



Marketing and publicity

To market and publicise a tour requires a global perspective. Much of the knowledge you already have will be applicable but you will need to shift your focus away from the local and create a national marketing plan.

Marketing plans

A marketing plan describes the process of linking your work with an audience – it's a planning tool. Marketing is not just about publicity, although publicity is a part of marketing.

Generally speaking a marketing plan begins with the 4 'p's':

- product
- price
- place
- promotion.

Product

Obviously the product is your show. However, ensure you take a very comprehensive look at what you've got – it's really the *experience* you're describing.

- Who's involved with the show (actors, musicians, dancers, designers, etc.)? How well known are they and which audiences do they themselves reach?
- What is the content of the show – its themes?
- Where does it sit on the continuum of performance (cutting edge, or established mainstream)?

Price

The price is always going to be related to what the market can bear – which is not necessarily what your product is worth (it may be more, or less, than the actual value of your product). So ask yourselves:

- What prices have you charged for this show in the past?
- Which pricing category attracted the largest numbers?
- Did you encounter any price resistance?

- What are other similar shows charging?
- Does your price need to vary between centres? This can be appropriate between rural and urban venues, however be very wary about setting different prices between centres. We live in a very small country and word travels quickly – you may encounter resistance to price differences.

Place

- Where are you performing the show (in a theatre, in a car park)?
- What capacity does the venue have?
- What are the sightlines like?

Location also covers ticket sales. Where can your audience purchase tickets, when and how easy is the process? And what's parking like?

Promotion

There are two types of promotion available to you – paid and unpaid. Paid promotion covers advertising: newspaper, magazine, radio, television, posters/fliers, mail-outs, etc. Unpaid promotion covers print articles and radio and television interviews, etc. The style and mix of promotion you choose to use will be defined primarily by the audience you're attempting to reach. This is the often unstated fifth 'p' – people.

People

So just who is your target audience? The more specific you are the more detailed your promotional strategies will be. Your pricing structures will also be more accurately targeted. Audiences are determined by product and place. Take a look at what your show offers. Identify (once again) the themes and key selling points of the show.

The answers to all the questions above will form the basis of your marketing plan. Now you just need to match the plan to the budget, make any necessary modifications and you're ready for implementation. In the marketing conversation, don't forget to include the sponsors you've negotiated. Sponsors can be a great source of marketing assistance.

Relationship building We have developed our audience over a number of years. Before touring our works to regional centres we established them in Auckland and Wellington. Before playing Downstage we played Bats. Each season built on those that came before. Seasons in major cities gave us better access to national media and grew awareness in provincial New Zealand before we went on the road. We talked to local people, theatre managers, other touring producers and local presenting partners and asked them about the local audience. What has worked before? How many people went to similar type events? How do they find out about events in their towns? How much will they pay? etc. We identified our audience by benchmarking against similar events that had gone before us and found them with the help of local partners. Then we developed a relationship by going back. That's what has grown our audience – having a relationship with thousands of people all over New Zealand.

Justin Lewis, Producer/Director, Indian Ink

Promotional tools

Magazines: editorial

National magazines work approximately four months out so you'll need your marketing plan in place well before this deadline. Magazines like to have content with a strong specific angle on which they can base a feature article and each will want a different angle so they have an exclusive story. Work out all the angles you have and then allocate them according to the reader profile and distribution of the magazine. For example, *Metro* is primarily an Auckland magazine and will require a specific Auckland focus.

To identify magazines, you could go to a large public library and use the AC Nielsen's *Media Directory* (www.acnielsen.co.nz). This directory lists every print media publication in New Zealand and will lead you to some specialist magazines. Specialist magazines are just the thing if your touring work deals with a specialist topic.

Many magazines will want to take their own photographs but if not, make sure you have a good range to choose from (black/white and colour). Scanning selected photographs will enable you to put them up on a website to be downloaded by media, or to send them electronically or on a disc to publications.

Newspapers: editorial

Don't forget to check the local angle if you're touring to the hometown of cast or crew members.

Radio and television: advertising

Radio and television advertising will generally only be justified if you have a large marketing budget or a substantial sponsorship for marketing. Radio is fragmented in audience share and many stations now require you to purchase advertising time before they'll give you editorial coverage.

If you do go ahead with television advertising, be careful about the kind of ad you make. A straight transfer of performance to live television can look terrible unless you have a sizeable budget to create the advertisement.

Newspapers: advertising

Identify the newspapers you may want to advertise in (there's usually only one). Again, the *Media Directory* will help. If there's a choice, then check the daily distribution rates and profiles. Find out which days the entertainment pages run, but don't automatically use these days. Don't forget to include your local research, especially that from the venue manager, about who reads what and when.

Check to see if the venue has a special deal going that you can access. Also, check with the paper to see if it offers a special theatre

rate or other deals, for example discounts if you place ads in more than one paper.

All ads for the tour should be booked simultaneously and well in advance. A clear list of which ads are to appear on which dates should be sent to each paper (key numbers are useful). This means you have a national checklist.

Do check that the ads actually appeared on the days they were booked for. If a paper misses an ad don't pay for it – ask for a free ad to replace it or have the bill discounted. Unless you have an account with the paper you'll often be required to pay for the ads in advance – an account is your best option.

Consider advertising in the programmes of shows going into the venue prior to yours, as well as shows at other venues. Piggyback wherever possible (exchange fliers, etc.)

Design

Design is complicated by the fact that newspapers and magazines have different column widths. A 6 x 3 advertisement in the *Waikato Times* looks very different to a 6 x 3 in *The Dominion Post*. Check the column size for each paper you're planning to advertise in and design accordingly.

What's a 6 x 3? It's a six-centimetre by three-column advertisement. Advertisements are sold in column centimetres – for example, a 6 x 3 equals 18 column centimetres. At say \$15.80 per column centimetre each 6 x 3 will cost \$284.40. Prices per column centimetre vary as widely from paper to paper as does column width.

Advertisements are sometimes more expensive on the weekend, or on particular pages.

Posters and fliers

For a national tour, having all the dates and centres on the poster and flier assists the marketing campaign by alerting people to the fact that the piece is of national significance.

If the work already exists you can either use the existing design for the tour, or start from scratch. Consider what else is out there and how your poster and flier can stand out from the crowd while remaining true to the integrity of the work.

When creating a flier think about its purpose. Is it a single communication, or do you want it to serve more than one purpose (it can act as a booking reply form for example)?

Fliers can range from small pieces of floppy paper to complicated cardboard postcards. The chief advantage of small and floppy is you can print more for less. However, there is an advantage to more expensive postcard design – they are easy to mail (no envelopes) and people don't yet see them as junk, but put them in their diaries, on fridges and send them to friends, etc.

Having determined your poster and flier design and format, decide how many to print. The budget and how many each centre will take will have an impact on this. Again, local knowledge will be invaluable. There are some centres where 50 posters will overwhelm the town; Auckland on the other hand is a bottomless pit.

Primary distribution of your poster and flier can be done either through a national distribution agency or local agents. Placement should begin around four weeks out from the date of first performance in each centre. Fliers can also be inserted into magazines and newspapers.

Getting your poster/flier to distributors is best done through your printer, who can package each centre's number and send them directly (don't forget to ensure you include yourself in this). Ensure your distributor includes the venue in its distribution. Or you may wish to send a number of fliers directly to each venue for distribution to theatre patrons, or a mail-out to the subscriber base. Also ensure the cast and crew each has a good handful. As they walk around town they can top up local shops, or give them to taxi drivers (who talk). They can mail them to friends and family. Leave no stone unturned in your quest to distribute fliers to potential purchasers.

Direct marketing

Identifying and accessing databases targeted at specific audiences can take a large amount of research and work. However, direct target marketing (that's putting material directly into interested hands, either electronically or through mail-outs) is a great way to sell a show. Potential sources include national bodies (DANZ, SOUNZ, Playmarket – refer to Service organisations, page 223), local repertory

societies, tertiary institutions, city councils, local performance teachers and local groups with interests specific to the content of the show.

Who does the mail-out? Ideally, someone else! One way to achieve this is to have your flier inserted into another publication, newsletter, newspaper, etc. which is going out to the right group at the right time. If you're doing it yourself, consider hiring students as envelope stuffers, or address labellers.

Banners and billboards

Banners are useful. Although expensive, they can provide a strong, visible indication of your presence in town. If you can afford it consider creating two: one for the current venue ('now on') and one for the upcoming ('coming soon'). There are a number of companies who create banners. The Yellow Pages or your graphic designer are probably the best sources of information. Local city councils often have banner sites if the venue is not available. These need to be booked well in advance and you will have to comply with local body regulations in terms of the construction and hanging of your banner.

Billboards are also expensive but effective. Use them if you can afford to – you may be able to pass the costs on to a sponsor. Billboard sites are usually controlled by specialist companies. Look in the Yellow Pages under Advertising – Outdoor.

Interviews and photos

Prepare your cast to expect a lot of very similar interviews. Do not expect the media to have absorbed the content of your media kit. Ensure your cast is well informed about details of the production such as times, prices and where to book. Manage all photo shoots carefully – time is usually limited. In particular, dancers shouldn't be expected to repeat the same moves 20 times until the photographer gets the right shot. Don't send your cast to interviews or photo shoots on their own. Do select your interviewees carefully, as print, radio and television all require different approaches.

Those interviews... Rawiri Paratene – a *Shortland Street* star, lovingly remembered for a stint on *Play School* – was greeted at 7am by a Palmerston North breakfast radio host, who looked about 14. ‘Cool man’, he said. ‘You taught me how to tell the time.’ Try to discuss your role in a pivotal new New Zealand work after that!

Results

Don’t panic if pre-bookings are low. In many instances in the arts it is unusual for audiences to book in advance.

I’ve gone into a large regional venue that seats 1,800, with pre-bookings of 300 until two days before the show opened. Bookings then started to move, but slowly. However, opening night saw queues out the door and down the street. The locals knew what I didn’t. A house of 1,800 in a regional centre for a New Zealand work is unlikely to sell out, so why book in advance?

However low pre-sales do have to be taken seriously – they can cause nights of sleeplessness and are one of the primary causes for tours being cancelled. So don’t count on door sales. Actively promote ways to encourage pre-bookings within your marketing strategy by, for example, offering incentives for early purchasers (for example, discounted tickets or premium seats to people on databases, for a limited period of time).

If ticket sales continue to be low following your opening don’t feel tempted to discount tickets as a first option – it can send a very poor message about your brand and give your event an air of desperation that drives people away rather than attracting them. It also tends to upset audience members who paid early at the full rate – and it certainly doesn’t encourage a culture of pre-booking.

Monitor carefully which of these are most effective for future reference.

Finally don't forget to send the best reviews from each current performance to forthcoming venues for display.

Debrief

It's important to compile a detailed written report on all marketing and publicity, including reviews, at the end of the tour. The report should cover each centre and include an analysis of what worked and what didn't. This can be one of the most valuable tools in developing your next marketing plan.

Further references

There are a number of good publications about marketing and publicity, some of which are listed in this publication under Literature review (refer page 217). Check your local library and ask your colleagues for recommendations on other sources of information.