2. MARKETING

TOP TIPS FOR DANCE COMPANIES WHEN SELLING SHOWS TO RURAL AUDIENCES/VENUES

Author: Esther Hingle – Highlights Rural Touring Scheme, Northumberland

THREE SELLING HURDLES

• To schemes (funded organisations with paid staff – often part time)
• To promoters (usually volunteers in village halls) - via the scheme menu of shows
• To audiences - via scheme brochure, press, social media and promotional materials etc.

SELLING TO SCHEME PROMOTERS

• Village promoters will choose their show from the scheme’s menu – a choice of 10 – 20 shows – from which yours has to stand out.
• The information about shows as they appears in the menu, is taken from your ‘company information form’ – importance of attractive, accurate, succinct description plus any further info eg good quotes, company credentials, industry awards, key selling points etc.

FROM THE PROMOTER PERSPECTIVE

• Compared to theatres and arts centres, village halls are infrequent promoters so want to give the most people the best time – consequently will often default to more mainstream tastes rather than ‘minority ‘arts’.
• Promoters are known to their community and feel the responsibility to ‘get it right’ in offering a show they are confident their audience will enjoy.
• The practical need to get bums on seats to cover costs – make it easier to play safe than take a risk, so you have to persuade them dance is a good idea.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

• Mostly older though some younger/family audiences.
• Likely to be 50% from village and 50% from surrounding villages and a portion who come
• from further afield because of the company profile or special interest.
• Village will include retirees from cities with exposure to arts and locals who’ve lived their life in the village with little access to arts – and maybe seeing dance for the first time.
• General not niche (though not to say villagers aren’t discerning arts consumers).
• Village motivations for attending may be different from theatre audiences, eg. only thing in the village; everyone else is going; to support the promoter / village hall; the show is appealing.
• Though their lesser exposure to arts can mean they are less knowledgeable about style / form /trends, they do all recognise quality.

 HOW CAN WE BEST COMMUNICATE WITH THEM – WHO/WHAT ARE OUR TOOLS?

• Tread a line between pitching to a less experienced arts audience and not dumbing down (may just involve thought and tweaking of your usual methods).
• Don’t assume promoters and audiences will know anything about you, your show/artform. For many this might be their first dance show.
• Think about what will get audiences over the threshold – without misrepresenting your show.
• Use descriptive language but tone down the ‘arts speak’. (eg don’t make it too esoteric – for newcomers, even the word ‘contemporary’ can be interpreted as ‘difficult’ – don’t make it too clever and highbrow as perceived as arsy and exclusive etc).
• In your copy think about what the audience will experience eg as well as talking about themes, inspirations, methods and messages of the work, maybe say something about how it will affect the audience, eg. it’s an eye opening show, an emotional rollercoaster, will make them laugh, cry, think, look at something differently etc.
• Communicate with your audience through the promoter - they are the do-ers and connectors in their community and a key conduit in spreading the word/information/ creating a buzz (phone and chat to promoter – talk about your show so they can confidently describe and sell to others – provide box office briefing notes).
• If your rural touring dates are part of a mixed venue tour, it’s worth considering – for your publicity - how you can address the above to serve both city and rural audiences and how you can take on the sensibilities of rural touring audiences whilst retaining your company’s visual identity.

TOOLS

Promoters use a multi-method approach to marketing – and cover the same bases as theatres and arts centres, including:
• Print distribution – 2 pronged – scheme brochures and event publicity
• Word of mouth
• Local/regional press & media
• Village press such as parish newsletters, circulars etc
• Online marketing eg websites, scheme and promoter mailing lists – e-flyers and mailchimp
• Targeted marketing – specific to artform or show themes
• Social media

WHAT ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS OF MARKETING A RURAL TOURING SHOW?

• The methods are the same as theatres but the reach is different
• Surveys show the main ways villagers hear about shows are still via word of mouth and posters/flyers – though social media is growing
• Through the promoter – provide the tools for promoters to be able to sell your show and create a buzz in their community
• They tend to like a ‘does what it says on the tin’ approach to marketing. Publicity should give a clear sense of what your show is about.

WHAT ARTISTS WILL NEED TO SUPPLY SCHEMES/PROMOTERS

• Schemes need all the ingredients of a marketing pack – as itemised below.
• If new to touring – suggest companies compile a marketing pack with all required info in one document.
• If it’s a new show and marketing packs are not available until later in the season, initial needs are: brochure copy, image, and the info requested in the ‘company information form’.
• Send your marketing packs to both the schemes and direct to the promoters who’ve booked your show.

MARKETING PACK

Don’t overload promoters with lots of reading. Keep things concise and easy to read/find/navigate. Space information out in bite size paragraphs and make it easy on the eye and not daunting.

• **Template press release** - include show description, performance elements/style/ingredients eg performed by 4 dancers and told with dance, music, film. A para about the company/performer and their credentials and any quotes and links to trailers, a press contact if you have one and website/SM details.
• **Brochure copy** - Good, succinct copy for inclusion in scheme brochures. Both 50 words and 100 word versions
• **Images** - if possible, supply both portrait and landscape, high and low res images. 1MB ideal for press. Many press are picture-led so strong images can help sell the show – especially for dance
• **Quotes and reviews** – from press, audience and promoters

• **Press pitches /angles** eg. performer is from the region, topical theme, timely show, first or last tour date etc. say which company members are available for radio interview and whether extracts from the show work well on TV and radio. Say if you offer free tickets for competitions etc.

• **Target audience** – ideas of who the show will appeal to eg young people, lovers of other art forms, dance groups and people who may have an interest in the themes and forms of your show etc.

• **Video trailer** – for inclusion in: scheme menus, scheme/promoter mailchimp or e: flyers, local press to embed in online listings, inclusion in social media. Quality of film will reflect on perceived quality of production so no trailer may be better than a poor quality trailer.

• **Box office briefing notes** – a simple crib sheet promoters can keep by the phone to help them describe/sell the show to their audience/community – to include e.g. description, running time, age suitability, interval, any strong content etc.

• **Example of direct mail** – eg. wording for a promoter’s mailchimp or email alert.

• **Workshops** – if you are offering workshops, supply information on, eg. content, duration, minimum age, max number, CRB checked, is offer bespoke, does it tie in with curriculum work, your fee, any equipment or technical requirements etc

• **Biog** – short description of performer/ company credentials.

• **Credits and Contacts list**: eg who wrote, directed, starred and also contact details of eg. tour manager, marketing personnel.

• **Social media** – Let people know how to find you on Twitter and Facebook so they can tweet, retweet and virally circulate your event info. Include link to a video trailer if you have one.

**SOCIAL MEDIA - HOW USEFUL IS IT?**

• Social media is a small but growing portion of ‘how heard’

• It’s viral so great for ease of marketing, attracting younger audiences and something we all want to encourage.

• Promoter take up of SM is mixed – and growing. Schemes may be more active on social media than promoters. Promoters may delegate to children and younger people.

• Between the schemes, promoters, RTDI and NRTF your potential reach is huge.

**EVALUATION**

Likely that both schemes and companies are required by funders to undertake audience evaluation. Discuss with schemes to avoid overload on the night – is sharing possible. If shows are being promoted by RTDI we have asked the schemes to hold back and we would ask companies to as well – we can share data once collected.
PUBLICITY

Hugely important. Still a main way people find out in villages. Gives you a presence on the ‘high street’. It’s a chief bug bear of promoters. ‘They like a ‘does what it says on the tin’ approach. If your publicity doesn’t reflect your show, promoters known to stick their own copy on!

Posters and flyers:

• Both A5 flyers and A4 posters needed. Some schemes may request A3 too.

They need:

• A good strong image.
• A decent overprint space at least 1/5 of the space – more if it’s to include workshop info – this is more important than a tour schedule on the reverse.
• A description on the reverse of the flyer.
• A good strap line on the poster and flyer front that gives a flavour of what your show is about.
• No gloss paper and above 130 gsm.
• Delivered in time to be of promotional use.
• Some schemes give instructions/requirements re print specifics and quantities as part of their contract with you. Make sure you abide by this.
• Some schemes will overprint for promoters, others won’t.
• Please make sure you have the RTDI logo on your print if at all possible (only if you are part of the curated RTDI scheme).