

Attracting Diverse Audiences

This Chapter . . .

- Explains how arts organizations can specifically reach out to diverse audiences; and
- Includes real life case studies illustrating how to approach audiences of color.

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Attracting Diverse Audiences

Attracting diverse audiences requires creating a mission within an organization . . . It should become a part of the fabric of your institution.

Part I: Targeting for Diversity

ATTRACTING DIVERSE AUDIENCES IS . . .

1. Investment in the future: creating a partnership with the community and your institution. It requires an understanding of the art form you work in so that you can be as creative as possible in its implementation.
2. The constant evolution of points of entry: helping audiences find the work, creating an invitation (the offer), building the bridge (packaging the offer) and welcoming the audience (environment at the event).
3. Commitment to the process that is long term by definition and quite labor intensive. It is creating different points of entry for the potential audience member to find the work. This lends itself to a creative use of space, productions and resources. It includes free events as well as paid mainstage productions.
4. Educating your audience on the importance and mutual benefit of connecting their lives to your institution. This is different from arts in education. It is partnerships and collaborations with as many different constituents, based on long term goals that provide for a creative use of shared resources. It also requires ongoing dialogue and sharing of resources internally so that all aspects of the institution are integrated in this effort.

ATTRACTING DIVERSE AUDIENCES IS NOT . . .

Fulfilling a grant requirement . . . a seasonal, short-term or once-a-year project . . . just targeting audiences to an ethnic-specific play.

In short, attracting diverse audiences requires creating a mission within an organization. It should become a part of the fabric of your institution. It means building support based on shared interests, so that the audience enjoys productions that reflect their culture and are secure enough to explore others.

4-STEP PROCESS

1. RESEARCH THE COMMUNITY: Get to know who's and what's important to the target audience.

2. CONVINCING OTHERS TO JOIN THE PROCESS by sending out information on a local level—brochures or posters to the cleaner, the bakery, the grocery store.

3. USE THEIR LANGUAGE: Don't be aloof. Invite representatives from the community to help publicize the institution.

4. CREATE PARTNERSHIPS with organizations that matter in the community. Create programs that emphasize these partnerships, and stress the benefits to both partners. Make contacts through partner organizations, stay in touch with them, create personal relationships and nurture them.

A critical factor is to hire the appropriate staff who can establish these relationships. The staff should be a mirror of the community you are trying to reach. The institution must also support this effort on a fundamental level so that a marketing director can avail themselves of all the resources possible.

Philip Kotler and Joanne Scheff in the book, *Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts*, Boston, 1997, state that “The essence of art is its communication with the audience member. Therefore, arts organizations must shift their focus to enable, expand, and enhance this communication. They must shift from a pure product focus to one that balances the artistic decision-making process with audience needs and preferences.”

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An effective strategy in attracting groups of people from different backgrounds is to go into their communities and sincerely acknowledge each group's uniqueness, then hopefully the institution's productions will speak to them as a group.

STEPS USED

- Research
- Review and Analysis
- Partnership/Collaboration
- Implementation
- Follow-up

Part II: Case Study: Positioning The Public Theater

- **The Mandate:** Producer announced "Cultural Explosions" campaign
- **Image:** Began to reconfigure the image of the Public Theater as a "public place"
- **Effort:** Creation of the Community Affairs Department
- **Partnerships:** Development of a multitude of programs that address needs of various audiences
- **Programs:** Development of group sales and other sales packages, monthly free programs and annual open house
- **Qualities to Incorporate:** Sensitivity, compassion, appreciation, dialogue and mutual respect
- **Vision:** Incorporate artistic vision into the fabric of the collaborations
- **Tools:** Advertising, promotional events, special events, direct mail, graphics, public relations, educational programs, flyer distribution

STEP 1: RESEARCH

Understand the buying habits of the audiences you are trying to reach, e.g. African-American, Asian-American, Latino-Americans. Ask questions: Why haven't you been coming? What do you like? When is the best time to present programs? Where do gatherings take place? Who are the key people to include in this fact-finding dialogue?

Sources to use to assist in fact finding include identity-based online communities, national directories of ethnic-specific organizations, community-based newspapers and their advertisers, and local phone directories. Advertising Age's website has a column called "Big Tent" that looks at issues around marketing to diverse communities. You may even form a think tank that serves as your oral history and can help navigate the landscape for you. If you can find one key person in a community, that person can take you everywhere.

STEP 2: REVIEW/ANALYSIS

What do you have? What do you do with the information? How do you integrate what you've learned into existing programming? What opportunities can you create internally to manifest these plans? This underscores why it is so important to have institutional support so that you can actually create discounts, mount free events and utilize other internal resources.

Begin to shape the offer, incorporating what your bottom line is—what is the expectation? To set your goals clearly, you must define them. Is it a percentage increase in box office income? Is it a certain number of new projects? Can it evolve over time? When are results expected to manifest? Review and analyze current marketing strategies. Are they working?

Ultimately of course, your goal is to welcome these new audiences into your institution. Your job is how and when to make this happen. It is not simply an acquisition of new mailing lists or stuffing their programs with your flyers. It is much broader than that. You want to make sure you have established goodwill that is based on sincerity, honesty and the ability to make it a reality.

STEP 3: PARTNERSHIPS

This represents the true spirit of building an audience. Each partner brings a richness and something of value. It is a combination of designing programs, initiating projects, offering discounts to expose new audiences to the product, and then together, setting goals that are realistic based on something of value that can be shared and has growth potential. Be as diverse in programming as you want your audience to be. Create partnerships based on shared interests benefits and mutual respect.

Remember: Collaborate with communities so that they embrace the entire institution, not just a single production.

SELECTED ETHNIC RESOURCES

AFRICAN-AMERICAN

News One

www.newsonone.blackplanet.com

Black Voices

www.blackvoices.com

The Root

www.theroot.com

Nia Online

www.niaonline.com

I See Color

www.iseecolor.com

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ETHNIC RESOURCES, cont'd **ASIAN-AMERICAN**

Asian Week
www.asianweek.com
Asian-American Arts Alliance
www.aaartsalliance.org

LATINO-AMERICAN
HOLA! National Directory of Hispanic Talent
www.hellohola.org
Association of Hispanic Arts
www.latinoarts.org

NATIVE AMERICAN
American Indian Community Bulletin
www.aich.org/pub_bul.html

Part III. Case Study: Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk

The National Coordinator for Community Outreach's mission was to support and develop audiences of color in each tour site. The goal was to create a partnership among the presenter, the entity producing the event, the community and the production, *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*. Steps included:

1. Preliminary discussions with the marketing director of each venue as soon as performing dates were confirmed.
2. Encouraging the marketing director to hire or find a volunteer from the African-American community to head this effort. The majority hired a local publicist or special events planner. A small percentage had someone in the sales department who had seen the show and has relationships with key leaders in the community.
3. Once this person is in place, I personally met the entire sales staff of the presenting organization to outline the goals and explain the history of the production.
4. A kick-off meeting was held in each city to present this initiative, embracing key community leaders and educators and launching the plan.
5. This team was charged with the mission of creating a committee to promote the show, focusing on educational, religious, social and professional associations; government employees; special events and fundraising. Each committee created and executed strategies to bring in new audiences. This was all based on a provided timeline and promotional material, including flyers, posters, buttons, study guides, videotapes and fans.
6. Additionally, the cast was made available whenever possible, which was found to be an excellent tool for engaging potential audiences.

BRING IN 'DA KIDS PROGRAM

The most effective of these committees was the Bring in 'Da Kids program. The goal of this campaign was to procure corporate funding to underwrite tickets for inner city kids—not just to see the production, but also to experience it from an educational point of view. Each committee in each of the tour cities decided to make this one of their primary areas of focus. They enthusiastically embraced the idea of being able to educate the children and present positive role models. Some examples of this were:

Washington, DC— Procured \$25,000 worth of TV spots that promoted the show as well as a program to sponsor a child to see the performance. In addition to helping sell tickets, the ads generated over 100 calls contributing \$20 each to sponsor a child—for no additional promotional cost. On the return engagement a year later, over \$15,000 was raised to continue this effort. In addition to purchasing tickets, students participated in study guide presentations, Q & A sessions with the cast, and mini-performances in local community centers.

Minneapolis—Theater Live! procured funding to adopt an entire school who were instructed utilizing the study guide; hosted four tap-dancing contests; had students write articles in newsletters; generated media coverage of all events; and trained teachers to use the study guide in the classroom. The touring cast flew out one month prior to the performance date to spend the day entertaining and engaging in a dialogue with the students about every aspect of the show. When the cast arrived, the entire school, including staff, attended the performance and wrote reviews on the production.

Brooklyn—Two retired school teachers created an organization called Griot Cultural Alliance with the unique goal of making sure youngsters in Brooklyn had the opportunity to see the show. When the Broadway engagement opened in the spring of 1996, they coordinated school groups from over 15 Brooklyn elementary and high schools, enabling over 2,000 students to attend in the first three months of the run. Much of the underwriting was provided by local business owners. Prior to the students' attending the show, the cast performed at their schools, promoting the show through lecture demonstrations, followed by questions and answers.

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• Additionally, until the show closed in January 1999 the Alliance solicited funds from
• local Brooklyn-based parents and educators to continue this effort .
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• **Seattle**—The Central Area Youth Association presented the “History of American
• Tap,” including elements from the Noise/Funk study guide. Students wrote essays on
• the theme of “African Americans who have inspired them” and the winner received a
• mini-performance with cast members for their school.
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• **Chicago**—Six months prior to the show’s performance date, the presenters adopted a
• middle school to educate a class and demonstrate to the community the seriousness of
• their commitment to building community bridges. They also sponsored a tap contest
• and poetry contest, with winners featured in local publications.
•

• **Los Angeles**—2,000 students were sponsored under the Bring in ’Da Kids project and
• an additional 6,000 kids attended through group sales, primarily from African-Ameri-
• can organizations. The sponsored children’s groups ranged from incarcerated juveniles,
• visually impaired children, children with AIDS, religious groups, second-chance kids,
• Boy and Girl scouts, underprivileged children’s centers, emotionally disturbed youths,
• as well as dance students. Coupled with mini-performances by the cast at schools
• throughout Los Angeles, bucket drum workshops and tap master classes were inte-
• grated into every aspect of audience development. The group sales director was a part
• of the outreach efforts and took the time to establish a relationship with the group
• leaders, thereby creating a relationship between the presenter and the youth groups.
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• **San Diego**—Over 15 African-American social organizations joined together to raise
• money to sponsor over 700 children to attend the show. It marked the first time they
• had ever worked together on a project and they were delighted with the results.
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• As producers of this show, the Public Theater was also committed to participating in
• as many local outreach activities as possible, including visits to churches, schools, com-
• munity centers, schools and universities.
•

• There are over 23 case studies throughout the United States, each detailing how the
• community, once empowered and included, created dynamic audience development
• initiatives that embraced the youth in their locales and ensured that the Black commu-
• nity was substantially represented at each performance.
•

• These efforts demonstrated to the presenter the importance and value of this cam-
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paign, how to create it, who should execute it and the type of follow up necessary to integrate these promotional efforts into their marketing strategies.

Part IV: Culturally Sensitive Marketing

Despite the overall objective of cultivating and establishing long-term relationships with these new audiences, there is a variance in the approach that acknowledges cultural and age differences. This is an important distinction to understand because it directly impacts the marketing strategy, timing and creation of marketing tools. All of the main ethnic groups discussed tend to be late ticket buyers, therefore the marketing mix needs to always include a call to action, ie. “buy now,” “don’t miss,” “limited tickets available,” etc. These recommendations are based on my experience and represent an example of one approach towards informing communities.

The African-American community responds most effectively to radio as a form of advertising that helps inform a decision, or serves as a call to action. It is not as important to have a well-known celebrity endorse the event/production/exhibition as it is to use this medium. If you are dealing with a limited budget and must make a choice, I highly recommend using radio and extending the buy into as much exposure as possible followed by strategic flyer distribution and promotional events.

Within the Latino community, specifically Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Brazilians, it is important to have a known spokesperson, either from broadcast media or the entertainment community who can provide a context and endorsement. Cable television has been quite successful especially when combined with print and radio. In promoting our Latino-based productions, our greatest success has been with a solid media mix, having first established a relationship with the community, that includes radio, cable tv and direct mail and media coverage, with extensive flyering in targeted neighborhoods.

The Asian-American community, specifically, Chinese, Filipino and to a lesser extent East Indian and Vietnamese are responding in increasing numbers to theater, music and spoken-word events. The 18–35 age group — especially college students—have embraced this programming, some in search of cultural identity, and also because of the influence of the collision of cultures, as primarily evidenced in hip hop music. In the absence of programming that was authored by Asian American writers at The Public Theater, we made our space available to many cultural organizations to hold fundraisers, readings and performances. This has allowed us to continue to welcome

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RECOMMENDED READING

The Personal Touch
by Terrie Williams
Warner Books, 1995.

Invitation to The Party: Building Bridges to the Arts, Culture, and Community by Donna Walker-Kuhne.
Theatre Communications Group,
2006.

Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts by Philip Kotler and Joanne Scheff.
Boston, 1997.

Marketing Workbook for Non Profit Organizations, by Gary Stern,
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1990

them to our facility and allow them to control what they experience. The end result was that when choosing where to go for entertainment, The Public Theater was often at the top of their list. This was because of our efforts at branding the institution and the sense of loyalty established through our relationships.

What I found at The Public is that the key to developing and retaining new audiences is programming events and activities that speak to these communities, so that it then becomes much easier to establish partnerships. Repetition of the marketing message is crucial. Of course, as non-profits we are all limited by budgetary constraints which underscores the importance of relationship building.

A Multi-ethnic Example

An October 1997 New York Times article by Glenn Collins cites a case study highlighting the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. The author noted that in this instance the challenge was to clear up an urban misconception about how to attract audiences to a new performing arts center. The advertising company used photographs of the building in all their advertising materials to show that it was a beautiful space. They also included travel maps and parking information in all mailings. The goal was to hold onto the Mozart and Beethoven audiences while going after new audiences.

To accomplish this goal, the Arts Center used specialized mailing lists and local advertising targeting music, dance and play enthusiasts, along with Blacks, Latinos and residents of Portuguese heritage. They did a total of six mailings offering various ticket packages. They flyered Portuguese festivals, set up ticket sales operations in several Portuguese shops and used “seat drops,” placing pieces of advertising on the seats of New Jersey Transit trains.

Don't Underestimate Word-of-Mouth Advertising

According to The Audience for New York Theater: A Profile of the Broadway and Off-Broadway 1997 Theater Season, which was sponsored by the Theatre Development Fund and the League of American Theaters and Producers, the recommendation of family or friends was the number-one means of hearing about a show for Broadway and Off-Broadway audiences alike.

This same study notes that the influence of reviews was strongly linked to age. In general, younger audience members appear to be less influenced by advertising and relied instead on personal recommendations as a source of information about shows. Young

theater goers were asked about attitudes towards theater, and 88.7% stated that going to the theatre in New York is “cool,” and 68.8% felt theatre is “for someone my age.”

As Gary Stern states in his book, *Marketing Workbook for Non Profit Organizations*, (Wilder Foundation, 1990), “Patience is the most important factor to remember. Your marketing plan will develop but it takes time to build a solid house that will weather storms, heat waves, and the like. Your marketing plan and promotional campaign will produce great results only if they are well executed. It is important to regularly evaluate your progress and be flexible and responsive. Follow through is paramount. It is a sustained effort and success comes from solid exchange relationships, ie., partnerships.”

• **According to a recent survey, the recommendation of family or friends was the number one means of hearing about a show for Broadway and off-Broadway audiences alike.**