

# **TEST DRIVE THE ARTS**

- **An introduction to Test Drive**
- **Guidelines to running a Test Drive campaign**
- **Test Drive evaluation form**

**Commissioned by Arts Council of England**

**Anne Roberts**

**May 1998**

## **INTRODUCTION**

*Test Drive* schemes - those that bring people into the arts, or a particular artform, or specific venue for the first time - have been around as long as there has been "arts" to be involved with. Nevertheless, marketers who have become adept at building relationships with those who already attend or participate in arts activity not surprisingly find it much more difficult to form these relationships, in a planned way, in the first place.

Over the past five years, there has been growing pressure, both from within arts organisations (because of their social, educational and financial aims), and from outside (particularly from funders, politicians and the press who are keen to label the arts elitist), to broaden arts attendance. This means tackling the knotty problem of converting non-attenders into attenders. *Test Drive* is more and more being seen as the miracle solution.

These *Test Drive* guidelines have been commissioned by the Arts Council of England as a means of disseminating evidence gathered during an audit of *Test Drive* schemes, undertaken by Anne Roberts, Richard Hadley and Sarah Johnson during the summer and autumn of 1977. Altogether 26 organisations contributed their advice, experience and data to help build a picture of the common characteristics of *Test Drive* schemes.

However, these guidelines aren't definitive. We are learning all the time about *Test Drive*, and *you* may have much to contribute to the debate. If you have, then complete the *Test Drive* evaluation form at the back of these guidelines and return it to the Touring Department of the Arts Council. The more we discover about what works, and what doesn't, the more successful will be our mission to broaden access to the arts.

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### ***Credits***

*The term Test Drive was coined by the national marketing agency, Arts About Manchester, who have equated marketing campaigns aimed at attracting people to an arts activity for the first time with car retailers who encourage people to Test Drive their products free of charge. The agency's vast and detailed experience in this area has contributed substantially to the growing body of knowledge about Test Drive, and a debt of gratitude is due to them for their contribution to these guidelines.*

*Thanks also to Heather Maitland from Midlands Arts Marketing, for her permission to use Test Drive case studies from her Guide to Audience Development, also published by the Arts Council of England.*

## **SOME OF YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

### **Q: What is *Test Drive* the Arts?**

Most people wouldn't even consider buying a Volkswagen Polo on the basis of a flashy manufacturers brochure without taking it for a spin first. They'd want to find out if the seats are comfortable, whether the engine has enough "oomph", how difficult it is to drive and how much it costs to run.

In the same way *Test Drive the Arts* acknowledges that literature, and even TV advertising, cannot fully convey a product's features and benefits - especially if they are intangible. If this is true of the feel of driving a car, it is certainly true of the excitement, romance or tragedy of the arts. If you can't fully convey or guarantee these things, customers won't buy. There's no substitute for the real thing.

Many people have different definitions of *Test Drive*. One marketing manager consulted called it "a free introductory offer"; a director of a ballet company suggested "it's any promotional activity which introduces people to our brand by getting them to attend"; a senior Arts Council officer said that it was "taking unsold capacity and turning it into a potential sale".

The truth is that it is all these things - but that's only part of the story. There's no point in giving away a free ticket if you have no long-term idea of what kind of relationship you want with the recipient. *Test Drive* only becomes *Test Drive the Arts* if you have planned every step of the relationship: not only a first offer, but a second, third and even fourth, until you have built a lasting commitment to, and enjoyment of, arts activity. One comprehensive definition is that *Test Drive* is:

**"An arts organisation's planned and incentivised encouragement of people to experience something in the arts for the first time, leading to lasting relationships".**

### **Q: Who is *Test Drive* for?**

*Test Drive* is for any organisation interested in, and able to, develop audiences. Most organisations will say they want to do this, but often pressures on resources (staff time or budgets) means that audience development is, in reality, secondary to the daily grind of finding paying customers. *Test Drive* only works if an organisation already has in place audience development practices which will enable new customers to be nurtured after their first few visits. *Test Drive* is labour intensive and takes huge organisational commitment - so it isn't for every organisation. In practice, some of the most successful *Test Drives* have been

run by national marketing agencies (such as Arts About Manchester, or Birmingham Arts Marketing), whose very reason for being is the development of audiences, who are funded to think strategically, and who are better resourced to plan, monitor and evaluate such schemes.

### **Q: What are the essential elements of *Test Drive*?**

The first essential element of *Test Drive* is that it *introduces people to something in the arts for the first time*. The "something" could be the arts generally, a specific artform, a particular theatre or gallery, or a certain company's work. For example, if you manage an arts centre, you could run a campaign for people who attend the local gallery, who have never been to the arts centre. They would be new customers to you, if not new to the arts generally.

The second is that the encouragement of first time activity will be *incentivised*. You could offer free tickets (if you normally charge for them), discounted tickets or money-back guarantees, or 'value added' benefits like a free programme, a CD, free drinks, food or transport.

The third, and most important element of *Test Drive*, is that the first attendance is seen as a *springboard to building an on-going relationship* with people. There must be planned follow-up offers. If this is not done, then *Test Drive* is no more useful to an organisation than papering ("dumping" free tickets)...

### **Q: What is the difference between *Test Drive* and papering?**

#### **Papering**

##### **Tactical**

"Oh my God, I've got spare seats and I must make the house look good for the producer"

##### **Last Minute Panic**

"Waaa! How can I find 100 people who'd be mug enough to attend tomorrow night for free?"

##### **Negative Message**

"It can't be very good if they're desperate enough to be giving tickets away"

##### **Short term benefits**

"Bums on seats"

##### **Monologue**

You talking to the customers.

#### ***Test Drive***

##### **Strategic**

"How can I use spare capacity to achieve my audience development objectives?"

##### **Planned Well in Advance**

"I'd like to use 100 seats from May's children's show to target families who haven't been to our theatre before?"

##### **Positive Message**

"How nice, they're wanting us to try out the gallery for the first time".

##### **Long term benefits**

"Life-time value"

##### **Dialogue**

You talking to the customers, and them

telling you what they think so that you can do it better next time.

**Q: How does *Test Drive* fit into my organisation's strategy?**

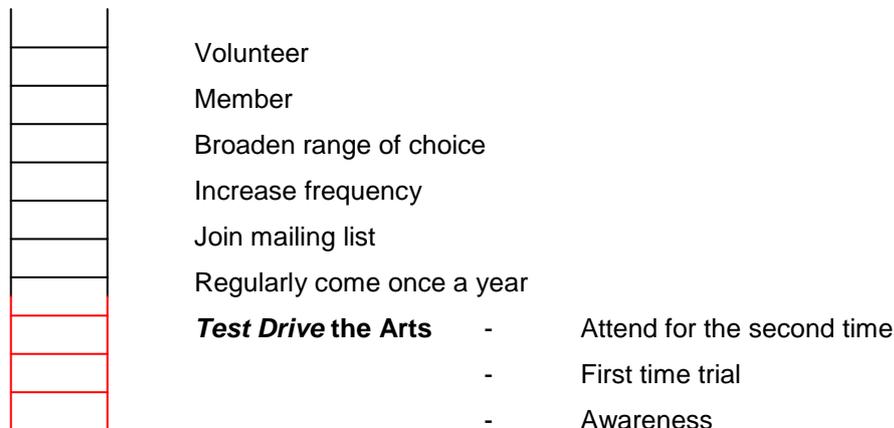
<b>Product</b>	<b>Existing</b>	<b>New</b>
<b>Market</b>		
<b>Existing</b>	Increasing frequency	Existing markets trying new products
<b>New</b>	Exploring new markets with tried & tested product	Product and market testing

If your organisation is committed to developing audiences, then probably what you are concerned with is:

- Encouraging people to attend in the first place
- Persuading them to attend more frequently
- Tempting them to try a wide range of offerings
- Building loyalty

Many organisations look at what they are doing in terms of a ladder. Marketing activity is geared towards persuading people to take the next step up - to a different kind of show, more frequent attendance or a closer, more committed relationship with the organisation:

**Ladder of Commitment**

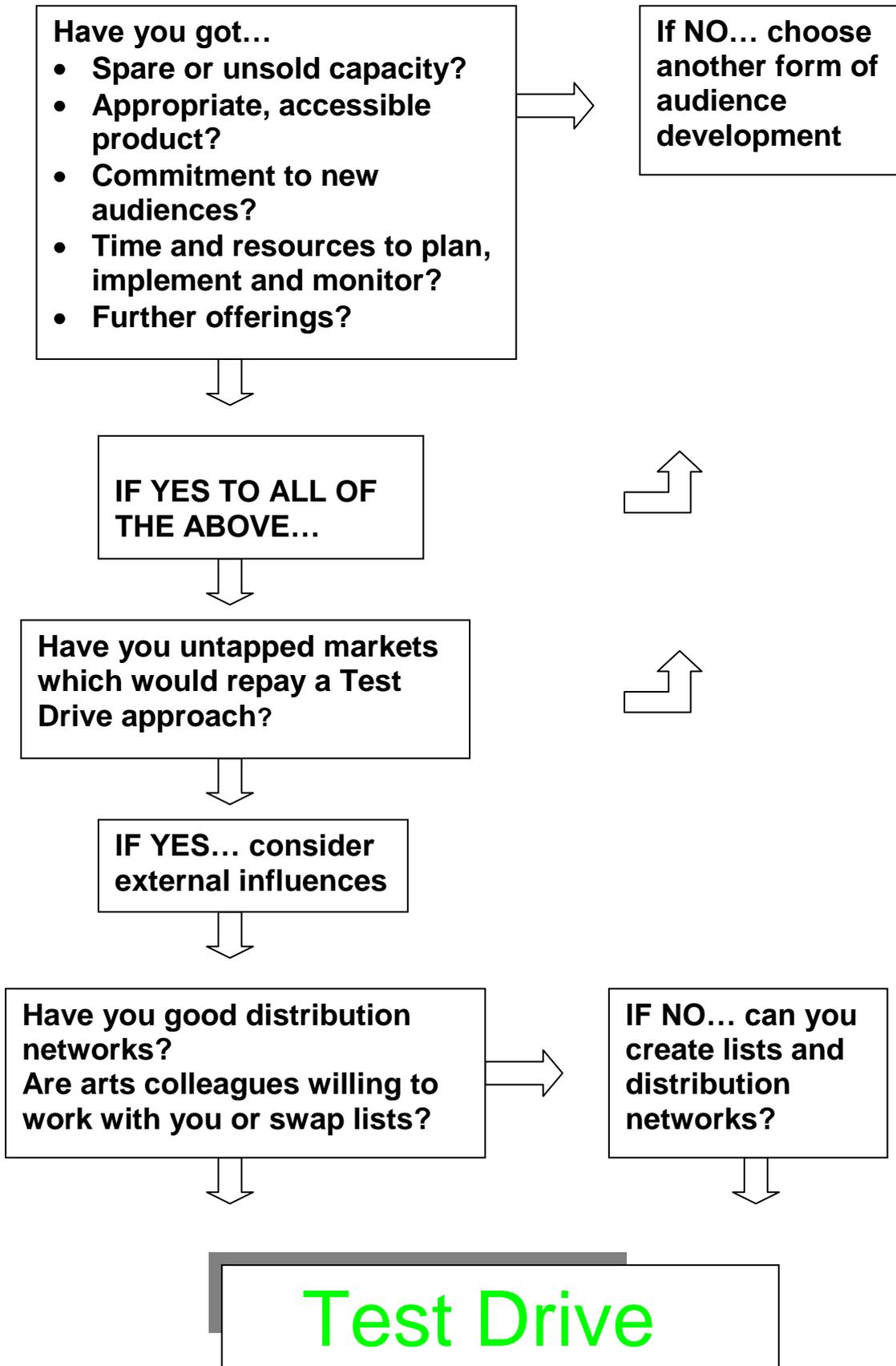


What *Test Drive* does is get people onto the ladder in the first place. What it doesn't do is replace - or make up for any deficiencies in - any audience activity that your organisation is doing with other patrons.

**Q: When and where is *Test Drive* most effective?**

- *When you have spare audience capacity which you want to turn into a long-term financial benefit to your organisation:* Few theatres and concert halls sell 100% of their seats 100% of the time! If you are lucky enough to be in this situation then *Test Drive* will not be a priority for you.
- *When you have a marketing orientated management structure which can create time and resources for planning, running and monitoring a campaign:* *Test Drive* is very demanding on staff resources and doesn't generate short term income; so if your management is only looking for immediate cash returns, or doesn't see the value of slowly building relationships with audiences, *Test Drive* is a waste of time.
- *When you have arts organisations working together in close proximity to share lists and resources:* an effective way - although by no means the only way - of targeting people is from an existing database. If you have good reciprocal relationships with local arts (or other) organisations, then pooling resources will make everyone's job easier.
- *Where there are finely tuned print distribution networks able specifically to target particular postcode sectors:* If your local newspaper or council or marketing agency runs a distribution service which can be targeted using postcode sectors then you can use them to get people in areas where there is high potential attendance.
- *When you have an accessible product to match with appropriate markets:* Whether you are developing audiences for the visual arts, contemporary dance, classical music, theatre or any other artform, it is wisest to select a product just "beyond" the present taste of your target market. For example, if your organisation is chiefly concerned with marketing contemporary avant garde opera, targeting audiences who have never been to the theatre before for anything, might not yield the best results!

Q: How can I tell if *Test Drive* is right for my organisation?



## **Q: What do I do if my regular customers complain about not getting a free offer too?**

This is a common fear amongst marketers, but you would be surprised at how small a problem this is in reality. There are a number of things you can do to prevent your present customers feeling ignored.

- Firstly, consult your core attendees and ask for their advice on broadening the audience. Use them as ambassadors for the scheme. Many organisations write to their attendees at the same time as targeting new customers to explain their campaign, and to offer some small benefit ("we will reserve the best seats for you", or "we'd like to invite you to a private view for loyal customers first").
- Secondly, as with any other offer, the more carefully it is targeted the less resentment you will have from people who have not been targeted.
- Thirdly, widening access to the arts is something that many people are concerned with, not just arts marketers! If you are coming at *Test Drive* from the right direction, then not only will your core attendees not complain, but they will be delighted to hear of the success of the scheme - so will the media who like anything that makes the arts less elitist. Make it a cause of public celebration.

## **Q: How do I create a list of new individuals to target?**

There are lots of ways of doing this, although it is time consuming, and damaging if you don't get it right. Here are a few suggestions:

- Can you work with a local commercial gallery, book shop or sports centre to swap mailing lists?
- If you have volunteers, can you get them to put together "prospect" lists by calling people from the telephone directory to find out whether they would be willing to be approached?
- Can you create a mailing list by placing a competition in the newspaper?
- Can you run a "shop a friend" scheme (asking present attendees to provide names of people who might be approached)?

- Some of the marketing agencies (notably Arts About Manchester) have found that the most successful way to putting together a prospect list of people new to the arts, is to call people up (from the telephone directory) to find out whether they are willing to take part in a *Test Drive* scheme. It is likely that this service will become available, for a fee, in the near future.

### **Q: What sort of response should I expect?**

As a general rule, the smaller your target base, the higher your percentage response will be. Large target bases produce smaller percentages, but higher numbers. Evidence is that depending on the quality of the campaign, you can expect a response of between 1.3% and 30% (ie, if you target 200 people you can expect a response of between 3 and 60 people taking up your offer).

### **Q: What do I do before I start?**

*Firstly, research...*

- Find out all you can about other *Test Drive* schemes: use existing research and secondary data so that you are not duplicating existing knowledge and practice.
- Speak to colleagues within your organisation. They may help you overcome obstacles and will probably have a different angle on the subject.
- Speak to colleagues outside your organisation. *Test Drive* schemes are widespread, and you may as well learn from other peoples' experiences.
- Speak to marketing agencies, your regional arts board and other funders: you will need their moral support, their expertise, and they may be able to provide or suggest funding for your project.
- Speak to your customers. Do you have a customer circle or advisory panel? It is important to have them "on board" so that they do not feel neglected as you concentrate on new participants.

*Secondly, establish how you will monitor the success of your Test Drive project*

- Set SMART objectives (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and apply a timescale): who do you want to talk to, what do you want them to do, why, when do you want them to

do it, how many, how much do you want them to spend, and how much do *you* want to spend? Then what do you want to happen?

- How does the project fit into your overall audience development strategy?
- Record all of this information so that you have something to measure the results of your campaign against.
- Make sure your chief executive and board know about, and agree with, the objectives, so that they can support you as they follow the progress of the project.

*Thirdly, understand your target group's barriers to attendance*

- People have all sorts of reasons why they have not tried a particular artform, venue or activity. They may be creatures of habit, low risk-takers, addicted to television or video, in need of peer-group approval or lacking in confidence. There is research available (see further reading at the end of this document) into what prevents people trying new things out: use the research and tailor your messages accordingly.
- Remember that there is no point trying to get a classical music virgin to attend a concert of uncompromising contemporary music. The product proposition must be appropriate to the market being targeted.

*Fourthly, plan in detail...*

- A good idea only takes a project so far. Plan every aspect precisely.
- Don't limit your responses by restricting opportunities. It is better to work with a small market segment, but unlimited supply of the offer, than to work with a limited offer targeted at a large number of people.
- Ensure, as far as possible, that you can deliver everything you promise.
- When demand exceeds availability, offer a waiting list. Then you can assess the over-demand, and decide whether to put in place a back-up offer, even if you cannot deliver on the original offer.
- Ensure that the box office is involved in the planning stages. The effects of the campaign will be felt there first.

- Remember not to alienate existing attendees by offering all the best offers to new people. Enrol them as ambassadors - tell them what you are doing, ask them to suggest people to approach. Send them tickets to pass on.

**Q: Do I have to make it a free offer?**

Some people would argue that in the same way that you wouldn't expect to be charged to *Test Drive* a Polo for the first time, you should not charge people to try out something in the arts for the first time.

However, if you are approaching people who are already attending arts events, then a substantial discount or adding value, might be enough to encourage them to take the plunge into a new artform or brand. Indeed, these people might be suspicious of a free offer. On the other hand, since you are usually dealing with "unsold capacity", then it's no skin off your organisation's nose if you do make your offer free.

If you are trying to attract people who are not familiar with the arts all, then a free offer is probably essential.

*Now go on to follow the step by step guide to planning a Test Drive campaign...*

## **A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO PLANNING A TEST DRIVE CAMPAIGN**

Once you have satisfied yourself that *Test Drive* is the right thing for your organisation, sit down with colleagues and answer these essential questions to help you design your campaign.

Next to some decisions there is a score which refers to that choice's likelihood of contributing towards a "high response" campaign (1 = most likely, and 10 = least likely). When you have added up your score, the **lower** it is, the **higher** the response to your campaign is likely to be.

For example, if you are an urban theatre, using your own database to target current local attenders to see a new artform, and you are using personalised direct mail to offer them free tickets, the response to your campaign is likely to be very much higher than targeting rejecters to attend the arts for the first time using random distribution. It seems obvious doesn't it? But if you are choosing a "low-response" target group (say, passive intenders) then you may wish to counterbalance that by ensuring that all your other choices are low-risk.

<b>1. What are the SMART objectives of your campaign? Put them in order of priority.</b>
1. 2, 3, 4. 5.



<b>2. Who is the campaign aimed at?</b>
Current arts attenders (1) Lapsed arts attenders (2) Active intenders (5) Passive intenders (7) Resistors (9) Rejecters (10)

**3. Where are they?**

Primary catchment (urban)	(1)
Secondary catchment (urban)	(4)
Primary catchment (rural)	(4)
Secondary catchment (rural)	(7)

**4. What action are you asking people to take?**

Try a new brand of a familiar artform	(1)
Try a new artform at a familiar venue	(2)
Try a new venue	(6)
Try the arts for the first time	(10)

**5. How are you going to identify people to target?**

Your own database	(1)
Existing lists from other arts orgs.	(3)
Existing lists from non-arts orgs.	(5)
Create a new list	(5)
TGI/ Acorn data profiling	(7)
Random geographical	(10)

Tip: if you are identifying people through TGI/Acorn, concentrate on a small cluster of postcodes. Word of mouth also comes into play when carefully selected.

**6. What are you offering as an incentive to act?**

Free tickets to a ticketed event	(1)
Discounted entry to a ticketed event	(3)
Value added benefits to a non-ticketed event	(3)
Value added benefits to a ticketed event	(5)
Money back guarantee	(6)
Pay what you like/can	(7)

**7. Do your new customers have a choice of dates?**

Yes	(1)	
No	(5)	

**8. Do your new customers have a choice of product?**

Yes	(1)	
No	(5)	

**9. How will you communicate with them?**

By telephone	(1)	
Personalised direct mail	(2)	
Direct mail	(4)	
Media advertising	(7)	
Door to door distribution	(10)	

Tip: Promotional material should be high quality especially for completely new attendees. If working with direct mail, spend time personalising letters. You are four times more likely to elicit a response to an offer if the approach is personal. Run a PR campaign simultaneously with the *Test Drive* campaign.

**10. How will you distribute tickets?**

Send them out free of charge	(1)	
Charge to send them out	(5)	
Collection on the door	(7)	

**11. What is your budget for this project?**

Research	
Additional Staff	
Cost of offer	
Print	
Distribution including mailings	
Other	
Total	

**12. How will you record the over-demand (if any) to your offer?**

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**13. How will you gather qualitative feedback from your respondents?**

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**14. How will you gather quantitative feedback?**

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**15. What will be the nature of your SECOND offer to this group? (PS. Unless you complete this section, you are not doing *Test Drive*)**

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**16. What will the nature of your THIRD offer to this group? ? (PS. Unless you complete this section, you are not doing *Test Drive*)**

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**When each phase of your campaign is completed, fill in an evaluation form for your own internal purposes, and send a copy of it to Phil Cave, Touring Department, Arts Council of England, Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 3NP.**

## **TEST DRIVE EVALUATION FORM**

Please complete this form before, during and after your *Test Drive* campaign. You should complete a form for **each offer** stage in your campaign (eg, first offer, follow-up offer, third offer, etc). It will not only be useful for you to demonstrate how successful your project was, or if it didn't succeed, allow you to highlight areas for improvement next time, but it is also very important that we add to the total knowledge of *Test Drive* projects. Once you have completed your form, please return it to Phil Cave, Touring Department, Arts Council of England, Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 3NQ.

**Organisation name**

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**Organisation address**

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**Contact Name**

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**Telephone**

**Fax**

**e-mail**

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**Name of event featured in first/second/third offer**

(please delete as applicable)

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**Description of event**

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**Date of event feature in first/second/third offer**

(please delete as applicable)

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**Description of target group**

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**Number of people being targeted**

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**Activity required from target group**

(eg, attend venue for first time, cross over from another artform, attend new company's work etc)

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**Description of offer**

(eg free tickets, discounted tickets - please say by how much - etc)

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**Position of offer in the price break of your venue**

(eg if you are giving away tickets, are they top, middle or bottom price tickets?)

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**Availability of offer**

(Are you making 500 seats available, or 40 preview reception places available?)

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**How much did you spend on the campaign?**

**Print** \_\_\_\_\_

**Distribution** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cost of offers** \_\_\_\_\_

(for example if you are giving away 60 x £10 seats, and you would expect to sell around 60% of the house, the cost attributable to the campaign should be budgeted at £360, not £600).

**Cost of hospitality** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional staff** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other (please state what)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did you identify your target market?**

(eg, own database, other arts venue database, electoral roll, TGI/Acorn etc)

**How did you communicate with your target market?**

(eg, leaflet through post, leaflet in local newspaper, advert, personalised direct mail etc)

**What other activity did you undertake?**

(eg, letter to regular attenders, press release to newspapers, customer circles etc)

**RESULTS**

**How many people responded to your offer?**

**How many tickets/places were taken up?**

**What was the value of the seats/places taken up?**

**What was the qualitative feedback?**

(eg, what comments did people make?)

**Over the course of a year, how much money has been generated by the campaign**

(ie, how much income has been brought to the organisation by anyone on the original target list?)

**Was it an effective use of your resources?**

**Did it achieve any unexpected results - 'spin-offs'?**

**Is there anything you would have changed? Would you do it again?**

## Case Study

### Test Drive the Arts

**Artform:** Musicals, classical music, stand-up comedy, flamenco dance, plays

**Timescale:** 1993 onwards

**Issue:** Overcoming barriers to first time attendance

**Target market:** Non-attenders in postcode sectors where computed figures for arts attendance show the largest numbers of likely attenders, but where few actually attend the participating venue.

**Project funds:** Existing marketing budgets

**Organisation:** Arts About Manchester, in partnership with a series of Manchester venues

**Type:** National marketing agency.

**Turnover:** £500,000

**Project aim:** Depends on the particular project but all aim to persuade enough people to return after their Test Drive visit so that income from their ticket purchases covers the cost of the project. eg., to recruit 85 non-attenders to repeat book at £10 within 12 months.

**Activity:** This method is the result of a survey of existing research into audiences and consultation with the target group.

AAM select postcode sector to be targeted. They write to the venue's existing attenders in that postcode sector asking for help in recruiting new attenders and enclosing information to give out to neighbours.

They distribute attractive postcards door-to-door offering 'Have a classic night out on us' and a choice of three dates. The first 100 people to call a hotline number get two free tickets which are mailed to them together with a friendly letter giving essential information about the venue.

Some sectors show a low response rate compared with others which are economically similar. This is because the community's general lifestyle does not include the arts. These communities think the offer is 'too good to be true'. AAM's team then visit door-to-door to explain the offer. 70% of the people they talk to take up the offer.

All those who 'test drive the arts' get a phone call or letter a few weeks later giving a ticket offer at a choice of concerts. All these offers use seats that would otherwise remain empty. These offers vary depending on the venue. The Halle Orchestra offered a mini-subscription to three classical concerts for £10. Next season those that take this up are offered full subscription at half price. The next season the new subscribers are offered 25% off their subscription. For the third season they are asked to pay full subscription price. Those who do not take up the mini-subscription in the first year are offered single ticket deals.

**Results:** All the available tickets are almost always taken up. In a typical example, 1,000 households received the postcard and 560 people took up the test drive offer. The follow-up offers are also consistently successful. 60% of the Halle's test drive audience took up the mini-subscription offer. 50% of these mini-subscribers took up the half-price subscription offer, 60% of those who took up the three-quarter price offer and 60% of those continued to subscribe at full price. Just under half of the test drive audience who did not take up the mini-subscription took up single concert offers instead. Just 70 people out of the original 300 did not reattend.

**Follow-up:** Distribution of leaflets and posters to shops throughout the selected postcode sectors. Tracking the test drive audience's attendance patterns and spend over three years.