

Case study

Creative Festive Corporate Fundraising



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Cardiff based Sherman Theatre has a strong, established history and reputation for high quality family Christmas productions but with the recession hitting audiences hard, particularly school budgets, the theatre was seeing a substantial decline in the schools attendance.

'Peter Pan' was the Sherman's first Christmas production since reopening the building following a 2 year closure for a £7 million redevelopment. Public audience sales were strong and better than pre-closure figures but schools audience figures were struggling, due to the change in finances over the 2 years we were closed. With some schools having attended the Christmas production for over twenty years, the Sherman wanted to enable these schools to attend in 2012, particularly those schools based in disadvantaged areas of the city.

Objectives

- Enable schools that were struggling to still attend the Christmas production
- Develop relationships with the schools during period of austerity
- Develop a group of small/medium sized businesses to engage with the Sherman
- Develop Sherman Cymru's capacity in corporate relationships
- Sustain the audience figures for the Christmas production

Target Groups

- Local schools, particularly those in disadvantaged areas of South Wales
- Local businesses

Process

Having recognised the difficulty that schools were having with attending the Christmas production in 2012, we knew we needed to help to support the schools but also safeguard our audience figures and projected income for the company's annual flagship production. As a reactionary activity, we created the Schools Appeal. We approached a number of businesses in the Cardiff area to 'sponsor a school' whereby each business contributed between £500 and £1000 to Sherman Cymru. This then enabled us to match the financial contribution to a particular school. We created a 3-way partnership between Sherman Cymru, the business and the school. In return for the contribution the business received

modest benefits, including name of business on the Sherman website and in the production programme, plus 2 tickets to attend the production and discounted tickets for the business employees (which also contributed to the development of the public audience figures).

Outcomes

- 18 schools benefitted from the Schools Appeal 2012
- Over £7,500 was raised within the 4 weeks of the appeal from businesses alone
- 2000 pupils from schools in disadvantaged areas of South Wales benefitted from the appeal
- Sherman Cymru developed and strengthened relationships with schools and the businesses
- Audience development for Peter Pan through the profile that the production got through the appeal

Key points for effective practice

Unlike many appeals for support, this had a relatively low risk in terms of Return on Investment. The investment was focussed on time in gaining the support there was no cost outlay. As we were seeking modest sums from businesses the 'ask' was within a direct email or phone call. The amount of funds raised directly equated to the number of schools supported. We didn't have anything to lose as such, but a lot to gain if the appeal worked particularly the value of the relationships with the schools and businesses.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Schools Appeal is now in its third year. Whereas the first year was a reactionary activity in response to the situation, the Sherman has been proactive in subsequent years with approaching businesses for support. The Sherman is now seeing that the schools which have been supported have so valued the experience for the pupils of seeing the production and the relationship with the Sherman that now schools are also contributing funds back into enabling their pupils attend as budgets have begun to ease slightly. We have also seen that relationships between the business and the school have developed, so helping the business achieve more of its CSR objectives. The Sherman continues to identify creative ways of developing relationships with businesses to support the work.

Additional information

www.shermancymru.co.uk

www.bluecanary.org.uk

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