

Boundary-Brokering in Arts Marketing Strategy
Exploring Audience Development through Relational Approaches

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Following recent research in Public Relations within the Performing Arts Sector, Gerard Devney's more recent research focuses on arts marketing in Performance Arts Organisations. Combining his passion for dramatic arts with the insight research can provide he is attempting to understand how a relational approach in arts marketing can provide more sustainable audience development strategies.

ABSTRACT:

Arts marketing as a practice is facing a dilemma of target-led and product-led marketing. Audience Development offers a research focus on the collaborative practices of in-house marketers and agency experts. Using Wenger's (2000) communities of practice as a theoretical lens, an ethnography of practice is underway to assess the degree to which the relational approach is currently being used and its effectiveness.

Key words: Performing Arts Organisations, Audience Development, Relationship Marketing, Communities of Practice.

Introduction and context

Audience development within the performing arts is recognised as one of the most important activities that arts marketing practitioners are expected to undertake (Tench and Yeomans, 2013, Scheff Bernstein, 2007). Lindelof (2014) argues that current arts marketing practice presents an organisational dilemma of adopting a target-led or product-led approach. Product-led marketing recognises the inviolability of the arts and the autonomy of the artist. This tends to result in marketing that relies on publicity or sales promotions to attract new audiences which may not sustain audience development objectives (incorporating the objectives of social inclusion policies, for example). Target-led marketing has a consumer orientation that appeals to individual attendee needs through such audience development initiatives as funded outreach programmes over short projects or through relationship marketing strategies that encourage more consistent attendance, moving attendees up a 'loyalty ladder'. Neither approach consistently sustains the attendance of the audience because the former may be too short-term to have any impact and the latter is focused on sustaining the organisation instead of the audience.

In order to address this, a relational approach has been suggested whereby the arts marketer acts as a 'boundary broker' (Miles and Durrer, 2009) for disenfranchised publics, success depending on their capacity to support and reinforce artistic experiences with those publics (Boorsma and Chiaravallotti, 2010).

The target-led approach may also be limited owing to the effects of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). *Habitus* holds that publics divested of social, cultural and economic capital will never be able to acquire cultural taste and as such impedes audience development initiatives engaging in outreach programmes with those publics not typically attending arts organisations. This has been echoed more recently in the work of social policy researcher, Kawashima (2006) who highlights its relevance to audience development practices:

"The acquisition and accumulation of cultural competence by those without any in the first place is such a long-term enterprise that the majority of audience development projects cannot tackle the root of this issue" (Kawashima, 2006:65).

According to Bourdieu (1984), individuals and institutions reproduce positions and tastes within society through the phenomenon of *habitus* that "immanently transforms situations into positions" (Robbins, 2000:31). This problem is manifest in arts marketing practices as this maintains the authority of the arts in a paternalistic relationship with the publics it seeks to serve (Lee, 2005). It is the practitioners themselves as cultural intermediaries who determine how social inclusion is delivered according to their position within the organisation which reinforces a definition of the arts which may be inherently elitist (Glow, 2013:45).

Although relationships developed between the arts and their audiences have been demonstrated as being effective at achieving attitudinal and behavioural change (Scollen, 2008, 2009), practice has largely been limited to relationship marketing addressing those audiences already in attendance. Similarly, qualitative research has been well received across the arts marketing industry providing information on audience motivations in attending and enabling the retention of audiences through relationship marketing techniques (Osborne and Rentschler, 2010; Guillon, 2011), but, again, predominantly around those audiences already in attendance.

Innovation in the development of marketing practice include corporate social responsibility, stakeholder engagement, and convergence marketing where public co-create value, could provide a solution (Radbourne et al, 2013). With the advent of digital technology and the rise of the prosumer, a fresh investigation is required to examine the efficacy of marketing strategies to accommodate this, supporting the pursuit of a relational approach to arts marketing. By taking an organisational focus, this research explores the innovative marketing practices developed during audience development projects at PAOs that should lead to sustainable relationships with their publics.

The Research and Methodology

To investigate practitioner collaboration in delivering a relational marketing strategy, Wenger's (2000) Communities of Practice is being used as a perspective through which to review this process. This working paper asks the following research questions to help focus the investigation:

1. To what extent does collaboration take place between marketing professionals during audience development projects?
2. What marketing strategies are developed through collaborative practice of professionals during audience development projects at PAOs?
3. To what extent do these marketing practices provide a sustainable relationship between publics and the arts?

This study applies an interpretivist philosophy, appropriate to the explanation of relationships via qualitative research (Guest et al, 2013). In so doing, the focus of research is a process study, revolving around the emergent collaboration between the practitioners of in-house marketing and audience development experts and the subsequent marketing strategy employed during a specific period of public outreach. Thus, this study looks at the roles that cultural intermediaries play and in particular their influence in determining how social inclusion is delivered according to their position within the organisation i.e. the degree to which this is inherently elitist (Glow, 2013). The study is being conducted over a specific period of a funded audience development project and therefore is adopted within a case study environment. The focus that a case study brings also means that it is able to accurately portray the setting of the case as it is contextually bound, while shedding light on the theoretical issues in question, i.e. collaborative efficacy of communities of practice in developing innovative marketing strategies for the new arts consumer.

Fieldwork for the study is being conducted in two main ways: fieldnotes and semi-structured interviews, with a consideration of supporting documents and photographs to provide additional context and to enable the development of 'thick description' if suitable. Taking account of the setting, the actors, the events and the processes observed, the validation of the study is further supported by the employment of protocols for both observational data (for example splitting descriptive notes from reflexive and demographic notes) and interviews which will help standardise the approach between participants.

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