

Public Engagement on a Shoestring

Anna Franks, Client Services Director, &Co and Eleanor Barrett, Director, Bradford Playhouse

Anna Franks is Client Services Director at &Co. Her responsibility involves leading on the strategic delivery of &Co's membership, events and CPD offer, as well as directing their reputable audience consultancy services. With 13 years' experience in marketing and communications, Anna has developed the consultancy service into a leading offer working with a wide number of arts and cultural organisations. Anna worked in a variety of marketing and communications roles in Abbey National's corporate affairs department before moving to Leeds in 2001. After setting up a communications function for a Leeds-based housing association, Anna joined &Co in September 2004. Anna is a frequent presenter at conferences on audience development, marketing and communications and has worked with a wide range of organisations within the arts and cultural sector. Anna is also Vice-Chair for Leeds Irish Health and Homes, a Leeds based social care, housing and outreach organisation.

Eleanor Barrett took up her post as Director of the Bradford Playhouse in September 2009 and with it the challenge of reviving an ailing theatre based in a city with a myriad of socio-economic problems during a period of deep recession. The venue was re-launched as a contemporary multi-purpose art space in October 2009. Eleanor has over twenty years' experience of working in the arts. She has also worked extensively in social inclusion projects and education. She uses her expertise in these areas to inform her approach in finding innovative and empathic solutions to professional challenges. She believes strongly that engagement with the arts can have a dramatic transformative effect on any human being, particularly people who have had challenging and problematic life experiences and uses this belief to inform her working practice and choice of projects. Prior to her current role, Eleanor spent three years working at the experimental theatre and arts venue 'Shunt' based in a labyrinth of underground tunnels underneath London Bridge station.

Introduction

This session was designed to take a practical approach to marketing the arts on limited budgets, with a view to giving participants an understanding of where to start with planning their public engagement approach. The session would also involve case studies and practical examples of engaging the public in imaginative ways.

Five steps to public engagement

Anna Franks

When I was building this presentation and looking at the five steps to public engagement, one of the most important things when I talked to organisations that I work with, who ask me about public engagement is actually why are you doing it, what are you actually trying to achieve with public engagement for your organisation? And I think we're all very good within the arts sector at generating lots of different terminology and people saying, well, I'm not quite sure what public engagement is and how does it fit, but crucially I think one of the most important things is actually stepping back and thinking – 'how does the way that I want to approach the public engage with my artistic and strategic mission and vision of the organisation?' This is an absolutely crucial point to start with; *who* are you trying to engage? I think it's often a neglected part of truly thinking about your public engagement as well.

Quite a lot of you are probably limited on your capacity and/or your resources. You might have some data, but you're maybe unsure how to interpret that data. It's absolutely essential that you do actually put that kind of market intelligence hat on and really try to understand, get under the skin of the public and the audiences that you're actually trying to engage with. Obviously the type of activity that you want to engage the public with is absolutely essential and again I think a number of the case studies that Eleanor's going to talk about really will begin to show how you can truly put audiences and the art right at the centre of your organisation, you don't have to focus on one to the negative of the other.

So, hopefully creating the art is the most exciting and creative part of what you're here to deliver, so it's absolutely how we can connect the art and the audience in our public engagement. Thinking about how do you actually engage them and again, looking at what are the promotional tools, how do you get audiences and visitors and participants to actually feel like they want to make the step from just hearing about what your organisation is doing to *truly engaging* with what you're going to do as well. And finally how do you know it's worked?

- What are you trying to achieve with public engagement for your organisation?
- Who are you trying to engage?
- What type of activity do you want to engage people with?
- How do you engage them?
- How do you know it has worked?

What is public engagement

One of the questions I was asking myself in developing this presentation is what is public engagement all about? There's lots of terminology that the arts and cultural sector band about, but I suppose for me public engagement is really about that *two-way dialogue*. We've heard quite a lot about that today in all the keynote presentations, it really is about engaging with the audience on a conversation. I heard two or three speakers this morning and throughout this afternoon talking about the value of the conversation and I think sometimes we're so focused on either creating the art or getting promotional tools out there that

actually we might miss sometimes the conversation and the pull that they're talking about rather than the push messages. Again, I think Eleanor is going to show some really good examples of how you can really build that two-way relationship with your audiences.

Audience development I think is about looking at more the kind of strategic way that you might approach, identify who your audiences are, where they are and how you're going to build long-term relationships with them, it's about the commissioning, the customer care and then finally you've got marketing. Many of us will know the standard four 'P's – that is your product, price, place, promotion. Now I'm not saying that any of these sit in isolation, I think there's quite a strong overlap in those, but I was just trying to kind of work through actually how you might distinguish between a number of different turns that are out there at the moment. It really is the audience and the art equally at the heart of the experience and I think before you even really contemplate truly embarking on public engagement and truly understanding what public engagement might mean to your organisation, it's about remaining focused on your mission, it's being clear about what you want to achieve.

I think you have to be quite an open and transparent organisation, you have to be open to debate. I thought Shelley Bernstein's presentation was absolutely fantastic – she talked about trust and losing control and enabling audiences to actually feel part of the organisation and I thought that was an absolutely fantastic example of true public engagement, making your audiences, visitors, participants feel part of the organisation, being committed to valuing the audiences participation. Don't do it just because you think a funder wants to do it, do it because it's right for your organisation and it actually is going to get you further in that relationship with your audiences. I think it's also quite interesting to explore what level of engagement your audiences want. I'm writing a paper at the moment with someone from Leeds Metropolitan University and I've begun to look into the difference between co-creation, which I think is probably the most in depth example of how an audience member might truly want to be part of your organisation, it doesn't automatically turn your organisation into the audience in focus, but it does actually create that in-depth engagement and that opportunity for someone to be truly engaged in developing the product with you. Then you've got audience development which I've touched on, now Arts Council England do talk about audience development as being around marketing and commissioning and customer care, but less comfortable about using audience development, because often it insinuates that the audiences need developing, whereas actually there's different levels of engagement there. Let's not forget those that actually just want a day out, full stop. They just want to go because the kids are jumping on the sofa, they're driving them crazy and they want to go somewhere because it's raining and they're not necessarily there for the art, they're there for the social experience and none of these layers of engagement are any less important than any of the others. I think sometimes organisations need to stop and actually think which layer of engagement do my audiences want to have with the art that I'm

trying to put on and that might be different layers of engagement at different points throughout the cycle of development with your organisation, but managing all those layers can be a key challenge.

I do quite a lot of work with smaller organisations, those from one-man-bands up to organisations that are slightly bigger, but don't have any dedicated marketing staff in that way. I often hear these kind of comments; 'but we don't have any money', 'it's a cost, rather than investment', 'it takes too much time', 'there's only two of us in the office, so we couldn't possibly seriously consider how public engagement fits strategically'. I think all of these comments start from the premise of actually looking at what you don't have, rather than looking at what you do have and I think that it's very important to sometimes stop and just think, okay, I have to step back and objectively look at the assets that I have within my organisation. And predominantly the key assets you're going to have are your people, they're the ones that are going to be coming up with the creative ideas, they're the ones that can actually drive the energy and the enthusiasm behind the artist work that you're trying to deliver to your audiences. It might mean that you have to re-evaluate the time and how you allocate that time within your organisation, it might be that you can work in partnership with other organisations or pool different resources, but critically that final question of where do I start, I mentioned earlier is all about truly understanding who your audience is, who your visitors and your participants are.

Audience insight

So when you're thinking about who you're trying to engage, it's all about building relationships, but you need to understand the relationship that people want to have with your organisation. It's absolutely essential to do your research and your audience insight to deliver effective and positive public engagement, it enables you to understand what their motivations and behaviours are. How many of you here feel that you have a really deep understanding of the motivations and behaviours of the people that engage with your organisations? [show of hands] That's a unanimous no. You need a starting block and as I say, often it is about actually just having the conversation. I always quote this example. I was doing some research for a museum's presentation and I came across the Sandwich Glass Museum in the United States. Their marketing director or their chief executive had a really huge car park and about once a week their chief executive for the sake of arguing would go into the car park and just pretend that he was randomly walking through the car park looking for something to do and would grab someone who walked out and say what's actually in there and hopefully someone would tell him. All of a sudden he got a direct conversation with the people who had truly just experienced the art and work that was within the museum, but it gave him absolutely a fascinating insight to understand what had motivated them to go in there and often it generated further conversations, because if someone wants to ask and value your opinion, they often want to share it even further. So research and insight doesn't have to be massively expensive, but I think you have to feel confident as an organisation to ask those

questions as well and I think once you understand about research and insight, it really does help channel the resources, which particularly for a number of the smaller organisations are a real challenge to allocate and share out as well.

How many of you do always gather audience data when you're running any event? Not everyone, there's kind of maybe a mix. Name, address, postcode, it can be email addresses, you know, it could be as direct and straightforward as that, as gathering that kind of data. Or it can be more opinion data, why did you come here tonight or what did you think of the actual event that we ran, did you get involved in any of the workshops that we're running around it as well? So it could be a bit of a qual or quant basis, but I do think that this is the starting point and if you're not doing it at the moment, do collect even that most basic of data, postcode data can give you so much information and if any of you are Arts Council funded, you can get an area profile report free from your audience development agency or if you don't have one in your region, you can call any audience development agency and they'll work that through for you. The area profile reports give you a kind of understanding of your local catchment area, so wherever you're based it can tell you the population details within fifteen, thirty, forty five minutes drive-time.

Look at existing tools that are already out there, how many of you have heard of the *Arts Audience Insight* segmentation model? It's all online, you can download it for free, again it's a segmentation model that is truly based on arts consumption. Look at audiencesuk.org for a full set of resources around audience data and examples of data that's already been collected, which again you could invest some time and just do this desk research and start to build an understanding of who are the audiences and the public that you want to engage. And as I said before with that Sandwich Glass Museum example, talk to your audiences, make sure you're out there having those conversations, make sure that anyone volunteering for you is also talking to them and that can continue to inform your public engagement approach.

Prevention of engagement

I think the other key point as well is to really understand what might prevent people from engaging with you. There are a number of different reports written about what the barriers to engagement for individuals and they can range from whether that's financial barriers, such as price, or lack of information that they just didn't know that it was happening or where it was happening, or intellectual barriers that they just don't feel that it's for them. But it's absolutely essential that you can understand what those barriers are, so that you can begin to break them down.

Eleanor Barrett

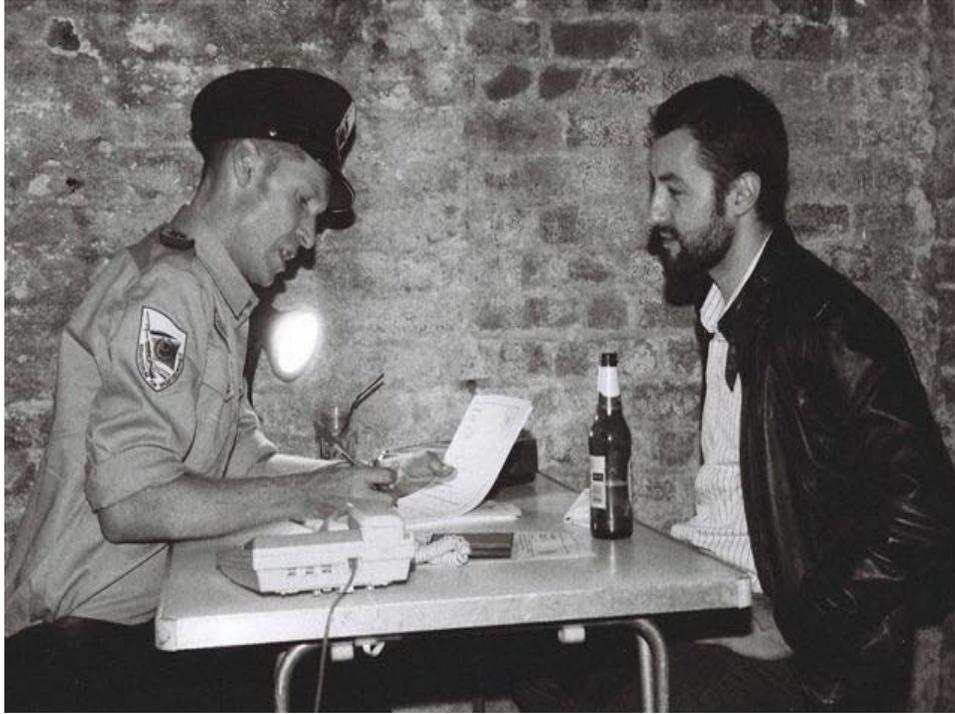
Turning grapes into wine

Following on from what Anna's saying, a lot of the organisations I've worked for and projects I've worked on have involved quite intensive engaging activities. I worked a few years ago on a project in Brighton which was about engaging hard-to-reach members of the community, people who'd been homeless for a long time, people who'd been using drugs for a long time and we used a lot of drama and art techniques to engage people, to remind people what it's like to be alive, because people had forgotten. So a lot of things that we did in that project were very immersive and also going out in to the countryside and doing quite sort of interesting artistic things outdoors. I did a project at Shunt which was outdoors, as part of a festival on Southwark Bridge. Basically this was a big tub full of grapes and me dressed up as a medieval peasant. We got everybody to trample grapes, which you would think people would be a bit reticent about, but everyone did want to trample those grapes and they wanted to roll around in them and get really full on with it. We set up a kind of contraption, but made it look like the juice that was being trampled was being converted into wine at that moment. So people were getting wine out of tanks and cocktail fountains and things, which was actually the wine being sold by the guide. Not for the kids, obviously, there was a Ribena version. So, we were trying to say that this machine was not only creating instant wine, but was also creating a half Ribena section and a half wine and quite a lot of the adults, you know, particularly blokes would come along and go, well, it's a bit unhygienic that and I would go, well, it's got a two filter system on it and I heard them saying to their friends, it's got a two filter system on it. The funny thing about it was pretty much the littlest kids were the ones who went behind and saw that it was a silly contraption that we'd made in about half an hour with plastic pipes. And all the adults were just totally wanting to believe that you could create wine by trampling a few grapes in a tea urn. So it was really nice, because what Anna was saying about levels of engagement, some people just wanted to watch, you know, not everyone wanted to get in there, but actually quite a lot of people did and it was really successful, we did it all day long, we were absolutely exhausted, there was just complete mess everywhere.

Creating an immersive environment

The image that Anna showed earlier of the interrogation actually wasn't a recreation. What we created was the People's Republic of Shunt and for two weeks we became an independent state with its own private army underneath London Bus Station. So there were a hundred of us dressed in uniforms and we had a border patrol and we had prisons and we had VIP, officers camps and the whole place was converted into this environment. So, the people who were our regular customers who came to Shunt were forced to take part and couldn't come to the venue and not be part of this event. I'll touch on it a bit later about the audiences that we were engaging with and how different they were to the audiences I was engaging in Bradford, but basically we had quite a lot of bankers, it's a business district, it's London Bridge and a lot of people coming out after work and they fell in love with our venue, because it was really, really experimental and something that they didn't see anywhere else, so they wanted to be challenged. We often had situations which were quite full on – I mean

people were being arrested, taken into interrogation rooms and stripped. But you do get a feel for whether it's okay as we had built up an element of trust with our audience.



And you wouldn't expect someone to want to make a sock puppet at 1.00am when they're expecting to come out and have a club-type experience, but actually the sock puppets were one of the most popular things we've done. I mean it takes ages to make one, it takes at least two hours to make one of these things and you have to really kind of concentrate and it's quite dark and people are drunk, and I was really paranoid that everyone's going to stick needles in their legs and it'll be a nightmare and there'll be ambulances here all night, but actually people were really careful, really considerate and there's something very sweet about seeing ten blokes sitting around a bit pissed going 'have you got any red thread', 'what buttons should I use for the eyes'. And then what was really sweet later on was everyone had made these amazing sock puppets and they were kind of walking around the venue with them really proudly, because it wasn't just a thing that you could make in five minutes.



Anna Franks

Shunts London is on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eE3Db2OIIVs>) and there are lots of different video clips about it and it's absolutely fascinating to just watch the experiences and hear the report back from the audiences that actually engaged in the work. There was one lady that was saying, do any of you remember Enid Blyton's Magic Faraway Tree, it was exactly like that, you know when you got to the top of the tree you always went to a different land and she said it was exactly like that, every Friday. This is where I think, when talking about how you promote and engage, certainly that word-of-mouth stuff was absolutely essential, because she said that it became part of the fact that if you didn't go on a certain night, you thought that you were missing out – you thought you were missing out on a particular experience. I just think it's a really interesting example of different ways that the public can actually engage in that way.

Marketing tools

Everyone knows about standard marketing stuff – you use the right tools for the right audience. But obviously if you're working on a shoestring, I do think it's often about getting out of your comfort zone and actually thinking, 'I'm not really that good about going out and promoting myself, I really don't like speaking in front of people but I'm just going to try that, I'm going to go out there and I'm going to tell as many people as possible about this'. Word of mouth, I think is absolutely essential. And websites and social networking are obviously again

really beneficial tools, I'm sure the majority of you are using those. I think with social networking, obviously there's such a proliferation of things that you can do these days from Facebook to MySpace to Twitter. My favourite quote at the moment is 'Don't twitter without a twattergy' because actually I think a lot of people are doing Twitter just for the sake of the fact that they think they should be doing Twitter.

I think Twitter's great and it's free and it's a brilliant platform for creating those cultural conversations, but I do recommend that you seriously step back and think about what you're presenting on behalf of your organisation and how that can convert into engaging them in the experience, actually physically engaging. It's about stepping back and recognising that for some people public engagement might be virtual rather than physical.

Measuring impact

Then finally, what I'm just going to quickly touch on is evaluating the impact that you actually have. I think evaluating the impact, the key message there is it's about asking the audience, about gathering information and data that actually will help you the next time that you create a product or develop the experience, it's about finding out how you can find more people like people that engage with you currently. It can also help you understand why people engage with your project and your organisation, what motivated them, where they heard about it. I talked about some of those promotional tools, but actually if we're not asking people where they heard about it, how do we know whether any of these promotional tools are working, so that's absolutely important to be asking about that and also sign up to hear about more events. You can use tools such as Survey Monkey, which is a free survey tool. I think it costs something like £15 for the year or you have to pay like a licence, but you literally go on, even I can use it and I'm not brilliant with technology, but you can go on and you can just create your own survey and then if you've got the details, the e-mail addresses of your audiences you can send that out after an experience or an event that they've actually engaged with and begin to gather some of that data as well. Things such as comment cards are absolutely easy to do, put feedback avenues on through your website.

Eleanor Barrett

Re-invigorating Bradford Playhouse

I wanted to talk about, well, for me the challenge of taking over as director of the Bradford Playhouse, pretty much, a pretty terrible time for the Playhouse. I don't know if anyone knows anything of the history of it. I'm from Bradford, I left Bradford when I was about twenty five and I'd not been back there for about fifteen years, as I've been doing something down south. So when I came back I felt like I had to get to know Bradford again, but at the same time I did feel I had a complete understanding of where it was at and what was going on and the Playhouse, when I used to go there was a film theatre, it kind of showed a lot of

European alternative films. In the last ten years it had been an amateur dramatics company receiving house for just local pieces of theatre.

The problem that they had was that over the years the audiences had dwindled, because the audiences that came to see the pieces of theatre were only for those particular shows, so they were like community theatre for their communities, so there's nothing essentially wrong with that, that's fine, but unfortunately because the audiences didn't cross-fertilise with each other or have any interest in each other's outputs and the audiences were getting smaller, the place started to lose money and just started to go into a sort of spiral of financial difficulty. So there was about two or three times when it nearly went bankrupt and it got kind of rescued and kept being kind of put back on its feet, because it's a really important historical venue in Bradford that's been there since 1920.

So, what had happened then is it had almost gone bankrupt, gone into administration and when I came in the Arts Council had given us a small amount of money to try and re-establish it as a relevant venue for the city. It was a very, very difficult task, because although we had a small amount of money, there wasn't really enough money to really go for it. It had a very big problem in terms of perception, because a lot of people in Bradford had either stopped going there or had never been there or just assumed it was for amateur dramatics and nothing else and had no interest in going there. It didn't really have a lot of people coming from any other community, other than small white communities, it didn't have really very many Asian people going there or any black people going there. So it had become irrelevant really in the context of Bradford.

There was hardly any money and there were only three full time staff and we've had to turn it around and start making money pretty quickly because it's on its knees. So I was excited by the challenge of the Playhouse, because not only did I want to go in and go, hey look, I can bring something to my home town and come back, but I can also be excited by the fact that the audience is so different to what I've been working with, so if I knew then what I know now, I probably wouldn't have done it, to be honest, because it was so ridiculously hard to the point where I chewed my fingers off and couldn't sleep, so that's the reason I've only done it for nearly a year, but it was an amazing experience that I would never ever want to reverse and I'm really glad I did it.

The key thing about building an audience in Bradford, I felt, we could talk a lot about theories and stuff, I felt it was an instinctive thing for me, I knew, even if I had loads of money, I couldn't turn up in Bradford and go look at this massive shiny thing, isn't it brilliant, because everyone would have gone, oh no, we don't care about it, because collectively Bradford has become under-confident as a city. Coming from London it's such a contrast, because people in Bradford don't look confident, you know, you walk around, people are walking around looking miserable, and fed up. The city centre's empty, there's nothing really going on, Little Germany is a very dead area and it just can feel depressing, really. So I

thought well, I can't just come with loads of crazy things and expect everyone to want to see it, so the key strategy that I had was about putting the audiences right at the heart of the experience, so it was very important to me, because peoples' perception of the Playhouse was no longer relevant to them or it had never been relevant to them. We had a sort of very quick campaign of a re-launch, which we didn't have a lot of time to put a lot of money into or anything, but we called it a Festival of Abundance. The idea was that we were basically reminding everybody in my city, our city, that we all had brilliant things, like each other, it sounds a bit cheesy, but you know, each other, we've got our lives, we've got our energy, we've got our knowledge, we've got our skills, we've got whatever we choose to think of as being positive.

So what we did was we got loads of vegetables and we had a vegetable parade through the city centre and gave out vegetables as flyers where we just wrote on them 'Come to the Playhouse'. We did all kinds of silly things as vegetables, because we were using them as a sort of symbol that, you know, at the end of the day, what have we got, we've got veg. You can make stews with it, you can have a laugh with it, you can draw faces on it. So we had a really silly kind of lot of fun in the Playhouse, we got quite a lot of publicity, and we re-launched the spaces as a multi-purpose arts venues for and of the people. A lot of it was quite tongue in cheek, but we've actually got a mural on the side of the Playhouse, because it was the birth place of British socialism a long time ago, the creation of the independent Labour party, so there is a kind of connection there. So without being overtly political, we wanted to reclaim the space for the people of Bradford, which we set about doing and one of the phrases we had was, you are us, we are you, so we're trying to break down this idea that there's an elitist version of art where everyone kind of, is that for me, is it intellectually something that I can feel comfortable with and because we didn't have any artistic budget either it was a sneaky way of thinking, right, well let's get everyone in creating stuff and then all their mates will come and see and did. So it was about saying whoever wants to come into this venue and create art can do that, we just threw open the doors and we said whoever wants to come in here and do whatever they like are free to do it.

So in a short space of time we started to get quite a large audience and the audience that came, we wanted to put them at the heart of the experience in terms of creating the output, so they started having meetings every week. It's now swelled to about 120 people who come regularly every week and have named themselves the Art Farmers, because they didn't think volunteers was a good name and I agreed with them and we've got a place called the Art Farm, which is on the Westfield site.

Just to summarise with that, I suppose the point I'm trying to make is that the Shunt-type audience would be rich, they're used to paying money for experiences, they're used to, they've got a confidence about their cultural experience and what they expect, whereas in Bradford it was totally the other

opposite end of the scale where people didn't have confidence, they were very cynical, they were quite rightly a bit fed up with people coming in from out of town and going, right, well, we know what's best for you, we're going to do this and do that. So it was about putting them, not just immersing them in the experience, but them actually being the experience and you know, some of it is been tricky, some of it hasn't worked, some people have been very critical of that approach, I've nearly gone completely mental, but the fact remains that the place is thriving, there's a brand new audience in there, people come from Leeds, which is amazing.

The challenge that I had with Shunt was that the emphasis was very much on, everything was totally experimental, there was nothing traditional at all in what we did, so we were pushing the boundaries of what theatre was and what live performance could be and sometimes it was very advanced. The thing with the Playhouse was that I had to not only absorb it, create this new audience, but I still had to support the traditional audiences, so we still had amateur dramatics companies hiring the main stage, we still had traditional kids dance companies coming in and doing stuff. There was some tension, because a lot of these companies had been going on for years and they didn't really like what I was doing, they didn't like the way the space changed, because I took out the old carpets and I basically made the space very raw, so that people could do what they wanted on it and if people wanted to make a mess, that was fine, because we could clean it up, whereas the horrible old red carpet was stopping anyone doing anything. But some of the amateur dramatics companies were very upset about the removal of the carpet and said we want you to hire in a carpet when we're here and there's been a lot of work to do to build those relationships and I have to say that some of those companies have been brilliant and we're still working with them and they understand that it's brought in new audiences. So it's all sort of, it's a hybrid that's starting to work, but it wasn't easy.

Making an impact

So we know we make an impact, well, obviously we knew things would work through audience numbers, I mean in Bradford that was the key thing, watching and waiting for people to come down those stairs, because the bars worked downstairs and some nights nobody would come and then sort of 200 people would come and it'd be like yes! So for me that was a big thing, I know quantity isn't the way you normally do things, but for me at the Playhouse, that was the one thing, if people came, I'm very happy and obviously then you can talk to people and analyse, one of the positive aspects of having such immersive experiences and interactive experiences is you can talk to people constantly, because you're already engaged with them without being too, like I've got a clipboard and I'm going to ask you questions, but you can, well, somebody's getting married, you can hear them saying, oh, this is brilliant, isn't it, this is great, now every week it's different here, isn't it and you're obviously clocking it, so it's a kind of different way, you hear things and you're in part of the experience anyway, so you hear the conversations people are having, it's quite sneaky, but

you get to understand a lot about what people enjoy about what they're doing and obviously spying on people on Facebook, I do that a lot and blogs, so find little trails and find out what threads are being said about your night or your organisation, because you do find some really interesting things out, things like, especially like I found out that some of our volunteers were giving away free drinks. They were like come down on Friday and I'll give you a free drink and I was like right, I've seen that comment.

Being Katie Flanagan

Being Katie Flanagan was an idea that we had at the Playhouse when we were building up a following on Facebook, which hadn't really happened before, so we said when we get to our one-thousandth Facebook friend we'll give them their own night, so we put it on Facebook and said whoever wins, whoever gets to be the one-thousandth Facebook friend gets their own night. Anyway eventually this lass called Katie Flanagan became the official one-thousandth person and she was brilliant, she had bright red hair to here, really flamboyant, loads of mates, it couldn't have worked better. So she won her own night, so basically a bit like the *Being John Malkovich* film, we made like loads of Katie Flanagan masks and asked about all the things that she liked best, which she said was beaches, so we created a huge beach installation and we had ice creams, we had sand, we had paddling pools and we had all her favourite music and we paid for her family to come down on National Express. I think we got tickets for about £7.50 or something and it was great, there was a lot of publicity about it and she loved it and her family loved it and it was just a really nice thing to do.

Final thoughts

Anna Franks

Being curious is a key thing from my perspective and taking an interest in really truly understanding and connecting with your audiences. Don't underestimate the role of word-of-mouth marketing, I think we're hearing quite a lot about that today and how if you truly engage the public and get them on board with your organisation, they can really act as advocates and spread the word about what's happening. I think it's absolutely key to walk in the footsteps of your people, not your own, because I think sometimes you can get very internalised within the organisation, sometimes it's really interesting to try and step outside what your vision and what your understanding of the organisation is. Keep the passion, I think arts and cultural organisations are doing some fantastic work out there at the moment and don't be too bothered about whether you have to term it audience development or public engagement, I think the bottom line is whether your audiences are having an absolutely fantastic experience when they're engaging with your organisation, so continue to engage in those cultural conversations, definitely.

Questions were then invited:

I know it's quite a specific situation, just really I work around market towns, quite rural and it's just how you make that very first initial interaction with people, because like you say they are very cautious and very suspicious and they immediately just assume you're trying to sell them something and it's just trying, because I'd love to be able to take that kind of risks and get them trying something new, it's just encouraging them to do that.

Eleanor Barrett

It's interesting, because I totally understand what you mean and what Anna was saying about how to talk to people and engage people, it's all very well in theory, but it is quite scary to actually do it, because you know, it's like it'll backfire if people get upset, you know, oh, I don't want anything to do with that, kind of thing. But I mean in your situation, I think you probably have to be more subtle in terms of, I don't know, for me it's about almost trying to get, you know there's like this line, it's almost like try and get on the other side of their line and stand next to them a bit and it's a bit like well, what are they actually doing, if something's really popular, like lots of clubs and things, is it worth going there and just, I don't know, seeing what they are engaging with and just maybe kind of like just even starting chatting to people. I mean if people are really genuinely cautious and suspicious of new experiences you almost have to ..., I mean this market project I'm about to start, I'm basically going to have a unit at Brixton market where I've got to do all these completely mental things, but I'm not going to start doing that, because people will just think I'm a loon and the people who are installed, who've been there for years don't want me going in, going right, I'm going to have a fantastic line art experience next to your fish stall, so what I'm going to do is volunteer on the stalls, if they'll let me, so that I learn what it's like for them to be on ... I'm the fool, I'm the idiot, I don't know anything about that market and if I go in there with fancy ideas, they're just going to think I'm an idiot, quite rightly, so yeah, I suppose that's the nearest example. I've got to pummel myself and learn what it's like for them and the only way I can think of to do that is actually be, do what they're doing, if they'll let me, they might just say no, you're not coming near any of my stuff. But yeah, I want to know what it's like to sell fish heads.

Anna Franks

Actually I think it is particularly difficult when you think about the rural, you know, it's hard to even envisage something like Shunt in a kind of rural perspective and I think sometimes we, I wouldn't say that we underestimate the audience, but sometimes I think that we provide what we think that they feel safe in doing and sometimes I think it's when you do the peculiar or the unusual that actually it attracts the attention of the wider kind of audiences that might not necessarily engage. I think some of the stuff that Mark Earls was saying this morning around that herd mentality, it was really interesting, wasn't it, watching that video of the dancer and then all of a sudden there was just this massive crowd that came sort

of flying in and I think it is about kind of potentially mixing up your programme so that you've got a bit of safe material that people can have an entry point that they think, okay, I can work with this, but perhaps throwing in some slightly different programming that is there and then sort of begins to create standout for your organisation in providing experiences in the rural areas. I mean it's always really difficult in rural, because you've got all the kind of transport issues that go back to truly understanding what the barriers to engagement might be and what really motivates them and I think sometimes it's actually just asking them, would you be interested if we were going to do something like this.