

Effective public engagement campaigns

Craig Titley, Director of Marketing, Rambert Dance Company and Stephanie Moore, Marketing Manager, Rambert Dance Company

Craig Titley is Director of Marketing at Rambert Dance Company, Britain's national contemporary dance company, founded in 1926. He heads the marketing, press and online team. Having worked in arts marketing for eleven years, Craig has experience in both regional theatres and touring throughout the UK. Following four years at the Theatre Royal Windsor, a producing and presenting venue, as both Box Office Manager and then Marketing Manager, he transferred to Watford Palace Theatre, becoming Head of Sales and Marketing in 2003. Over the next five years, he was part of the senior management team who led the theatre through a two-year, £8.3m part lottery-funded refurbishment. In 2006 he joined Rambert Dance Company as Director of Marketing. Rambert is currently fundraising for new premises at the heart of the South Bank, London.

Stephanie Moore has worked in arts marketing for ten years, and has been Marketing Manager at Rambert Dance Company since 2005. She has previously worked at regional theatres including the Bradford Alhambra and the New Victoria Theatre, Woking, as well as heritage organisations such as the Imperial War Museum and English Heritage, after starting out as 'deputy gaffer' on the UK's longest-running festival of street theatre, the Winchester Hat Fair. At Rambert, she works with each touring theatre to create a bespoke regional marketing campaign and is responsible for all the Company's printed publicity.

Introduction

Craig and Stephanie's session looked at very practical ways of engaging with audiences, offering clear examples of their work, and giving hope that much can be achieved on a small budget.

About Rambert Dance Company

Craig Titley

If you don't know Rambert Dance Company, I'll just give you a very brief introduction. The company was founded in 1926 and we are the UK's oldest dance company – five years older than the Royal Ballet. It was founded as Ballet Rambert and then the company changed its style in the 1960's and that's when we changed our name to Rambert Dance Company. We tour primarily on the larger scale in the UK to about 18 theatres every year, some with scale venues as well and we tour 24 permanent dancers. We're funded by Arts Council England and we're currently based in studios in Chiswick in West London, but we're in the middle of a multi-million pound capital project to move to the South Bank. As well as touring dance, something that's been part of our DNA since the

time that Marie Rambert founded the company was the 'eight new choreographers for the future', so working primarily with our own dancers, we developed their abilities and skills, so that we can have choreographers for the future.

I joined in 2006 and I inherited a very competent marketing team who were delivering very solid marketing campaigns, but because I come from a venue background, I know a lot of you are from theatres as opposed to touring companies here, it's very alien to me that we didn't have a direct relationship with our audiences. We had a very tiny mailing list, which to be honest was predominantly people who'd bought items on our online shop and we thought we'd put them on a mailing list, so we weren't talking to them direct, we were relying, as most promoters do, on the theatres to communicate. The only people we were really communicating with were our supporters, a very small number of people, which was quite time consuming and it really didn't address the thousands of people that we wanted to get to every year.

So from 2007 we started, I think we were calling it a public engagement programme at the time, but that's how our thinking was and we're still on that journey and in 2009 our website was named by the Arts Council and NESTA with 50 other RFOs as being either good or excellent, which was a big surprise to us. It's a new website, which I'll talk about in a minute and the criteria for that was it wasn't a website that was just about providing information, it was a site that we had try to develop, to interact with our audiences a little bit more.

Effective public engagement campaigns

So how often do we attend a seminar or a conference and you listen to someone speaking and you go 'oh, that's fantastic, it all sounds really good, but we don't have the resources, we don't have the money, you do, we couldn't possibly, I'm the only person in the marketing team...' Or you go back to your theatres or offices and you're buzzing with enthusiasm and lots of exciting ideas and then you get back and you remember all the reasons why you didn't do them in the first place because you're very busy, you've got a chief executive who's not interested, etc., and all those ideas just get shelved and you get back to what you do daily. What I hope that Stephanie and I can do today is leave you with some sense of hope, that you can go back to wherever you come from, if you've not embarked on any public engagement at the moment that you can do some little thing or if you're already doing it, that there's some other activity that you might be able to address when you get back.

For me public engagement is about enhancing what we already do, new ways of communicating different messages and understanding our audiences better. Radio stations and TV stations have been doing this for years – radio phone-ins are now reality TV. How can we integrate new technology simply and effectively into marketing planning, and this is really just exploring and discovering what's out there and what's available and not just having it because you're lucky enough

to have the money, buying in that particular technology, but working out whether actually it's going to make a difference to you. I think the big thing for us today is to say how to take small achievable steps to make a difference, that you can do little things that hopefully in the longer term will make a difference to your organisation and take you on some kind of public engagement journey.

So most of what I'm going to talk about now is about 2007, the thought processes that we went through in 2007 and I was thinking what, even ten years ago, what was the closest thing we had to public engagement, it certainly wasn't a term that I wasn't aware of then and I suppose we had mailing lists, we sent brochures to those people, sent direct mail letters and maybe quarterly newsletters, but they were probably to friends, rather than to the masses and more recently new newsletters. They were all rather impersonal and of course the other way that audiences were engaging with us were complaints that I would get as box office manager or marketing manager or some other random comments. I just remember this one example when I was working at the Theatre Royal Windsor, a customer phoned the box office and said 'Could I speak to Craig Titley please?' and a colleague said yes, but not on this number, you need to redial and he said 'Oh no, no, it's fine, I don't really want to speak to him, he's just sent me a letter and I just wanted to see if there was someone really with the name Craig Titley'. Great, so he had time on his hands, but really, apart from that, there wasn't any real interaction or two-way conversation happening between me and the audiences, it was all, as we've just heard, it was all just sending out information and trying to get people to book tickets.

So I've got three questions that we asked ourselves:

- How can Rambert have a more meaningful and long term relationship with its audiences?
- How can we do this when we're touring, but when we're not communicating with our audiences on a regular basis? How can Rambert maintain an ongoing rapport with its audiences, when the company is absent for say months or even years at a time?
- How can Rambert inspire its audiences to engage with a company beyond a two-hour performance?

How many of us have attended a performance, thought it was amazing and wonderful, walk out and say we should do this a bit more often and then we forget and we go home and the rest of our lives sort of take over? I didn't want our audience to forget that they'd had that experience for possibly the next three years.

First steps

So, what did we want to know? Who are we trying to talk to? Obviously Rambert fans, people who come to Rambert a lot, other contemporary dance audiences and about 25% of our audience are students and like with all our audiences, the

students are going to be Rambert's audience for the future. How do we communicate with them? Are we doing the right thing, are we communicating with the audiences in the right way? Direct mail is still, I think probably for all of us one of the best ways to communicate with audiences and we get a good return on sales, but I think we know now that there isn't a one size fits all. When I started marketing, I'd do one letter that was based upon some copy from a leaflet and it was sent out to five thousand people, no thought into who they were or what their working patterns were. You really can't do that anymore and this was kind of a key for us: what do our audiences think?

You know, how often do we write copy that's what we want to tell people? Normally it's over zealous, sometimes from artistic directors and chief executives, language that they want to use, things that they want to get across to the audience, but so often it's not the language that audiences want to hear or what they're going to respond to. And can we challenge our own ways of working and our own perceptions about the Rambert audience? We all make assumptions about audiences, but do we really know them and what makes them tick? It's good sometimes to step back and challenge what we do and who better to ask about what our audiences want than our audiences. What do we consider to be our weaknesses and how might we address them – none of us like to ask that question of ourselves – but sometimes we need to be a little bit humble. There's an example, not mentioning any names, of an arts organisation who went through a massive expensive rebrand and the designers, as we all know designers gave some very strict guidelines about how to use the brand, but it turned out the audience didn't find it very accessible and members of the arts industry didn't like it, even the marketing teams found it very restrictive, but that's what they'd decided on and they persevered with it and eventually they were forced to change it. It's very easy for us to work in our little bubble worlds and forget that everyone out there isn't necessarily up to speed with our thinking and we sometimes need to explain things a bit better and in simpler terms and use less arts jargon sometimes.

Understanding audiences

We asked ourselves various different questions and the first thing that I wanted to do was do some audience research. We kept saying 'ask the audience, what do they want to do?'. So we worked with seven regional theatres and we did a postal questionnaire to three and a half thousand previous Rambert attenders and we had, we were very pleased, an 18% response rate, it was about six hundred, seven hundred people, so it gave a very good information data. The aim of the questionnaire wasn't to find out about the geographics, the demographics of our audience, because we'd done that research in 2004, it was about understanding Rambert's audiences booking patterns, their overall impression of the company, to find out what they thought the strengths and weaknesses were and to test certain assumptions.

The first thing was, I asked each venue to send me data of people who'd booked Rambert, but had not booked to see the company the year before and then I purposely put a question in the questionnaire that said did you see the company the year before. Logically most of them, if not all of them should have said no, because that's what the box office data was telling us. 50% of the people who responded said they had seen the company the previous year, that's very large, if it's 2-3% you could think of examples of why that might be, but 50% is a large number. So we asked ourselves why that would be, perhaps the data was wrong? Well, we cross-referenced it with some of the theatres, no, it seemed to be correct. Maybe they went to a different theatre to see the company, that was possible, but considering where Rambert tours to, many of those cities you'd have to travel about 100 miles to see Rambert, at least a hundred miles to see Rambert somewhere else, so that seemed unlikely. They might have booked with somebody else or they might have gone with somebody else who did the booking, that's very likely, but 50%? So I think the most likely reason is that they thought they had booked the year before.

If I was to ask you now what arts events you saw in 2009, you might be able to remember a few things, but if I said what did you see in the spring of last year, chances are your memory would be a little bit blurred and you won't be too sure. So, our feeling is that these people probably saw the company two or three years ago, but their idea was it was very, very fresh still, very, very new in their memory and they only booked last year, so when we're marketing to them again, because we go back to a theatre every year, in their eyes they'd been much more frequently. So we need to remind people that as far as we're concerned, they've not been for a while. 72% consider themselves to be regular Rambert bookers and many of them said they'd come to see the company three, four, five times or more, which is a lot when you only go to the theatre at the most once a year and yet it doesn't really reflect that in the sales figures, about 25% of Rambert bookers on an annual basis are repeat, but they felt they were very regular.

This is something that will come as no surprise, really, 81% cited the season brochure as the primary reason for booking tickets, but on average 50% of all Rambert bookings come in, as a lot of dance does, within the last three weeks, That doesn't mean they couldn't have picked up a brochure within those last three weeks and booked, but I think it is unlikely that it was the original brochure that the theatre sent out maybe four or five months earlier that triggered that booking.

This is a very disappointing one, bearing in mind this is 2007, not now. 76% said that they used the internet at least once a week and yet only 7% said that it was websites or e-marketing that were the motivation to book, which wasn't very good, probably not a surprise, but it wasn't very good.

So are we not doing enough or do audiences not see the internet as a means to find out what's on? Well, I think that's very unlikely and if we just take Sadler's

Wells as an example, their online sales have rocketed in the last five years and it was about 40% the last time, I was told, I'm sure it's a lot more than that, is it more than that, 50%, are now, of their bookings are now online.

Now we didn't say to customers do you want to get closer to us, do you want to find out more, the question was, what could we do to make you book more often? And a very high percentage said they wanted Rambert to consider ways in which they could get closer to the company. That was *audiences* that were asking that of us and actually we've done some research with the Wickham Swan in High Wickham recently and there was a large number of people there that said once they'd booked the tickets, they would like it if Rambert could send them more information about the work before they attended the performance, because we all sell programmes, but maybe it's a contemporary dance thing, because a lot of the work can be quite challenging, but they were asking for more information up front. So now Stephanie and I are thinking about, okay, how can we convey that information to them. If that's what they want, we should respond to it and a final couple of things here, 50% of the people who responded asked to go on our mailing list, 39% asked to go on the new database and remember this data came from the venues, not from us and this equates to several hundreds of people asking to go on our lists and I think there's still a contentious issues, because there's a lot of theatres in the room, but I think there's a lot of discussions still to be had on the ownership of the data and how it gets used. Obviously the theatres take the booking and therefore you're the custodian of the data, but I really do think that it's something that we want to be able to do a bit more of, is that Rambert or other promoters could be doing a lot of work in background information in between visits on particular art forms, which will actually help everyone when the company returns to the theatre in a year or two years' time, but that's a bigger conversation.

Rambert's wish list

So there were various different things that we wanted to get, we just decided that we'd have a wish list, we wouldn't think about whether we had the money, we're not an enormous team, there are five of us, there's three full time and two part time. For some of you that will be a lot, for some of you you'll have more than that in your teams and we're not commercial companies, we do not have big marketing budgets at all, we do a lot of rejigging, but in an ideal world, in 2007, what would we like?

Well, the main thing we wanted was a **new website**, ours was about seven, nine years old, not very easy to navigate, that was the main thing that we wanted to get. I wanted clearly to have **my own database** that I could contact people on a regular basis, so I wanted a means that we could get our audiences to sign up. I wanted people to be able to sign up directly. And we wanted to have some **decent small promo clips** that we could put on our website, blogs, we know that audiences like to get closer to the artists, in our case they like to talk or they like to know a lot more about the dances than the director. We have actually done

this, it's not proving to be the most successful, but it doesn't cost us any money, so we do blogs. **An online forum**, this, to me was one of the biggest things that I wanted. I wanted the means that we could encourage our audiences to communicate with us on a regular basis and not just ring up because they thought Titley was a really stupid name and they could tell us what they thought and that is something that we did and I'll mention that a little bit later. **Behind-the-scenes video footage**, again, this is partly because contemporary dance can be quite challenging, so we wanted to produce, if we could, some short films or interviews or just more stuff, generate more stuff that our audiences would find interesting, about the company generally or about the work that we do.

Photo galleries: when I joined Rambert I was told, by theatres, actually, that they loved Rambert's studio photography, but unless it appeared on a poster or a leaflet or maybe a display ad, all these lovely photographs were just sat on our system and people weren't given the opportunity to see them. I wanted **our website to feel a little bit alive and ever changing**. There's nothing worse than having a news item or a news section and the last thing on there was put up four months ago, it doesn't encourage people to go back and I wanted to drive people to our website on a regular basis. Over the last couple of years, this is obviously very particular to us, but we tour every year and I wanted us to **generate a micro site for audiences** with a lot of this information in it, but it also meant that it made us think differently. If we were going to create a micro site it had to be populated with stuff and therefore we had to create that stuff and we had to be a little bit more creative.

Post-performance talks is nothing amazing and lots of people do it, but we didn't, we did pre-show talks which is all about just talking about the company. We didn't have an opportunity to get audiences together and discuss the work, so not a new idea, but for us and again a lot of this is to do with what's right for you. **Schools marketing campaigns**; I mentioned that 25% of our bookings are from schools, I really believed when I joined Rambert that you can't just send a letter and a leaflet to a school and hope that they're going to book, you have to talk to the teachers direct and for the last three years now we've been running a telemarketing campaign for every tour that we do and what was really encouraging recently is that the person who does it for us is an external company, we don't do it ourselves, but it is quite cost effective. She was saying that teachers that she's now talking to remember their conversation last year and they're now building a relationship and a trust. Fortunately they know the Rambert brand, dance teachers, but nevertheless they trust about the booking process.

And our last campaign, just to give you some figures if you don't do it, what we did in June for the Autumn, direct sales just off the campaign were a thousand-ish tickets, from about thirty schools which was triple what we paid for the campaign and that's just direct sales, there will be a lot more that just go directly to the venue.

I've talked about language, we've wanted to visit **repertoire language** and the way we were talking about ourselves anyway. **Annual audience research** – I've done that piece of research in 2007, but unless you put a bit of a budget aside to do some kind of research, the chances are the year will go by, even when we have put the budget aside the year goes by and if you don't have the money, you don't do it. I would really recommend that you, even if it's £500, if you're able to do it, you put £500 aside and then during that year you decide what small bit of research would be really useful for you to undertake, primarily with your audiences and over a five-year period you can actually start generating quite a story that's helpful in the way that you do your marketing.

We weren't on any **social networking** sites at all, I think most of us probably are now, so we do have a Twitter page, we do have Facebook, we do have a separate page on YouTube. I said I want people to come to our website and I want them to sign up to us and I don't want them to sign up to Facebook, because that's not the most direct way and I was a bit miffed that the numbers on Facebook were going up very, very quickly for our page (which is great). I just had to get over that and realise that okay, this is how people want to communicate with us, if this is how they want to find out their stuff, then that's a good thing. And the last one, **SMS text messaging**. When I joined the company there was a little bit of money where we could do this and I didn't know much about it and I thought this seems to be the way forward, let's do it, to be honest we didn't really think it through properly and we didn't have the resources there and for Rambert it didn't work, so we kind of abandoned that. But all of these things in the end, in some shape or form we've been able to do over the last three years, not immediately, we couldn't do everything, some of these things cost money, some didn't, some we had to find budgets for, but we have been able to achieve them.

Short, medium and long-term objectives

Short term

So from the outset we wanted to obtain the infrastructure and resources to develop an audience engagement programme. It did mean some jiggling around and changing the way that we did things and who did what in the department. If you really sit back and think is there a way that you can change things.

Medium term

Unless I get that robust new database I can't do all the work and all the communications that I want to do. But at the same time we need to develop a series of engaging marketing tools. There's no point me having thousands of people to engage with and nothing to tell them.

Long term

Create a culture of audience interaction instead of a series of sales pitches, because if we're honest, on the whole, that is what we do, we have a product and we try to sell it and we have another product and we try to sell it and it's all a little bit bitty and what I think we have to think about and I think all this is about relationships and relationships don't happen over night and they take time and we have to help build them and then grow the audience. Having said that, being realistic, it is actually about selling tickets and making money.

Participant exercise

Participants were asked to consider in pairs one initiative that they would like to adopt for their organisation which will bring them closer to their audiences in a more engaging way.

Stephanie Moore

I think probably all of us, unless we are the boss, have a boss in our teams, who comes up with all these wonderful ideas, but how do you actually input that if you're the person who's having to implement it on the ground? You're probably all thinking 'well this all sounds well and good, but how can I actually do this?' and the answer is, as Craig's already touched on, much of the activity we wanted to do could be achieved by making actually quite small changes or small additions to what we're already doing and of course as expectations increase, inevitably so does workload, but we've been able to adapt and new working structures eventually do become the norm and you just find yourself living it. So don't be put off, we can do it, so you can do it.

Key areas of change

Looking at planning and regional marketing campaigns, we obviously deal, as a touring company with each theatre in a different way, each campaign is tailored very specifically to the organisation that we're touring to and I was already taking quite a collaborative approach to each venue campaign, but we really upped the ante to get the marketing teams working for us and thinking much more strategically about not just what they were doing for us and the success of the Rambert campaign, but our place in their overall programme, so not just in terms of Rambert, but in terms of dance, contemporary dance and the wider dance art form, but also their overall theatre relationship with their audience. We know that a half-week show that's not going to make a theatre any money is, with the best will in the world not going to be at the top of many priority lists, but positioning our company as a tool to help theatres achieve their greater goals has proved a really good starting point.

To achieve this it's really important that we increase the theatre's understanding of our work which then they pass to their audience members. We now treat every venue campaign almost entirely as an audience development opportunity. This means focusing more on attracting new attenders and as Craig mentioned

before, only about 25% of our audience are actually repeat attenders and we do have a much higher than normal proportion of first-time attenders to each show.

Audience research has shown us that people who regularly come to Rambert don't usually need much persuasion to come back, if they enjoyed it they're going to come back, they feel that they're regular supporters and loyal friends of the company. It's usually unsuitable dates that stops them coming back. The key to attracting new attenders for us is engaging them with the company, drawing them into the life of the dancers and musicians and everything else that goes on to get a work up onto the stage. Dancers do have a sort of mystique, obviously all artists are like this, but particularly the dancers, and we discovered and people see it as a huge privilege to get to know them better.

At the same time this encourages them to think that contemporary dance might be for them as well, it's very niche and has that kind of contemporary scary factor and of course our core marketing activity hasn't really changed. We still send out direct mail, print, put up posters and do bus sides and all of the general things. But the message that we're sending is now often much different, it's not unusual for me to design in house, I hasten to add, four or five different direct mail letters per venue and we're doing eighteen to twenty of those a year to target separate groups. So, for example, live music is a big thing for us, we're the only contemporary dance company to permanently tour with an orchestra. Classical music attenders at a venue who've never been to dance before might respond better to a letter from a well known composer who's working with us and if we can get that composer to endorse the company and say what he or she's got out of working with us, we believe that these people will try that as well and trust that message.

Craig has talked quite a lot about the website, and it's really been an invaluable tool in helping us to engage in attendance. When it was redesigned in 2007, we did build a facility to show lots and lots of photo galleries and films and the dancers and staff have been really brought on board with helping us to reveal the backstage elements of the company. As well as the official performance footage, we now show costume fittings, video diaries, rehearsals, interviews, orchestra recordings and any number of different things. As well as providing that exclusive insight into the company it also shows the dancers as normal people who make jokes, mess around and make lots of mistakes. That was quite a cultural shift for us – before we'd wanted to present ourselves as really very quality, very aloof, high-end and actually we had to be a bit humble and say that actually it's better to let people see that we're real humans and that's really helped.

All these tools on the website are useful for schools and community education work as well and even if people don't immediately buy tickets, they're becoming more familiar with the company and the most consistently popular pages on our website are those with video and photograph elements, our web manager tells us. As an aside we've also been able to make this really good quality footage

available for theatre foyer screens, which I know people are moving more and more towards. It's so important and Sadler's Wells Theatre in London tells us that shows with footage running on their screens always sell better than those without and if our Chief Executive goes to Sadler's Wells and doesn't see our footage up there she comes back screaming.

As Craig mentioned we do try to undertake at least one piece of audience research a year. They are fairly small scale, we can't do anything large, as we haven't got the time or the money, really, although we're trying to make small changes, but every little snapshot that we get is really valuable and provides us with an extra insight and feedback in all these areas and helps to inform our marketing decisions with forthcoming campaigns.

Creating new lines of communication

As Craig said, traditionally we've had to rely on the venues as the most effective brief to our customers, because we don't have a large database ourselves, especially in the years when our online activity was quite basic. So we now encourage the theatres to think of how our website and our database can be tools to allow them to develop longer-term relationships with Rambert customers. If the venue allows us to, and this is where Craig said there's a bit of a thorny issue still, but we're getting there, we like to contact all audience members immediately after the performance, encouraging them to give feedback and discuss with each other via our online forum and to sign up to our mailing list and we do that via hard copy postcard, so just postal addresses, but also by email and that's the most effective, because people can immediately flick through, very immediate. We do see an increase in new subscribers each time we do this and a very noticeable influx of comments on our online forum, some of which are great, some of which are really bad, but we leave all on there unless they're offensive, because we think it's important that people can discuss.

Subscribers then receive a monthly e-bulletin, which we try to keep as newsworthy as possible, always driving them back to our website, which is still our best tool for targeting them with ongoing up to date information. So by keeping regular contact with these people, by keeping Rambert in their minds or trying to keep Rambert in their minds, making them more likely to respond when they're asked to book next time we perform at their theatre and as our e-bulletins talk about the work of other dance companies and sometimes other non dance arts organisations, this can only help with building an awareness of the art form in general. We're not precious about only promoting ourselves, but obviously that's the main thrust of it, and we like to build an awareness overall.

On our e-flyers we always include a forward to a friend option, occasionally with an incentive to do so, but it's not always required. Our view that even if the friend doesn't book or even if they just delete it, it's a way of getting the company's name into their minds and that's a really good starting point. Craig talked about the online forum, we built that into our website to allow people to comment on

what they'd seen and it's given us some really incredible feedback which we've been able to use as endorsements on direct mail and leaflets, etc, There's nothing as powerful as a good recommendation from a friend or someone who in some way is like you, which is what the keynote speech was touching on this morning, so it was quite heartening to think actually we're kind of doing that little bit, you know, basics, but getting there.

Providing a renewed focus for each tour

Now this is about telling the public what they want to know, not what we think they want to know and this is a little bit where we talk about the language that we use. We all know that dance companies in particular, and other arts organisations as well, use language that's not accessible and most of us are aware of the problems that this can cause, but we're so often tied by artistic directors and other creatives who want to talk about their arts in particular terms and are very particular about that and other companies can be very, very unlucky in that respect. I will admit that we're very lucky at Rambert to have an artistic director who's very supportive, who provides us with the information we need mostly and then allows us to formulate it into the language that we want to use and we appreciate that not everybody's that lucky.

So we've been able to really examine the language we use to describe the company and most importantly what people are going to get from engaging with us, that's now what we're really focusing on. It's a gradual process and we're always refining it, but it's always in our minds. A good recent example which I'm implementing at the moment, we did some online surveys with the Lowry with Rambert attenders, dance attenders who haven't attended Rambert and complete non dance attenders and all of the Rambert responses were just massively positive. These are those people that feel that they know the company really well, they're very engaged, they connect with the company in some way. We asked them to describe how they felt when they sat in on a performance and we've taken the top ten words which were amazing and we're now using those to describe the company on direct mail, instead of talking at length about the work that they're going to see in artistic terms. So to get those feelings across to other potential attenders and they're not necessarily the words an artistic director would ordinarily wish to use, **entertaining** was one of the top ones, that's not what artistic directors generally want to say, **escapist**, **accessible** and **quality**, which seems sort of self-implied, you don't need to say it, but actually that's really really important that people feel they're going to get that from Rambert.

Another way that we were responding to audience needs, is that we carried out an audience survey in 2007, which Craig touched on, which indicated that people wanted us to provide them with more opportunities to feel closer to the company and the work. We were already doing what we now call insight matinees, they were called family matinees at Sadler's Wells on a regular basis. Basically it's a reduced programme, then incorporating a talk by our artistic director and a demonstration of the difference between ballet and contemporary technique on

stage. But we haven't tried this in the regional venues at all and we now programme them in at several theatres with moderate success, I think, growing, but this was a response to a genuine audience desire, rather than us doing it because we thought it was a good way to sell tickets or because it was a good worthy, artistic thing to do and of course any decision like that has to work for your company or your organisation, but it really was driven by the needs of the audience, rather than ourselves.

A two-way conversation

A really important thing that we're doing now is encouraging a two-way conversation with our audiences and as Craig mentioned before. Ten years ago it was very much a one-way street but people now expect to be able to input into any entertainment that they're engaging with, and if we're not offering that, then it's not going to be acceptable. We very much now invite comment and genuinely try to act on that if we can and it's achievable but of course we in the marketing team don't make final artistic decisions. But we can feed audience thoughts back and we can crowbar ourselves into any discussion where that might be happening and make sure that we're representing the audience. It all helps to make the audience feel part of the company and we think the closer they feel, the more likely they are to book to see us perform.

The right team

So you may still be thinking again, 'Oh lovely, well and good, who is managing all this extra work?' At Rambert, we're lucky, yes, to have five members in the marketing team. And expectations to develop our audience were not matched with an offer of increased staffing, so we looked at what we wanted to do, who we had in the team and how we could move some responsibilities around to free up staff time. We had a part-time assistant, that person became a part-time press and marketing assistant, which freed up some of my time to work on more of the public engagement side of things by passing over some of the admin tasks that I'd had to do on a day-to-day basis. Our part time web manager previously spent a lot of time managing online merchandise sales, which was essentially packing things up in jiffy bags and posting them out, that was the web manager and with some delicate negotiation we were able to pass that responsibility over to the company receptionist who was sitting there not doing much but answering the phone. So this then freed up time for our web manager to spend time really exploring new media opportunities that are increasingly more crucial. You may not have that number of marketing staff in your team, in fact the team might just be you, but if it's at all possible, shifting some responsibilities around can help.

Undertaking new initiatives often requires new skills and we can't always afford somebody else to come in and do these things for us. 'Oh no, more work for no reward' you may cry. But if you can approach it in a positive way it can really work, you've got to see it as a chance for developing your role and pick up some new skills that will benefit your current job, but also you personally in the future. You have to put that spin on it and think of it in those terms. For instance our web

manager is now a whiz at film editing which she'd never done before she came to Rambert and carrying out more frequent research projects has given me the chance to put my knowledge into practice much more often and the more you learn how to do things the quicker you can deal with them and it just all becomes second nature.

The results

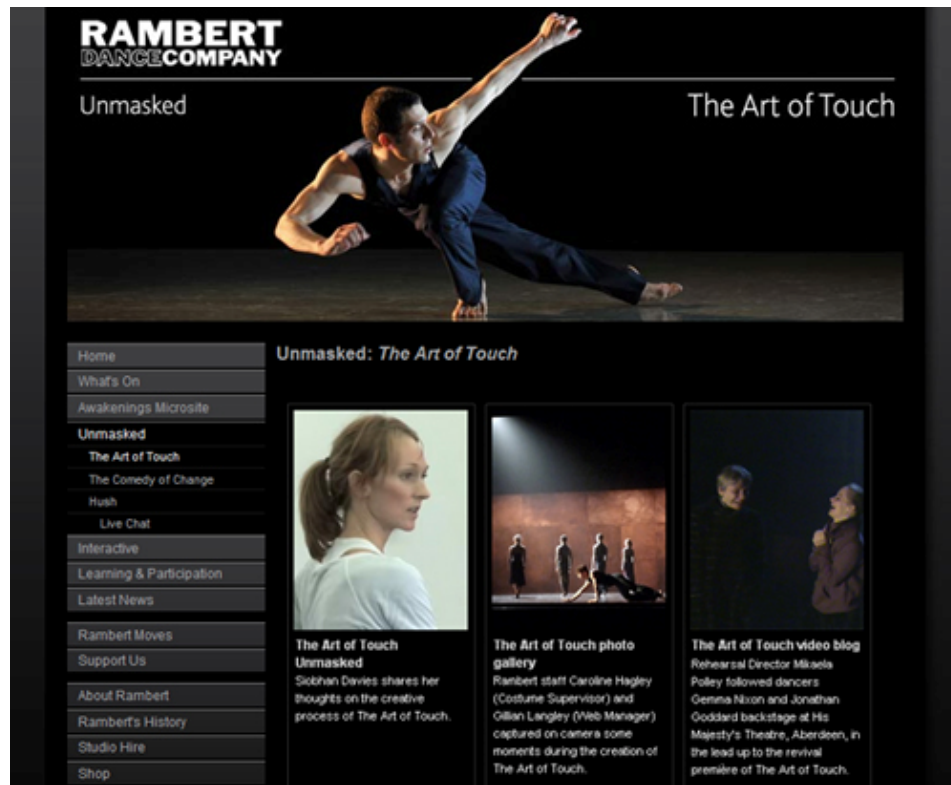
And all of these things that I've talked about have helped us to achieve an overall increase in public awareness, the benefits of this are many-fold. Greater awareness minimises risk taking for audiences and for contemporary dance that's a real challenge for us, because people need to feel that they know what they're going to get. The better informed they are about the kind of company we are, what they're going to see on stage, how they will feel when they're there and the better equipped they are to understand it or more important perhaps to accept they do not need to understand it, because that's a real barrier for us, the more likely they are to take the leap and book and it all helps us to create a positive network of external ambassadors. Nothing's more powerful than word of mouth, as we all know. If our audiences go away enthused and transported and then go home and tell their family and friends and spread the word we're happy and then we can create a nice herd of Rambert fans.

So that's some examples of actually how I think implementing Craig's lofty ideas on a day-to-day basis and we've just got a few screens from our website, to show you the kind of thing that we're talking about:

Online forum

Home	General discussions	Threads	Posts	Latest Post
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's On Awakenings Microsite Unmasked Interactive Rambert Blog Video Wall Gallery Forum Join Help Learning & Participation Latest News Rambert Moves Support Us About Rambert Rambert's History Studio Hire Shop Press Contact Us Search this site for: <input type="text" value="Google Custom Search"/> 	<p>Anything Rambert</p> <p>Use this discussion group to talk about anything Rambert related.</p>	14	75	<p>Ghost Dances</p> <p>Created Thu, 24 June 2010 at 10:32:27 PM</p> <p>by Katy</p>
	<p>Ask Rambert</p> <p>Maybe you have a question for the dancers, our Artistic Director or any other member of staff? If so, post them here.</p>	11	107	<p>Hush music</p> <p>Created Sun, 25 April 2010 at 05:07:44 PM</p> <p>by Emma</p>
	Performance Feedback Archive	Threads	Posts	Latest Post
	<p>Eternal Light Tour autumn 2008 (Locked)</p> <p>Read reviews left during Rambert's Eternal Light Tour autumn 2008.</p>	8	87	<p>Eternal Light</p> <p>Created Thu, 22 January 2009 at 02:17:44 PM</p> <p>by George Jennings</p>
	<p>Eternal Light Tour spring 2009 (Locked)</p> <p>Reviews received during the Eternal Light Tour spring 2009.</p>	9	57	<p>Leeds Grand</p> <p>Created Mon, 20 July 2009 at 11:38:53 AM</p> <p>by Oliver Davies</p>
	<p>Sadler's Wells spring tour 2009 (Locked)</p> <p>Hush, Scribbles and A Linba Cupa performed at</p>			<p>Sadler's Wells</p> <p>Created Mon, 29</p>

Micro-site



Some key results

- 2008/09 saw an average increase in annual ticket sales of 14%
- Unique users to Rambert's website increased by 17% in 2009 and 13% in just the first six months of 2010
- Online forum for the 2008/09 tour attracted 147 posts. These public posts were viewed 26,382 times
- Repertoire films received 18,578 unique views 2009
- Rambert Unmasked received 13,342 unique views in its first year
- Over 3,000 people have signed up to Rambert's e-database

Summary

Plan now for the future, otherwise change will never happen, don't just keep putting it off.

What will work best for your organisation, it's what works best for you – consider what resources you need long term and what your options are, because inevitably it probably will cost a bit of money and it might mean you need to get funding, it might mean that you can't do it this year, but you can do it next year, but you've got to just start the process otherwise it won't happen. Of course try and make a compelling case to budget holders, they're not going to give you the

money unless you can, quote some things that we've said today if it's been helpful.

Starting smaller is better than not starting at all. Adapt what you already do, rather than revolutionise your marketing – I don't think anybody is suggesting that we do that – and think big, act more and don't be impatient. You're not going to do it all in five minutes, we're talking about a three-year period and we've done, I think for Rambert we've done a lot, but there's obviously a lot more that we can do.

Participant exercise

Participants were each asked to come up with an idea about what they'd like to do, thinking through the challenges that might prevent them, what might be their first steps, and who they might collaborate with. They were asked to consider a timeframe, being realistic about what could be achieved, and about how they might evaluate its success.

Questions

Nathalie from Cryptic: I just wanted to ask a bit more about your database and specifically the data fields that are within it, is it just this gigantic lengthy thing or are you kind of adding them to the surveys that you're doing, just to get sort of very tailored letters, for example.

Stephanie Moore

Well, when I'm talking about doing tailored direct mail letters, we're using the theatres database for that, so that is, they have a lot more information about booking history and obviously you can pull a list which shows people have attended. Our own database is deliberately very simple, because we were working with Razors Edge, which many of you may be familiar with, which is essentially a fundraising database, that was the database we had for our organisation and it has all kinds of relationships and how much money people have given and it was so unwieldy we just couldn't bear to even think about doing anything with it. So we pulled all of our data out of that, which is just people that wanted to receive mailings from us and we use a very simple online database called Eye Contact, which essentially just has spaces for name, postal address and email address, that's it, we don't have any more information than that. There is scope to add fields. So as the database grows, if we do want to start segmenting that in some way we can, but obviously if we don't have the capacity on our database to segment by show as the theatres do, so it's deliberately very streamlined, but for segmenting by show type, we're using the theatre's database for that.

Yes, I suppose it's then how do you use ...

Oh, importing afterwards.

... the specific questions that you're asking, is it in a much more generalised way or are you using it then to create an online dialogue?

Well, in terms of, you mentioned the audience surveys and in terms of the data that we get back from that, obviously the results are collated say on a basic Excel spreadsheet or something like that and we do have then fields where we ask people if they want to receive x, y and z from us, information, would they like to get engaged in some way and then we can important that data from the spreadsheet into our system or give it to the relevant departments so they may be much more interested in education work and we can make sure that that's being fed through. Because we're dealing with a relatively small number of people, it's quite manageable at the moment and who's to say what it's going to be like in five years time.

Craig Titley

We might regret setting it up like this, but because it was new to us three years ago and we didn't have extra resources, well, we were worried that if we asked too many questions people wouldn't sign up and if we asked too much and then we couldn't actually do anything with that information that was a bit pointless. So if we end up with 10, 20, 30,000 people on the database, we'll wish we'd asked more, so we may have got that wrong, but at the time we just wanted to go.

Steven from Chipping Norton Theatre: I was very interested in that point you said about the work, sending out, feeding in extra information about the shows to people that have already booked as it comes up, because one of the problems that I face is the fact that I'm having to think about work that hasn't been started yet, when you're producing the brochure six, eight months ahead of before it actually arrives in the venue and how do you feel that, does that actually have a real impact on extra ticket sales, does that actually enhance ticket sales, do you think, actually sending out extra information to people that have already booked and thinking about what Mark said this morning about that social learning kind of thing.

Craig Titley

Well, we haven't done it yet, it was very, very recent. I mean literally we were only talking about it at the end of last week, weren't we, the audiences were saying this, so we want to see how we pilot that, but my thinking is if we do it, it'll be something, we all send people information the week before and by then I would rather hope we kind of know it's part of a bigger tour, what we're doing. I don't know what effect that's going to have and it will depend on the art form. I mean for contemporary dance and there'll be certain other art forms perhaps and new writing or visual arts or something, that it would be more relevant, but one of

the things that people are really scared about with contemporary dance is turning up and not understanding it, not knowing, feeling a bit stupid, so I think what they want is to be armed with and you can't necessarily tell them stories, because there isn't one, but just armed with a bit more information so they walk into that auditorium feeling a little bit more empowered with knowledge, not stupid and you might just give them a couple of little nuggets of information, we're going to have to balance that with, we still want you to buy a programme, but it's something that we've never done and I think it would be very interesting to.

Stephanie Moore

I think something that we have been doing and this is not to people who've already booked, but to encourage people to book, because the pieces, as in your case are invariably not created or are not in any state where we can actually talk about it, but we've really opened a process to people, so every week we send them something or put something on the theatre's website, this is the development that's happened this week and it's all coming together, so people then feel really engaged with the creative process and they're getting quite excited about what they're going to see on stage and I think that's worked quite well.

Craig Titley

Yes, I mean again our experience is obviously contemporary dance, I feel that sending a letter to someone three weeks before like this, that gives that much information about it is just not enough. Not for contemporary dance, it's like you're not giving me enough information so what we're trying to do ourselves and the theatres will do it as well is over a longer period of time, it's just that drip, drip, so by the time you get that letter, you've actually already got it in your mind, you already know something about it, but then that's longer planning or you're trying to sell the show that's not selling very well next week.

Louise ... (unclear on recording): About your forum, it looked really good, you've got lots of people sort of interacting with it, our biggest problem is, it's up there, but how would you encourage people to interact and the number, like 26,000 viewing, how would you get those people then to not just view, but how do you encourage people?

Craig Titley

I've got no idea where the 26,000 people are coming from, I don't think we've got the data, most of the people who view our website come from America and China, which is helpful for touring, obviously in the UK, but Stephanie said earlier, when we've visited a theatre, I think all theatres have done this, which has been great, provided us with either mailing or email data, whatever their own data protection rules say, whether it's third party or all of it and then we send that

out and we drive those people to do a posting and it's mostly, if you don't do that, you get the odd one or two, but people do, they get an email, they click straight through and they tell you what they think and we do have sort of, well, there aren't that many awful comments, but there are a few and then are some lukewarm ones, but fortunately there are enough good ones, the majority, that it gives a good balance.

Stephanie Moore

And in terms of them interacting with each other, that is a slow process, they're generally telling us what they think, but I find that the more postings there are about particular forms or about a particular issue, the more they do interact with each other, so somebody might have said I didn't really enjoy that piece and someone up here will say, gosh, I feel really sorry for you, you must be some kind of idiot for not liking that, it was amazing and then once that person's made a comment in reference to someone else, then they start talking to each other.