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## The Shared Space of Arts Marketing & Education

Posted by [Mr. Jeff M. Poulin](#)

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Oct 08, 2014

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In my last job, I worked to develop audiences. Today, I work in arts education. Many people curiously ask me why and how the two are connected. To which, I respond: "To develop audiences in the long run, a venue must work to ensure that future audience members receive a quality arts education." This is exactly how I ended up in my previous position, before uncovering a chicken-and-egg style conundrum.

### The Task-At-Hand

My work was with a large (2,111 seat) theatre in a European country capitol city. The venue was the first of its kind to bring blockbuster musical theatre to its audiences and capitalized on the new-found economic stability in a post-2008 economy. The time was ripe to be developing robust theatrical calendars, and audiences were justly on board. However, the question became: how is this sustainable in the long run? I began my work in the Marketing Department to understand the audience and devise strategies which would deliver on long term audience development goals.



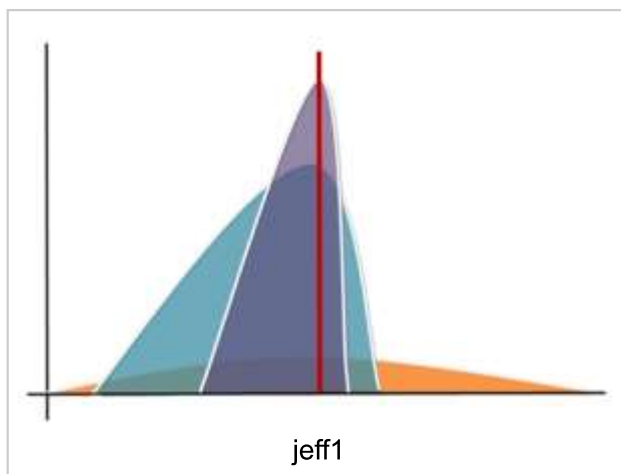
[Mr. Jeff M. Poulin](#)  
(<http://www.americansforthearts.org/users/727>)

After a period of research into ticket-purchaser habits and a sample audience survey, we were able to uncover certain trends about the current theatre-going audience. One important fact which we discovered was that the typical audience member attended 2-3 times per year.

My question became: **How do I attract that audience member to come to the theatre more? 3-4 times per year? Or maybe 5? Or maybe 6?**

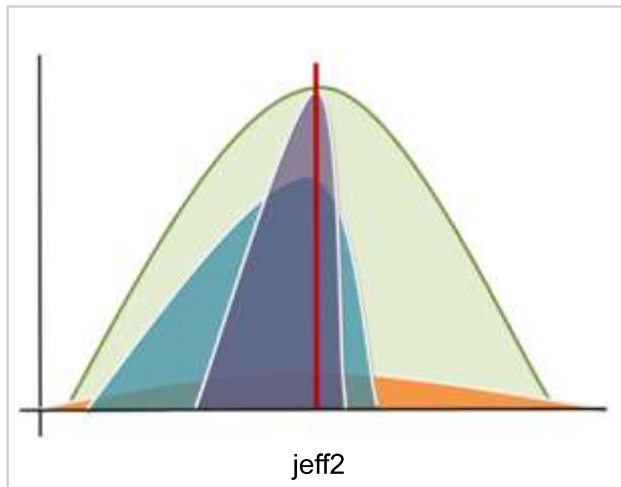
The answer was easy from the anecdotal data we received from the survey was not ground breaking, but still important: Provide opportunities for the audience to engage with the theatre *beyond the theater-going experience*.

Thus, I developed this chart, which mapped the theatre's impressions on potential audience members as seen through our specific work: orange is sales, teal is marketing, purple is public relations, and the red line indicates the theatergoing experience.



As I analyzed our impressions, I realized we had a gap. To answer my questions, I needed to create an ideal audience engagement curve, which consists of ebbs and flows in engagement, but highlights *consistent* engagement. With the addition of the green being the ideal audience engagement curve.

To fill in this new additional space, we had to come up with new and innovative ways to engage our audience.



### The Research

We began by studying what our peer and benchmark institutions did. This revealed a number of things:

- Increased social media usage
- Digital marketing strategies
- Hosting original content on the venue's website, like on a

blog

- The addition of educational activities

Aha! We had it – we could do the first three items with no problem, but the fourth – educational activities – was uncharted territory. So I began reading.

Amongst the myriad resources available, I found several very useful in the endeavor. First, we should all take note of the huge body of research on audience development from the [Wallace Foundation](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-) (<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience->

[development-for-the-arts/Pages/default.aspx](#)). However, to begin my process, I looked to the [robust resources \(http://culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Arts-Derby-audience\\_development\\_toolkit.pdf\)](http://culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Arts-Derby-audience_development_toolkit.pdf) of [CultureHive \(http://culturehive.co.uk/\)](http://culturehive.co.uk/), an organization based in the UK. Additionally, I relied on these reports ([here \(http://www2.danceusa.org/Uploads/EDA/EDA\\_GranteeResearchFINAL.pdf\)](http://www2.danceusa.org/Uploads/EDA/EDA_GranteeResearchFINAL.pdf) and [here \(http://www2.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/Survey\\_CurrentEngagmentPractices.pdf\)](http://www2.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/Survey_CurrentEngagmentPractices.pdf)) from WolfBrown – specifically focused on dance – which were very helpful in relation to designing educational programs to accompany our current engagement efforts. Lastly, I turned to [Heather Maitland \(http://www.heathermaitland.co.uk/about/\)](http://www.heathermaitland.co.uk/about/), one of the reigning experts on audience development, engagement, and evaluation.

I had the research. I developed a proposal. I was able to project out numbers for developing audiences by show for years to come. However, I found myself in a conundrum: **Now that we are using arts education as a marketing tool for the long run, how do we market the arts education program in the short term?**

Well, now, this is a problem.

### **Towards a Solution to the Conundrum**

In short, the proposal was accepted, we offered diverse educational programming, and audiences did grow in the short term. The true success will be measured in the future to know if those audiences do, in fact, remain loyal.

However, as I returned to the United States and began working exclusively in arts education, I have come to realize that the predicament I found myself in is not a unique one. Many theatres and venues are finding themselves in the same position and are looking to achieve the same goals. Moreover, I was lucky: I was challenged to only focus on strategy while other staff members continued the marketing, publications and sales efforts.

So often, we find that in small venues, the folks who do the marketing, communications, and public relations are the same person wearing multiple hats. Then, they get the challenge – as I did – to diversify their engagement efforts and add in education/outreach...one more hat.

To this, I offer a number of questions to be explored:

1. **What are some best practices to enhance audience development efforts through quality arts education programming?**
2. **What is different about marketing arts education programming than marketing arts programming?**
3. **How can we work *smarter* to offer robust arts education programming at our venues that meets the needs and interests of our audiences, while building future audiences, and not burning out the one person (or team) who has to do it all?**

I believe it can be done and will be done, so let's work together to make it possible in communities everywhere.

**Shameless plug:** I will be hosting a [roundtable discussion \(http://artsmarketing.org/conference/session/2014/roundtable-](http://artsmarketing.org/conference/session/2014/roundtable-)

[discussions](#)) at this year National Arts Marketing Project Conference in Atlanta, GA from November 7-10, 2014. If you are interested in this topic, I encourage you to attend and add your voice to the conversation.

*The Arts Marketing Blog Salon is generously sponsored by Patron Technology.*

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