

Guide

Marketing for Audio Description

Adapted from www.accessibletheatre.org.uk with material from the See a Voice project led by Stagertext and VocalEyes



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Your guide to making theatre performances more accessible.

Guide

Adapted from
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A Guide to Theatre Access



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A guide to marketing for Audio Description (AD)

Making theatre performances more accessible

What is AD?

Audio Description (AD) in theatre is a way of capturing the visual elements of a production for blind and partially sighted audience members.

Understanding the audience for AD

Gaining an insight into the existing and potential audience for audio described performances can inform your marketing and audience strategies. It can also inform your decisions around programming and service development.

Clear and consistent communication strategies will ultimately help your organisation achieve its aims in making a commitment to access and inclusion.

Who is AD for?

The primary target audience for AD is visually impaired people (VI). The term VI can be used to cover a range of people with a very broad range of sight levels. Generally they are broken down into two groups: blind and partially sighted.

AD users can fall into either of these categories and each individual may have a different perspective.

Top tips

- Focus on how patrons see themselves: their preferences, outlooks and beliefs
- Don't make assumptions about how much people can see

What motivates them?

People with sensory impairments think a good theatregoing experience is one where they feel they have had an equal experience.

Once someone has had a good experience at a venue, whether at an assisted performance or not, they are more likely to become repeat attenders.

Blind or visually impaired people are less likely to want to, or be able to, come to the theatre alone. Some, mainly older people, enjoy attending clubs, groups or voluntary organisations.

However, around 15% of people who participated in the Network 1000 survey* said they do not do any leisure activities outside the home.

* A survey of the opinions and circumstances of visually impaired people in Great Britain

Top tips

- Promote your desire to offer equal access
- Be transparent about any difficulties that you face in providing equal access
- Engage with local blind and partially sighted people to help find solutions to those barriers
- Encourage people to come with friends or create opportunities for meeting and talking to others
- Let blind and partially sighted people know about companion concessions

How to persuade non-attenders

Blind and partially sighted people are potential theatregoers. We just need to persuade them that our events have something to offer. With 15% of visually impaired people reluctant to engage with a leisure activity outside of the home, you have to work hard to get the message across.

People have said...

'I can't enjoy theatre anymore - I can't follow it.'

'It's too difficult to find the right information.'

'I can't just shut my door and go out; I rely on others.'

'I can't see, I never will see, and I want to be able to experience the play in my way.'

Some younger blind or partially sighted people will have limited experience of live theatre. Others may be regular attenders and artists themselves.

Some older people may have been keen attenders who now, later in life, are having difficulty following the action. They may think theatre is something they can no longer continue to enjoy.

During the See a Voice project, staff ran venue open days called Discover Theatre for local blind and partially sighted people. It gave participants an introduction to the venue, the services available, and a chance to meet the staff. This sense of familiarity and safety is particularly important to blind and partially sighted audiences.

Top tips

- Going to the theatre needs to be seen as something enjoyable, not hard work
- Remember that not all blind or partially sighted audiences are the same - some may have been frequent theatre attenders and some may never have been
- Consider holding a specific event for local blind and partially sighted people to learn about what you offer and get to know your venue

What you can do...

- Consider what some of the barriers to attendance are and how your marketing strategies might help overcome them
- Get to know your visually impaired patrons and build a mailing list of anyone interested in attending audio described performances
- The personal touch works - try offering to ring people on your AD mailing list to let them know there's a performance coming up
- Train frontline staff in welcoming and assisting blind and partially sighted patrons
- It's useful to have the same staff scheduled to work on the day of an audio described performance, or dedicated AD ushers
- Let groups know about any discounted tickets you may offer
- Provide information in advance on travel options and recommended taxi firms
- Provide directions on how to get to your venue on your website and pre-recorded notes, and include any distinguishing landmarks
- Make sure your brochures and websites have clearly identifiable sources of information in a range of formats

Top tips

- Provide as consistent an experience as possible
- Think about the full experience - not just the show
- Advertise your audio described performances to everyone
- Generate word of mouth by talking at events or to local groups, social clubs and blind societies
- Understand the particular needs of your customers and build good personal relationships between local groups and your venue

Effective communication

Use all your communication channels to share information about assisted performances to as broad a range of people as possible.

Raising awareness among your general attenders is important. Start with what you already produce, like your season brochure. If you already include information on assisted performances, ask a friend or colleague who's not familiar with the details to use it to find out more about AD performances.

- How easy did they find it?
- Could they quickly tell whether your next show had an AD performance?
- Did they have to flick backwards and forwards between different sections?
- Is there an explanation somewhere of what AD is?
- Does it say if there's a touch tour and what time it is?
- Does it include any specific information on how to book a headset and where to collect it from?

Making a few simple changes to your existing marketing materials could make a world of difference in developing audiences for AD.

Top tips

- Remember, the aim is to make theatre-going enjoyable and not hard work
- Think about people's decision-making process. First they decide whether they're interested in the show, then they see if it is accessible to them
- Don't assume that all visually impaired people are so desperate to go to the theatre that all you need to do is tell them that there's an audio described performance and they'll come

Visit the Accessible Theatre website to read the full guide, including sections on language and reaching target markets.

www.accessibletheatre.org.uk