

STAMP Resources

# Marketing for Cash and Time-poor Artists

Compiled and edited by Jeremy Wong (Operations and Finance Officer at Improbable)

These notes summarise key learnings and tips from STAMP's event on 25 April 2019 at Omnibus Theatre, London. The format of the 2-hour event was a participatory Q&A/panel, followed by smaller breakout sessions with each panellist. The attendees were mainly artists and some producers, primarily from a theatre background but also a couple from dance. Most had some level of marketing experience and were split between early and mid-career stages.

## Top tips

- Marketing is resource-intensive – if you don't have money, unfortunately it will take time. Get good at organising your time and figure out your marketing priorities.
- Consistency is key – marketing is “playing the long game”. Marketing shouldn't just happen when you need to sell a show (which is good, because you're probably doing a hundred other things by the time the show comes around).
- Streamline and space out the work in a way that makes it manageable. Plan way ahead. Be realistic.
- Your marketing materials are **not** an artistic manifesto – use your image and copy to **sell** your show. Clarity is your friend.
- Use your social media to authentically add value to people's lives. Find ways of generating content that is easy but still produces engaging stuff.
- Good marketing and branding is fundamentally about storytelling, not (just) selling. You can tell stories for free!
- Know your audience – it's better to be really targeted. If you're marketing to everyone, you're marketing to no-one.
- Anyone can be good at marketing. Try not to take it too seriously and don't feel like you need to overthink it – the whole thing is a bit of an imperfect science anyway!
- Don't be afraid to experiment, especially with your social media.

## Time management and marketing responsibilities

- If you're a small company, both ensemble-led and producer-led marketing can work for you. It's also possible to outsource this to an external marketer (if you have the budget), or split up the responsibilities within the company.
- The main thing is to be *really realistic* about what you need to achieve, but don't let marketing fall off your priority list. Often when you're working with very small budgets, it's easy to try and do 8 people's jobs at the same time. *It is hard* but the biggest mistake you can make is for marketing to fall down the list.
- The more organised you can be early on, the better, especially if you'll have loads of other things to do when the production is in R&D/rehearsals/tech. For example, get a marketing plan together – even if it's just a simple timeline – before the show goes on sale.

- When you're really low on money, you'll need to be organised about it, especially if you take it on yourselves. Don't be afraid to ask for help from others!
- Focus on 3 things really well rather than 10 things badly.

## Show artwork and marketing copy/blurbs

- Your image and show/project copy is **really worth thinking about and working over**. You can easily get it wrong and it's likely the only thing people will see or read about your show before it's put on!
- If you're about to drop money on making a show and spending £200 on print – get the image right! **Remember, the image or the copy isn't an essay about the artistic content of the show. It's about getting bums on seats.** Don't worry if the image doesn't capture all the nuances of your work, you're not making your art on the marketing materials – the art is the art! The image and copy needs to be CLEAR in order to get audiences to attend or buy tickets.
- If the venue aren't supporting, talk to people who aren't connected to the show – get their feedback.
- Once again (because it's important!) don't get bogged down in the meaning and nuts and bolts of the show – write the copy and use the image that will SELL your show.

## Social media – do's and don'ts

- Social media can be a very useful tool, because it allows you to go straight to your audience. Although it can be empowering, social media can also get too much sometimes.
- Managing social media marketing effectively is down to good organisation and taking the time to learn skills. What can each platform can do for you and how can these free tools be used most effectively?
- Key things to do:
  - When you have time outside to making shows/projects, put time into researching how to use social media platforms to the best of their capabilities – e.g. use YouTube tutorials.
  - Decide what channels you should be using, and for what (general) purposes. It's good to be on all the main channels if you can be as you give yourself a better chance to attract different audiences.
  - **But again, the key is be realistic!** There's no point in setting up several accounts if you don't have the capacity to engage with people and generate meaningful, valuable content on each one. **Do less, but do it better.**
  - You will develop a feel for how to use each channel most efficiently.
    - Facebook: good for events and for bigger announcements (caution: Facebook's average user is now in their 40s, younger audiences are moving to other platforms and only use Facebook for a select few things).
    - Twitter: good for conversational and industry-interfacing engagement and building links with followers/your audience.
    - Instagram: stories are useful for quick and easy content. Visual medium, can curate a brand aesthetic more easily. Much more popular with under-30s.
    - Other major channels used more by younger audiences: Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr
  - Ask yourself: what value can I bring to people on these platforms? What interesting things have I got to say about me and my work, and how is that facilitated by the specific platforms I've chosen?

- That value can be in any form – behind-the-scenes content, insights into best way to plant flowers, original haikus, tips for how to support community members, memes etc. The key bit is figuring out what your audience will engage with and how you can bring them with you on your (or your company's) journey.
- What kind of content from other artists or companies would YOU watch?
- **Important:** don't fall into the trap of just using social media to "shout into the void" about the things you're flogging – while social media can be great marketing tools for selling tickets, **they're fundamentally communication tools and social tools**. It's about the story of your show and your practice – not just broadcasting "hard sell over and over again"! The hard sell is necessary, but it brings ZERO value to people.
  - Take a lesson from boxing: Your audience will respond to the hard sell if they are on board with you and your work i.e. if they see value in what you're doing. Provide them with that value regularly ("jab" them) before delivering the hard sell ("right hook"): **Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook** (see Gary Vaynerchuk's book on social media storytelling of the same name).
- Don't be afraid to experiment – figure out what content works well or doesn't work well.
  - Each social media platform has its own analytics tools. There's no need to do really in-depth analysis – even a quick glance will tell you what kind of content is performing better than others.
- Beware: generating good social media content can take time and takes practice. However, you might be able to figure out a seamless way for it to work for you.
  - For example, create content as by-product of your work – instead of thinking about "what am I going to make a video about", just flip the camera on when you're working on something.
  - Generate investment in your work by documenting your work in interesting ways.
  - Share sector content (e.g. articles, reviews, news). Are people already having conversations that your work also taps into? E.g. if your show has themes about representation and inclusivity, there's always BIG conversations around that online. Use things like Twitter – how can you be part of those conversations in a meaningful way that also raises awareness of your work and your brand?
  - Again, look at what other companies or artists are doing. What stuff are they putting out that's really good or meaningful, but is actually really easy?
- Social media advertising is one of the most effective and efficient ways of spending advertising budget. You can be **much** more targeted than traditional print or web advertising, so it's useful for low budgets.
  - The quality of your content will be what determines how successful your advertising on social media is – even if you have your targeting down to an art, if the people seeing your adverts don't understand what you're trying to get them to see or do, then it's money down the drain.
  - Facebook is by far the best use of advertising spend in current climate – it can be very targeted and generates more reach than other channels. Facebook adverts also extend to Instagram's platform (you can use this even if you don't have an Instagram account!)
  - Don't just "boost" posts – you can set such specific criteria with Ads Manager, so "boosts" are mostly a waste of Facebook's targeting potential. You'll still need to use your intuition when setting up targeting – hence why it's important to know your audiences!
  - Beware that using paid advertising on Facebook can negatively impact the reach of your organic (i.e. non-paid) posts in the future!

## How curated should my social media content be?

- Rough and ready, or curated content? It depends on your brand (or what you want your brand to be!)
  - If you're an individual artist, your selling point might be authenticity, in which case your feeds and marketing can be spontaneous and quick-fire (e.g. using Instagram Stories, Facebook Live videos, Snapchat stories).
  - If you're trying to create a company brand, you probably want more curated content – or at the very least, a consistency in aesthetic and messaging.
  - For longer-form or curated content, use the feeds on your social media platforms.
- It might take some time to find a balance between speed and quality – this will come with practice. As mentioned above, try creating spontaneous or easy content whilst you work – this could be in the rehearsal room, or in the office, or just wherever you or your company is doing stuff. Have a camera with you as much as you can, even if that's just on your phone.
- What are some simple, entertaining and interesting things that you can do to your footage or photos? If it's, for example, just you working at a desk, could a smart filter, some jaunty music or a time-lapse actually make it into a bit of short content that's worth engaging with?

## Posters and flyers – are they worth it?

- Depends on your show and where it's happening. Think: who is your audience? Once you know who your audiences might be, decide whether print is the best medium to reach them.
- Examples:
  - **London venues:** Culturally engaged audiences at Pleasance do pick up print, but it might not have any impact on shorter dates on tours.
  - **London streets:** Flyering in London or distributing print in shops and cafes (with no connection to your work) is likely a waste of resources and time. There are far more efficient and effective ways to target specific communities e.g. there's been a resurgence of postal marketing in London (i.e. dropping flyers into individual mailboxes).
  - **Local rural audiences:** you may be touring somewhere where no one uses social media and no one is on the venue e-newsletter, so print and direct mail would work far better.
  - **Edinburgh Fringe:** There is SO MUCH print at the Fringe, the likelihood is that your print will get lost. But venues will also ask you for some, so it's a balancing act. It's possible to do a show with minimal print – consider using your flyer as a "calling card", rather than as your only marketing tool. If you have flyers for the Fringe, carry them with you at all times!
- For busier events like festivals, flyers and posters help audiences to recognise your show (but bear in mind they can't be your only channel to secure bums on seats). Research suggests that people need at 3 - 6 "prods" or "nudges" in order to book a ticket. Are your posters and flyers going to be visible enough to "nudge" people towards booking for your show?
- Only get the amount of print that you have time and money to shift!
  - Be prepared to have a conversation with venues about their print requirements (if they have them) – it may be that they have a standard demand that they make of companies but it's unsuitable for you because you have a shorter or longer run than they're used to.
- Print isn't trackable so unless you're really targeted with where you're putting your flyers, you won't know if they're making a difference. A solution is to use flyers with discount codes, but this increases your admin and distribution time.

## Advertising: print and web

- Be smart if you're doing print advertising. It can be expensive, so make sure you're getting the most for your money.
- Print advertising is one of the few areas where it is worth securing as late as possible, because it will be cheaper the closer the publications get to the publication date. It is worth getting in contact with them to begin with – if they haven't filled the space, they will get back in contact near their print deadline. Always ask if they can get something else with your print advertising too – can they throw in a digital ad, a guaranteed review etc.?
- **Web advertising is expensive** – there are some more cost-effective places to use your money (e.g. social media advertising) but if you can spare the budget, you might reach audiences you don't have access to otherwise. **If you're on a shoestring, prioritise social media spending.**
- Digital advertisers will have rate cards for pricing – familiarise yourself with the terminology, because rate cards often refer to the same digital advertising elements e.g. leaderboards, MPUs. (See here: <http://www.knowonlineadvertising.com/facts-about-online-advertising/basic-terms-in-advertising/>)
- If you're doing digital advertising, make sure you get the metrics/analysis afterwards so you can figure out if it's effective. Never be afraid to ask people for their data (mailing list numbers, clickthrough rates, impressions) – you're paying for it.
- Email blasts (or solus emails) are an effective way of reaching a publication's audience.
- Pay Per Click might be worth it – you can cap a spend but you could also run through it in a day so it's not the best for consistent marketing.

## Branding and audience development

- Marketing isn't a quick thing that is done or finished – if you're low on time, you can chip away at it and your consistency will likely pay off more than trying to cram it into a burst of activity right before a show.
- Outside of marketing or selling specific projects, think about the "long game". For example, try to provide regular content that's valuable for your audiences on social media – what is "valuable" will depend on who your audience is.
- Ask yourself: WHY am I building my brand? What do I want to achieve? If you're just thinking about selling tickets, then you're limiting how you think about your work and the additional things you can bring to your audience.
- Alternatively, think about storytelling – what's your narrative? What are the stories you're trying to tell around yourself/your company and your work? Think about your journey and how you work engages with the existing arts ecosystem, as well as the wider world.
- If you're doing direct marketing (i.e. emailing people who have access to their own networks and communities, using them as "champions" of your work and spreading the word), don't send bulk emails. Personalise your approaches. Direct marketing doesn't cost you money, it costs you time, but it can be incredibly valuable. It helps you start conversations and build networks that you can re-engage with in the future. It also encourages you to think more laterally about who your audiences might be in the longer-term.
- Form a relationship with your venue(s) and research what shows are doing well. Look at booking charts to see what's really selling – figure out why and how you might be able to tap into their existing audiences to build your own.
- How can you work out who your audience is? How can you build it?

- Look at work you admire – where do you fit in the landscape? Go look at the marketing of companies you admire, look at who's talking about them. Research them! Spy on people!
- Don't forget that reflection can be a valuable strategy too. YOU are the one making your work – what are you interested in? Find the audiences that are interested in the same thing.
- As mentioned plenty of times, if you market to everyone, you market to no-one. However, let audiences surprise you – your work may appeal to people who you hadn't considered before. Don't box off your audiences too early.
- Try thinking laterally about people who might want to see your work. For example, it may be a useful exercise to think about who you want your audiences to be further down the line. How do you get your FUTURE audiences to engage with your work NOW, or how can you start convincing them to engage with your work in a small way? A casual social media follower may come back around and become a valuable/loyal supporter in the future.
- Leverage your existing audience to grow it, e.g. with competitions, giveaways. Also, look to them for feedback. Engage with your audience and find out how you could improve, or build on the things you're already doing well.
- Who is coming to your shows? Look at analytics on social media (e.g. on Twitter, Facebook Insights).
- Use your networks and get other people to share your stuff.
- It is crucial to think about who your art is for at the earliest stages of making your work – this is key to figuring out and growing your audiences. Remember: it's completely possible to create art that fulfils you and fulfils the audience, which is also created with selling tickets in mind.

## **Marketing plans**

See the Resources section on the STAMP website ([www.stamplondon.org](http://www.stamplondon.org)) for Hannah Freeman and Isabel Dixon's marketing plan and budget templates!

- Filling out blank template marketing plans can be long and arduous, but it can be a really rewarding process if you're unfamiliar with how to market a show. Once you've done it once or twice, you'll be far more aware of the things you need to be thinking about and what things slot into what places – in other words, you can figure out what works for you and streamline the whole process, saving yourself way more time in the future.
- Some venues will also ask for your marketing plan, so it's a really useful skill to develop.
- Think about your marketing plan as a framework around which to structure some thoughts and actions around marketing. The most important thing is that it works for YOU.

## **Other hints and tips**

- Don't underestimate the power of word-of-mouth and social media reviews from audiences – similarly, don't underestimate the impact of really strong branding and audience development (the long game!) *Heathers* did a whole West-End run without a single reviewer coming in.
- Don't be afraid to steal other people's marketing ideas! For maximum effect, make those ideas work for you in a bespoke way.
- If you're approaching external marketers, ask other companies who they'd recommend for marketing.

## **About STAMP:**

STAMP is a group of venues and organisations based in London who supports and produce new theatre and performance work. STAMP's mission is practical collective action to improve the ways in which artists are supported by our organisations and the industry, and are valued in society more widely.

Find out more at [www.stamplondon.org](http://www.stamplondon.org)

## **Contributors/Panellists:**

**Moderator:** Nic Connaughton (Head of Theatre at Pleasance Theatre)

**Panel:**

- **Isabel Dixon** is a playwright, dramaturg and arts marketing professional. She was previously the Press and Marketing Officer for VAULT Festival, and Marketing Manager for Pleasance London and at Edinburgh Festival Fringe. She is also co-Artistic Director of Burn Bright Theatre Company whose recent productions include *Frankenstein* (Old Red Lion Theatre), *All Is Bright* (Crossrail Place Roof Garden; Victoria Library Westminster), and *Vernon God Little* (The Space). She also co-curates and co-produces *The Miniaturists*.
- **Hannah Freeman** is a freelance digital and social media consultant. With over seven years experience in social media and digital marketing, Hannah has worked with a variety of brands including the Warburg Institute, the British Council, University of London, Southbank Centre, and with a variety of music artists, including McFly and McBusted.
- **David William Bryan** trained at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting in NYC and specialises in self-producing, writing and performing one-person plays. David's solo shows *Trashed*, *In Loyal Company* and *Fragility of Man* have taken the theatre festival scene by storm with his current production *In Loyal Company* selling out its last sixty performances, including sell out runs at Edinburgh Fringe and Vault Festival. He is currently touring the UK and will return to Edinburgh Fringe in 2019 with two solo shows at the Pleasance.