

## **Leo Sharrock, Market Intelligence Manager, amh** ***To plan or not to plan?***

### ***A guide to using research to inform creative marketing campaigns***

Leo Sharrock has a master's degree in Shakespeare Studies but nevertheless he somehow ended up crunching data for AMH, the Audience Development Agency for Hampshire and the South East of England. Leo works with clients to help them understand their audiences, helping them to plan and develop engagement, using a wide variety of tools and resources. Recent work has included producing Arts Council England's annual Target Group Index national and regional reports and pilot testing Stephen Cashman's A to Z project for ADUK. He also produced an online guide to researching audiences and visitors for the AMA's *Dazzled by Data?* workshops.

This session looked at what information is readily available for arts organisations to help them segment their audiences, visitors and participants according to their lifestyles and attitudes. Many factors influence consumer behaviour and this session explored how we should take these into account to inform planning and to improve the relevance of our marketing communications.

### **The Tale of the Time-Poor Marketer**

The session began with a short film showing an archetypal arts marketer asking himself whether to plan and how to find the time based around the 'to be or not to be' soliloquy in Hamlet.

There is a tension between the deadlines that we all have to meet every day and the need to plan and think strategically. However, it might be possible to use the creative spark of spontaneity alongside a long-term view of strategic planning.

Planning: A Preserve of Wealthy (time) Organisations?

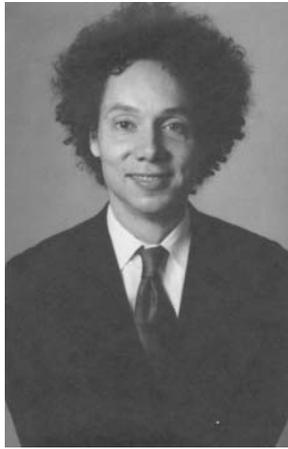
How many organisations have current mission statements, business plans and strategic marketing plans? All arrive at a plan to communicate (effectively?) with their audiences. Perhaps 'thin slicing' is the alternative planning mode to intensive evidence gathering?

### **'Thin Slicing' versus Evidence Gathering**

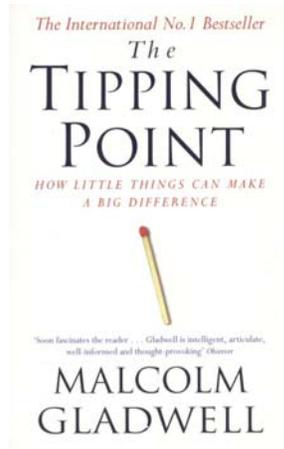
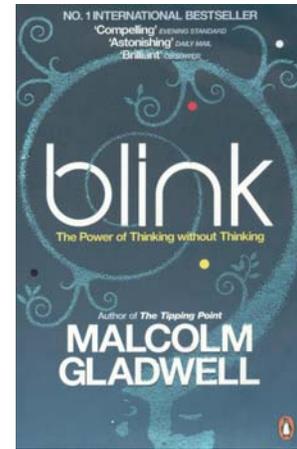
Thin slicing is a concept developed and discussed in *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell:

*'There's a wonderful phrase in psychology - 'the power of thin slicing' - which says that as human beings we are capable of making sense of situations based on the thinnest slice of experience.'* (*Blink*, Gladwell)

When presented with a barrage of information we have become adept at finding and interpreting exactly the most relevant piece of information almost instantaneously. An example which Gladwell gives is that of the statue which the Getty Museum was going to buy and which all experts had decided was genuine but two historians seeing it for a brief moment instinctively knew it was a fake. They couldn't explain why but it turned out that they were right.



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### Thin Slicing: Pros and Cons (examples from Blink)

- Spontaneous decisions often better than carefully planned / considered ones
- Experience can make us master *thin slicing* - *Evelyn Harrison, Getty Museum fake kouros statue*
- Too much research can lead to information overload and errors of judgement – *Paul Van Riper's Big Victory*
- Dislikes, prejudices and stereotypes can corrupt *thin slicing*

Blink theory could be quite useful in helping arts marketers to think about what and how they plan. The following are three possible arts marketing models based on thin slicing, thick slicing and flexi slicing and expressed in terms of Shakespeare.

### A Shakespearean Exploration of Blink Theorists

**The King Lear school of arts marketing** (Thin Slicing bad) is characterised by making strategic marketing decisions based on the minimum available experience: this leads to disaster.

**The Miranda** (from *The Tempest*) **school of arts marketing** (Thin Slicing good) is a better example of thin slicing when she decides that Ferdinand is the man for her, which turns out to be an inspired decision.

**The Hamlet approach to arts marketing** (Thick Slicers) is characterised by those who research endlessly in order to have a solid foundation to plan, perhaps because they are scared of making the wrong decision. However, the question has to be, how much evidence do you need?

**The Henry V school of arts marketing** (the Flexi Slicer) combines the best of both thick and thin slicing. He makes spontaneous decisions, but doesn't act irrationally (for example invading France). Once in Agincourt, he is able to make good decisions that lead him to victory. He is brilliant on the spot as well as being able to take advice and plan.

However, that is not to say that there is no need to research. There is still a need to immerse oneself in the area being studied.



### Information for Thick Slicing

Could a hybrid approach to planning be best? If so:

- What information is useful / available?
- How can it be accessed?
- What can it tell us?
- What can we do differently as a result?

### Information Gateways

A good first port of call is the Audiences Data UK (ADUK) website at [www.aduk.org](http://www.aduk.org) which has resources to help people understand and use data in a standardised way across the cultural sector. It is just re-launching the site [July 2008] so that the resources are more accessible and easy to use. The AMA website ([www.a-m-a.co.uk](http://www.a-m-a.co.uk)) also hosts a variety of resources, including Leo Sharrock's 'Audience Intelligence, A Guide to Desk Researching Audiences and Visitor Data'.

This attempts to organise all the available information in **5 outcome-led topic groups**.

#### Topic 1: How can I learn more about the attendance habits of audiences?

Best resource is our [database](#) which we might want to segment by

- Event Type
- Frequency
- Recency
- Geography
- Value

Two publications are recommended:

*Boxing Clever* by Roger Tomlinson, 1993 (available online from ADUK)

*Full House: Turning Data into Audiences* by Roger Tomlinson and Tim Roberts, 2006 (Arts Council Australia, available from website) which is an updated version of *Boxing Clever*.

*How Does this Help? Foregrounding*

The term 'foregrounding' comes from stylistics in art criticism and is another way to think about segmentation: the idea being that the more you know about someone, the more easily you could convince them to do something.

We've heard this morning about wanting to communicate with everyone, to convince them that what we are doing is fundamental and irresistible to them. It is easier to convince people if we know as much as we can about them.



Using *Star Wars* as an example, with segments based on nastiness / weaponry / laundry requirements (new products going to market). The following segments might be formed in order to sell weapons and laundry services to them.

- Absurdly nasty people
- Really nasty people (the ones in red)
- Quite nasty people (the ones in green)
- Nasty by dint of occupational hazard people
- People interested in buying light-sabre upgrades
- Those interested in blasters
- People who need dry cleaners to remove battle stains
- Those in need of PVC panel-beating services

We need to be precise about what we are talking about to these different people.

*How do I apply this to Strategy?*

Strategic aims defined by mission to either:

develop existing audiences  
develop new audiences

Use available data to foreground audience segments



Create strategies based on manipulating marketing mix around those segments.

An Example

Increase revenue (SMART-ly) from existing customers

Research customer worth - looking at price data



Maximise revenue by targeting highest value customers (by promoting value added experiences at premium prices)

A better explanation can be found in Stephen Cashman's book, *Thinking Big* or Heather Maitland's *Marketing Manual*.

If you can identify strategic objectives from the mission statement and identify what resources we have available to us to segment the potential market and then base our strategies on the foregrounding information, we can manipulate the difference between different groups.

*Attendance habits of those people we don't currently engage*

How do we find out about these people? There are a number of new tools:

- Arts Council England is introducing a new Segmentation of the Population: an exciting new tool being developed by Catherine Bunting
  - Headline data will be freely available on web
  - More detail will be available for RFOs
  - Describes population demography and arts engagement across the whole of the England in terms of the different ways in which people engage with the arts

This is a sneaky preview for this session; The 'Leaked' Dossier has 13 Segments such as Urban Arts Eclectic, Middle Aged Music and Shows, Time Poor and Tired, Sport Pub and Solitude. These 13 segments are contained within three big groups.

- Highly Active - 9%
- Occasionally Engaged - 69%
- Unengaged – 22%

*So What's New?*

- Clusters are based on engagement with arts which is much more useful than previous systems. It provides us with more of a clue about who might be interested within unengaged for example.
- Probably lead to ACE concentration on the low engaged – which has both positive and negative consequences.
- The drawback is it doesn't enable you to understand your own audiences very well because it is not postcode based (unlike Acorn and Mosaic).

However, it is a great tool for understanding how people really interact with the arts.

**Topic 2: How can I find out what sort of people my audiences are, so that I can target more people like them?**

- ACORN and Mosaic
- Postcode based
- Profile your own data
- Some ability to foreground: brand ties; fiscal orientation (e.g. value +/-); newspapers / language / politics
- Best usage – elimination of least likely prospects = reduced risk?

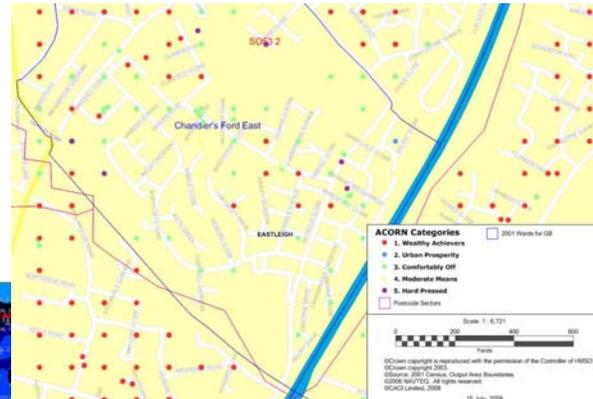
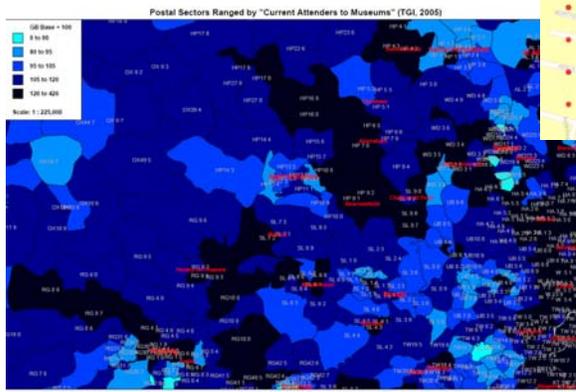
These tools help us to understand our audience in terms of the number of people on our doorsteps who might be interested in attending and providing guidance about how we could communicate with them. There are all sorts of creative possibilities that come out of this depth of description.

### Topic 3: How can I find out where my audiences are coming from?

Those of you with box office systems can run straight forward geographical postcode reports. Non-box office organisations can use different programmes to do that if they use the postcodes they gather from audience data. By far the easiest way to do this is to use geographical mapping.

Geographical analysis by:

Data Mapping – Network  
ONS



Box Office Systems' reports  
Spreadsheet manipulation

- Understand geographical strengths and weaknesses
- Can be tied to secondary data sources – ACORN / Mosaic / TGI – the darker areas on this map show the propensity of people to attend museums, based on postcodes
- It is become more affordable and the Office of National Statistics material is free

#### *Geography – Fast Track to Strategy?* Contemporary Visual Art Gallery Example

Gallery had specific brief relating to attracting local population

1. Mapped visitors having collected postcodes for a considerable amount of time.
2. Identified catchment area – where people were coming from
3. Identified 'cold spots' – where people were not coming from
4. Compared population of postal sectors to visitor profiles of the gallery looking at in the first instance, finding people who were either like or not like current visitors and then producing ...
5. Strategy sets drawn up accordingly used simple coding:

RED = not core users (mostly '*Modest Means*' & '*Hard Pressed*')

- strategies to address: new messages/new product/education/outreach/access

GREEN = matched to core profile (mostly '*Wealthy Achievers*' and '*Comfortably Off*')

- strategies – new messages/new media of communication – evaluate to find out how changing marketing mix

GREY = non-residential business areas

- strategies to address business/corporate use/visiting

#### **Topic 4: How can I find out where to target the people who are most likely to attend arts events?**

All of the information above came from an area profile report provided by Arts Council England. The investment in either the time in filling in the application form or paying £25 is highly recommended.

Area Profile Reports – cost: 2 minutes (if funded by ACE) or £25

- Highly definable geography
- Comprehensive demographics
- ACORN and socio-economic grade
- Artform and Museum attendance – TGI summary benchmarks
- Coming soon: Taking Part – Participation!
- All data specific to postcode sector level
- RFOs and funded – but 'Indifference to Enthusiasm' web
- Non-RFOs – census data from ONS and neighbourhood statistics are available online. It is constantly updated and made easier to access.

#### **Information Summary**

- Boxing Clever and Full House
- Thinking Big
- New ACE Segmentation
- ACORN and Mosaic
- Mapping
- Area Profile Reports
- Target Group Index
- New 'Taking Part' Data
- Office of National Statistics



## **Where Do You Sit on The Slicing Spectrum?**

Where we sit on the slicing spectrum is not immensely important. It's about us understanding our style and ensuring that we are doing one of these things, doing it in a creative way and making it SMART. Even if you go down the blink route, it has to be based on information, experience and practice in the first place. The key thing is to make sure you are at least a slicer.

### **Questions**

*How do you identify the people who are not on your database but do attend your venue?*

This is a very good question and can often be demonstrated by our own personal experience. My wife is musician and I like the theatre so when we go to the opera she will book and when we go to the theatre I will book. Therefore, although we both see the same range of activities, the venue probably has a very different view of what we actually see.

Nevertheless, recent research has indicated that the people who are on your database and attending are actually very similar to the people who are not on the database but also attending, and therefore using Mosaic or Acorn could be helpful.

We [The Sage] are finding that quite a few people who come with other people are identified when we have a direct marketing push. So when we send out a brochure saying we don't think you've been before, we get lots of phone calls from people saying 'I've been coming ever since you opened'.

*Do you find that there are similarities from venue to venue in terms of the Mosaic profiles which are revealed? And if a number of organisations from an area are using Mosaic and they all come up with the same results does it mean that a small number of people are being bombarded with communications?*

Yes, that is a potential problem though actually the gallery we worked with for example, was the first in that area to use Mosaic and Mosaic does have great value. One theatre we worked with was convinced that their main house and studio audiences were different types of people but the Mosaic profile showed this was not true.

*I find Mosaic doesn't work so well for rural areas because it categorises everybody into big 'rural groups'.*

*Can we use these tools outside England?*

Yes, it's available in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (though not the Republic of Ireland) – talk to the Arts Councils of Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.