

Arts Audiences New Media Mentoring Scheme Mentoring Report

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Mentee: Marcella Bannon, Director, of Droichead Arts Centre
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This report was written specifically for publication on www.artsaudiences.ie, and for subsequent discussion on the Arts Ireland group on LinkedIn.

Introduction:

Launched by Arts Audiences in November 2009, the New Media Mentoring Scheme matches individuals with expertise in digital media, with individuals in arts organisations seeking mentoring for specific projects in the area of new media marketing.

Following an open submission process, individuals from eight organisations were selected for mentoring. On completion of this process, these individuals are required to produce case studies, to be published on this website, in order to share learning achieved with the wider arts community.

Under this scheme, Aoife Flynn (asquared) mentored Marcella Bannon, Director of Droichead Arts Centre over the past 3 months. What follows below is Marcella's report on this.

If you are interested in discussing this work with Marcella and Aoife, please visit the Arts Ireland group on LinkedIn – if you're not already a member, it's free to join.

REPORT OF MARCELLA BANNON

Our requirement in brief:

We felt we had all the right elements in place to build an increasingly rich relationship with our audience online, however we realised that in order to do so, we would need an overall plan as to how to draw all of these element together into a successful strategy.

Our starting point when we met the mentor:

Droichead Arts Centre had upgraded its website in September 2009, and we were in the process of moving into a more "on-line" strategy in terms of advertising and marketing. The new website has links to our facebook and twitter, and includes a bright area homepage, with a flash moving screen and an online booking service. The site was designed specifically to

highlight areas of our programme we specialise in i.e. Youth Theatre, Visual Arts, Community Outreach and the Film Club.

We knew we needed to market our organisation to a greater extent online, in order to stay relevant and to reach a new audience of a younger demographic. In addition to this, significant funding cuts necessitated a review of our overall marketing strategy, placing e-marketing a priority, as we were no longer in the position to afford seasonal programmes.

We found e-marketing attractive as a sales and marketing tool, as it involved low outlays in terms of cost and staff maintenance. We had a presence on Facebook and Twitter along with our own "blogging" space on the homepage of droichead.com. In addition, we were producing a bi-monthly constant contact e-guide being circulated to 3,000 people, and we were sending regular webtexts to a catchment of 900 people.

However, we were not optimising our time and energy in using this media, as we were maintaining facebook, twitter and web text hap-hazardly, as an 'extra add on' instead of integrating as a key tool in the overall marketing strategy of the centre.

In this mentoring process, Aoife Flynn helped us to evaluate each of the individual strands of activity in our online campaign, and in so doing, helped us to come up with plans for an overall strategy as how to best move forward.

Developing A Sales Led Strategy

Aoife helped us to put together an overall digital strategy, designed specifically for Droichead Arts Centre. This strategy is **sales led**, although this would not be the case for all organisations.

With tighter funding, our reliance on digital media will grow, and it is imperative that we can change the habits of our audience, encouraging them to seek information online, book online and give feedback online. Such changes do not happen overnight, and it will take a number of months to realise this.

We are now reviewing ways to evaluate, on a weekly basis, the sales impact of campaigns through our digital media and linking it directly to our box office. This involves planning around the following;

- Analytics - each digital package has an analytical facility which can measure the success the usage of the application including Facebook, Wordpress Blog, Constant Contacts and Google, we are looking at ways of measuring the successes.
- Setting up direct code on Databox to link in with offers on Facebook and E-guides. We are also exploring a newsletter facility offered by Databox [Droichead's Box Office system] as an alternative to Constant Contacts, as it would feed directly to our sales system.
- The track-ability of digital marketing is very significant - it is possible to set up special offers on facebook pages with their own specific url so you can track how many people accessed an offer on facebook. You can also get stats from facebook on fans locations.

- The re-training of staff. Droichead Arts Centre hosts a CE employment scheme with staff changing annually. It is vital for us to develop strict training plans within our strategy and procedures to encourage the audience to seek information about our service digitally. This needs to happen at the first point of call through our box office and on all printed marketing material. Training also needs to be given to all Marketing staff and managers on how digital reports should be delivered always relating back to Sales.

Facebook & Twitter

We can see that Twitter can be a powerful tool in engaging with the public. However, when we considered the various factors, we decided that at this point it would not be worthwhile utilising this facility.

It takes staff resources & management time to plan and sustain a successful campaign, and we don't feel that there is a sufficient cohort of our audience on Twitter to make this worthwhile, so we decided to focus our resources into Facebook. However, the facility exists if our situation changes.

With regard to Facebook, before meeting Aoife, Droichead Arts Centre already had a group profile and a personal profile. The personal profile was required to maintain the group page, and to feed into the daily newsfeeds. Aoife recommended it was better practice to set up a business page. [Arts Audiences note: for further info on the advantages of a facebook page over a facebook group or facebook personal profile, read this article by Aoife Flynn].

So in March, Droichead made the change over to the page. Now, people are no longer our friend on facebook, instead they are fans. This is attractive to people, as it protects their privacy, as we can't see their private data, nor can we email them (so no junk mail). Now, to receive our news, our fans must subscribe to our news feeds. Another advantage of a facebook page is that members of the public can access a facebook page without actually having a facebook account, which broadens access.

When we set up, we encouraged all our group members to transfer over, and we now have just under 600 fans and rising. We update this daily with news snippets, and the page has definitely increased interaction, with some posts opening up a lot of discussion, which we are very happy to see.

We've also linked our wordpress blog to feed directly into our facebook page, which reduces duplication of work load. This means that people who are more comfortable with facebook may read our blog entries, whereas they mightn't visit the site of the blog itself.

We are currently experimenting with different campaigns but it's difficult to assess the outcomes against sales just yet.

Digital Loop – website, blog

Arising from this process, Droichead Arts Centre realised the importance of creating a digital loop between all the digital media we use.

Rather than have all of the various applications bringing the public in a variety of directions, now, as part of our sales led strategy, all digital media feeds back to the website and specifically to the booking facility. Similarly, from our website, the customer should be able to easily access facebook, our blog, e-guides and staff email.

Our wordpress blog is integrated with facebook and the website. One person is responsible for updating the blog twice weekly however all staff, artists, and youth theatre facilitators are requested to relay news to this person. The blog will contain interviews, behind the scenes information, information on outreach projects and conversations. This is targeted towards people who want to know a little bit more in an informal environment.

Constant contact E-guide

Constant Contact is a software application which tracks the success of email campaigns. Having spoken with Aoife we found that what we thought was a 'low' opening rate for our e-guide was in fact above average.

We weren't particularly happy with our opening rate, but in conversation with Aoife, we found our opening rate of is actually above average – our last mail out had an opening rate of 35% - sometimes it's higher or lower, depending on the events. Average opening rates vary sector by sector, but generally are around 20%.

We agreed our aims in this respect are to;

- create a more accessible, sales driven e-guide.
- Increase the number of members opening the e-guide by introducing incentives like competitions.
- increase the traffic on the website with the introduction of more hyperlinks to the website.

When evaluating the e-guide, we realised that the layout of the e-guide was a concern, as we found that every computer hosted a different programme with individual spam filter preferences. With so many embedded images, our e-guide was being viewed differently on each computer e.g. often images needed to be right clicked on to open or they wouldn't appear at all. This was leaving the e-guide untidy and busy to the viewer and we had no control on this.

To rectify this problem we did the following;

- listed our up incoming events to the top of the page linking directly to more information on our website.
- removed all images except for the banner.
- detailed offers on the side panel of the e-guide again hyper linking back to the website.
- introduced competitions and special offers at the bottom. Due to the change in spending trends in Drogheda we decided to offer special offers if people booked events 2-3 weeks before events.

Conclusion

We realised through this mentoring that digital marketing strategies are, by their very nature, constantly evolving with the technology and platforms available. This document is a first step to gathering our thoughts on how digital marketing can work for us, but we recognise that any strategy is an organic document that will need constant updating.

It is still early days yet to measure the success of the changes we have made. For one thing, it will take time to incorporate the strategy in totality due to limitation on staffing and the need for ongoing training.

However, we feel we have taken very positive steps towards using the various different aspects of new media to move towards a system which makes the most of our limited resources in our goal of bringing an increasing amount of our business through the website.

Finally to say, we found the mentoring process extremely helpful, and are very grateful to Aoife Flynn for giving her time voluntarily for this mentoring. Her broad understanding of the arts and in-depth knowledge of the new digital marketing technology, coupled with her familiarity with the resource restraints on arts organisations ensured the targets/ tasks she set were achievable, and the advice she offered was relevant, timely and highly valuable.

Some quick DIY tips

Website:

Ensure you have a booking online facility on your homepage. Ensure your Facebook link, twitter and blog are clearly linked on your homepage.

Facebook

Set up a business page. Not a group page or people page. Use a bright image and a description which describes your organisation best. Update 2-3 times weekly. Don't always push events - people see through this. Instead, update on activities in the venue. Set up a vanity URL i.e. www.facebook.com/droichead

Blog

Set up a wordpress blog. It's simple and easy to use, plus it's free. Nominate one person in your staff to update it twice weekly. Look at other organisation blogs to get a sense of the kind of language you need to use.

Constant Contacts

Review how it's appearing in patron's inbox. Keep it simple and have direct link to your website and booking online facility. Introduce Special offers and competitions to entice more user/higher rate of opening.

Digital Loop

Ensure each digital media feeds into each other. A simple example is this; all Droichead Arts Centre staff is now updating their email signatures to include links to our website, facebook, blog and e-guide sign up.

Staffing

Droichead Arts Centre does not have a professional Marketing Manager. If your organisation is the same, identify someone who is savvy and interested or/and identify a work place student who can focus on this area for you. Training is important to ensure all staff are clear

on the kind of language used in each medium and can evaluate its effectiveness. I believe this training needs to be integrated to management, marketing staff and box office sales staff.

The wider arts community

We all face similar challenges in the arts these days. It is important to look at what other organisations are doing to keep up with current trends and technology.

Evaluation

There is always the danger that the sales generated from these strategies are not worth the time and money spent pursuing them. As such, it is important to put in place clear evaluation procedures to assess the level of resource input against the sales, for each different element of the digital marketing strategy. Introduce analytical reports as part of the marketing report in your operations/staff meeting.