park for the participants!

Business Come Dancing is a black-tie event, starting with welcome drinks and a gala dinner, during which raffle tickets are sold, before the couples take to the dance floor for the main competition. They are judged by a panel (although no scoring and no paddles!) who determine the winner at the end of the official programme.

The dance floor is then opened up for everybody to let loose and expel any pent-up energy!

It Takes Two: Learning

At PDSW, our Business Come Dancing journey with our charity partner has definitely been a win-win situation. By creating a partnership that shares core values and combines different skill sets, both organisations have been able to form new relationships, build participation and engagement and develop fundraised income.

By investing in and developing a new event over a three-year period both PDSW and Lewis Manning Hospice have moved beyond short-term funding goals towards a deeper relationship with those involved. We have firmly established Business Come Dancing as a recognised event in Bournemouth's annual fundraising calendar. Businesses are now approaching us wanting to take part, and the list of participants for both 2017 events is already growing. At PDSW, we are planning our first 'BCD Alumni' event next year, to re-engage previous contestants and encourage them to continue on their fundraising journey.

The partnership has provided an opportunity to share knowledge and skills across the arts and charity sectors. The way in which non-arts charities engage with their audiences is directly comparable to arts fundraising, but it is important to find the right combination of the 'What' and the 'How'.

To work alongside a charity partner championing such strong emotional causes as end-of-life care and life-limiting conditions we needed a cause, beyond the intrinsic value of the arts, that had an equally strong appeal.

As for the 'How', we discovered that we really need to play to our strength, which is dance. Here, we have experience, expertise and connections our charity partners lack. We tried other fundraising methods, including crowdfunding and other challenge events such as the Three Peaks challenge, but none was as successful as Business Come Dancing.

By leaving our silo and building partnerships with other charities in this way, arts organisations can broaden their experience and draw on expertise available to us all — if we ask.

Top tips

Play to your strengths - our network of dance teachers and expertise in producing high-quality theatrical events enabled us to create an enjoyable event for all involved.

Develop meaningful partnerships - look for shared values and complementary skills.

Think long-term - it takes time to build meaningful relationships and establish a key event in a town or city's fundraising calendar so be patient.

Be clear about your cause - sometimes we need to think beyond the intrinsic value of the arts to match the strong emotional appeal of health and wellbeing charities.

Keep learning - talk to arts and non-arts charities; there are always things we can learn from each other.



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