

Marketing

Nicky Webb, Artichoke

Michael Smith, Cog Design

Nicky Webb (NW) began by explaining how her background in marketing defined her working relationship with Helen Marriage. They both believe in putting the audience first and that there should be no real distinction between marketing and programming.

NW started working in theatres and then ran a marketing agency for the arts to support lots of different organisations. HM and NW met when working for Lift and went on to work together at Canary Wharf, mounting an arts programme while the area was being developed. The idea for this programme was to both appease local people who were fed up with the development and also animate the spaces so that the employees of the companies moving into the area had a positive impression of it. The programme was free which can seem odd from a marketing point of view, but is also liberating because one can think about the audience not the box office. NW and HM then worked in Salisbury, transforming the small, genteel arts festival into something quite different. Here, they were forced to use outdoor spaces due to the lack of good indoor venues, which was a learning curve in terms of what excited an audience.

Artichoke's approach to marketing is based on the following points:

- Marketing is not:
 - an afterthought. It has to be done in conjunction with creative decisions or it doesn't work. It mustn't be imposed by anyone else without the thought needed.
 - a luxury. It is integral to the production's success so it needs a budget
 - only about bums on seats.
 - threatening. Don't treat it as something nasty and commercial.

- Marketing is:
 - integral.
 - appropriate. What's right for one production isn't right for another.
 - audience focused. Work is not just about art; it is also about the audience and one must think of them or it is meaningless. At the same time it is not necessarily about giving them what they want. Salisbury had a largely conservative audience, but they were led to other things they wouldn't have assumed they would like. One example was when an outdoor performance called *Mephistomania* was programmed to catch an audience as they exited another show. It was made awkward for them to avoid and many commented on how much they enjoyed it despite reservations. Marketing can help to broaden an audience's horizons.
 - about place and where the production should happen for the greatest impact. This can be important is making people look at places in a different way.
 - about motivation. What will get the audience to come and what to stay away? Marketing has to convince a lot of different people why they

shouldn't miss your show, so it is crucial to think about different individuals and different motivations.

Fundamental to Artichoke's approach is the belief that the audience matter just as much as the art. NW explained that Artichoke wants to change people's perceptions about what art is and where it should be seen and to take audiences on a journey. How you communicate to your audience is part of the event itself. *The Sultan's Elephant* was sold on the idea that it was all a big secret. This was uncomfortable for the marketing team but it generated excitement and mystery.

Michael Smith (MS) then introduced himself and his company. Cog is one of very few companies that works across the broad span of the arts, designing marketing strategies and print, with a sister company, DotCog, doing web design. MS works in the arts because he enjoys working with people who are incredibly passionate about what they do. He said that the downside to this is that people who have been passionate about their project for a long time, often give MS one day to understand that passion and to convert it into an effective marketing campaign!

Cog is interested not just in the design, but in how it all links into a wider marketing strategy. MS always works to create the most appropriate method of conveying the client's message to their audience, working backwards and always starting with the audience. An important thing to remember is that you do not want to tell the audience what will happen when they get there but, rather, to persuade them to invest their money and their time in the event, so they can find out for themselves. It is also important to focus on the most appropriate message, which can be different things for different people. It is crucial, therefore, to find ways of talking to specific groups.

MS explained how counter productive it can be to go to a designer with a fully formed idea and to be very prescriptive about what they do. It is important for a relationship to be built up between designer and client. Good design and marketing is always an investment of time and money. You need to put in time with your designer to get the best result. It is important, however, to find the right supplier for your needs; each design company is as individual as you are. It is advisable to do research through word of mouth, not just by consulting the phone book.

NW then went on to talk about the marketing campaign for *The Sultan's Elephant*. It was an unusual campaign because Royal de Luxe wouldn't let Artichoke use images from previous shows or allow interviews. In addition, RdL was virtually unknown in the UK, while Artichoke had a relatively small database and budget at that time. RdL also had very specific ideas about the marketing, giving Artichoke an image to use (which was a quite confusing and even slightly alarming image) and insisting on the original title for the show which was very long and in French. These ideas, while effective in Europe, wouldn't work in the UK. Artichoke wanted to start again, thinking specifically about the British audience.

The authorities were very nervous about too many people coming to see the show, so a lot of marketing ideas were axed. As it was to be Artichoke's first big show, NW and HM were very keen to attract an audience from all over the country, not just from London, but the marketing restrictions made this a bit more difficult. A West End show usually has a marketing budget of millions to generate an audience of hundreds of thousands. Artichoke aspired to get an audience of 250,000 so the marketing campaign had to reach 10 times that number, assuming that 10% of the people who saw the marketing would come. Artichoke had £80,000 to spend on marketing.

NW and MS went on to talk about some of the decisions they made about the campaign. NW decided she would cope with the lack of images and information by turning this into a feature. By keeping the show very secretive, she could create intrigue and excitement. The first piece of print was an elegant and simple black and silver card with the words 'Will you find it?' printed on it, without any dates or places.

Cog was involved with the project for nine months, spending a very long time working to crack the ideal image and range of materials. MS knew they needed to create imagery that would work well for new media and email as well as print. It also needed to appeal to a broad audience without alienating the cognoscenti. The arts community were brought on board early on with the hope that they would help create the buzz and spread the word of mouth.

It was very difficult to see what success the campaign was having because there were no ticket sales. One of the only ways of tracking interest was through the website where people could sign up to a mailing list. The importance of the web could not be underestimated as it is key as far as spreading word of mouth is concerned and it was also the place where most people got information about routes and timings. This worked so well, in fact, that the website crashed and had to be rebuilt very quickly!

NW talked briefly about the press campaign which was, again, quite different from the usual. Because of RdL's provisos, NW knew that she couldn't get much in the way of press attention in advance. However, NW took five journalists from major newspapers to France to see the show, and although they couldn't write about the performance itself they could write about RdL's work in general. For the show itself, despite the limitations, Artichoke worked with Ben Chamberlain to draw up a detailed press plan, including information such as the best vantage points for photographs.

NW gave some statistics showing the impact of the event:

- The BBC says 1 million people came to the show. There are no official statistics.
- There were 10,000 subscribers to Artichoke.
- There were 4 million web hits in 24 hours.
- According to a Visit London survey, 37% of the audience was aware of the event via marketing campaign.
- In the same survey it was shown that the return on investment was 23:1 (i.e. for every £1 spent on marketing £23 was spent at local traders etc).
- Spend in London over the 4 days was £1.87 million more than it would have been usually.

The session was then opened up to questions from the floor.

Geoff Rowe (Leicester Comedy Festival) asked how important it was for Artichoke that people understood the story, or was it fine for people to just see part of it and leave.

NW replied that Artichoke has no hard data about what people did, but there are many letters and emails from people who say that they had gone to see the show intending to stay for an hour but ended up spending the whole day following it. It was intended for people to be able to dip in and out over the course of the four days, however, so there was no expectation that people would have to stay to enjoy it.

Sian Thomas (Hat Fair) asked what happened with the marketing campaign when the show was postponed for 9 months.

NW replied that while the industry knew about the postponement, the general public didn't as that part of the marketing campaign hadn't started by that point. Nevertheless, the momentum had to then be kept up for even longer.

George Harris (Lanternhouse) asked how NW budgets for the marketing and whether it is based on a percentage of total costs.

NW said that when she worked in opera, she argued for a percentage of the box office income that she was creating, but this is a bit false, especially with a free event. You have to base it on the specific tools needed for the particular performance.

Jane Gower wanted to know if there was anything in the marketing campaign that NW would now not have bothered with.

NW replied that the exclusive and in advance coverage in the media, was pointless because some press sabotaged this anyway by taking sneaky photos of the elephant in rehearsals.

Katie Beale (Kinetika) asked about how Artichoke was credited in the strategy?

NW replied that it wasn't appropriate to push Artichoke to the front because the event was focused on Royal de Luxe. However, because RdL wouldn't talk to the press, Artichoke had to and so a public image was ensured partly by design but mostly by accident.

Neil Webb (British Council China) asked whether Artichoke aimed to appeal to children specifically.

NW answered that Artichoke was keen for it not to be perceived as a children's show as this wouldn't help to win arguments, such as those had with Buckingham Palace over use of the ceremonial route. While the show appealed to children, it also had a huge impact on older audiences. MS added that there is a culture issue; in Britain we only have either children's or adults' show, whereas in Europe they really do have family shows.