

**Arts Audiences
New Media Mentoring Scheme
Mentoring Report**

Mentor: RTÉ Publishing- Lucy Campbell, Murne Laffan

Mentee: National Youth Council of Ireland - Emmet Sheerin & Anne O'Gorman

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This report was written specifically for publication on the Arts Audiences website, and for subsequent discussion on the Arts Ireland group on LinkedIn. If you are reading this in PDF from, you may like to visit www.artsaudiences.ie, where you will be able to click through links which you'll find throughout the document.

Introduction (James Kelly, Arts Audiences)

There's no doubt about it, digital and social media hold great potential for those looking to increase the engagement with their audiences. For those with little experience of the area, the promise is great, and yet without significant experience in the area, it can be difficult to envisage what is involved in building momentum around a blog, or a social media campaign, using Facebook or Twitter.

Emmet Sheerin and Anne O'Gorman from [NYCI](#) entered this mentoring process looking for assistance with building an on-line community and social media network. However the very valuable lessons they learnt from the Lucy Campbell, Murne Laffan and the team in [RTÉ Publishing](#) was to first concentrate on getting the basics right, and as such Emmet and Anne's report will provide very informative reading for those;

- considering starting a blog or social media campaign
- looking to optimise their overall presence.

If you are interested in discussing this work with those involved please visit the [Arts Ireland group](#) on LinkedIn – if you're not already a member, it's free to join.

REPORT OF EMMET SHEERIN & ANNE O'GORMAN

Original Plan

Our original aim, when applying for mentoring was to seek support around developing an on-line community and social media network.

As we saw it, this would enable NYCI to facilitate more organisations and practitioners in sharing practice and networking with others in the sector, regardless of geographical location.

Also a more effective presence on-line would also help us to promote specific aspects of our work programme, to highlight opportunities, and to further advocate for youth arts in Ireland.

As such, our specific goals were;

- to create an online discussion forum and blog to enable youth workers and youth arts practitioners to engage with each other, to share practice, and to access relevant youth arts news and resources.
- to exploit the potential of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to engage with individuals and organisations in the youth / youth arts sector.

As we saw it, the objective of the mentorship would be to help us generate interest and participation around these applications and to develop a strategy for attracting and maintaining engagement with the on-line community.

The first step – identifying our audience

Our initial meetings with Lucy centred on a critical reflection on our target audience, identifying their needs, and what information/ discussions we wanted to communicate and generate on-line, such as funding, training and supports etc.

This process of reflecting on our target audience and their needs was extremely valuable. Even though organisations engage with their audiences day in day out, it is really useful to make the time and space to step back and think critically about target audience.

We discussed what kind of information we are looking to share: this included networking and information exchange, and the facilitation of discussion around important topics affecting our audience.

In terms of finding new ways to connect with audiences, there was a useful discussion around identifying well known people who we could approach to be champions for youth arts, and who could use social media networks to advocate for the sector. These ‘champions’ would be well known figures who had been engaged in youth arts when they were younger – Aidan Gillen (former member of Dublin Youth Theatre), for example.

The way forward – a critical decision

On closer examination of our situation, we began to realise that creating an online community, consisting of a discussion forum and blog, might not be the best use of our resources at this current time. While the technical aspects of creating these applications is realisable (our content management system Drupal is capable of this), the main challenge lies in attracting and maintaining a critical level of engagement.

RTÉ Publishing have considerable experience in this area, and they felt that without a very large amount of traffic to our website, it would take a considerable amount of time and energy to build a discussion forum and blog of the scale which we had hoped. As it stands, NYCI’s youth arts site does have a relatively large amount of traffic given the size of the youth arts sector in Ireland. We would therefore have to invest a great deal of time into attracting a critical mass for the online community to be worthwhile.

We made the significant decision to change the focus of the mentoring, and that we would now focus on ways of attracting greater levels of visitors to the website. Achieving this would mean that we would be in a stronger position to develop the online community at a later stage.

Social media network

In advance of making the above decision, we spent some time investigating the level of engagement other organisations in the youth/ arts sectors had with their social media networks. It was decided that our social media ambitions, for now, would be best served as part of the broader National Youth Council of Ireland’s social media strategy, and not as a separate, specific youth arts network. This would help maximise our potential audience and allow for greater integration with the other work areas in NYCI.

We did, however, decide to continue plans towards creating a YouTube channel, which we can use to show films made in the youth/ youth arts sector, and highlight best practice in this area.

Focus on the Website

Before discussing any potential website developments, we took time to reflect on our programme of work, the resources and opportunities we offer the sector, and our strengths as a national organisation. Identifying the range of these “assets” helped us focus on what information and structure would make our website more engaging and attract more traffic.

Some of the key strengths we identified include:

- Optimum domain name (youtharts.ie), which features well in search engine results
- Wealth of publications, manuals and other resources produced by the programme
- Strong and exciting programme of work, which includes youth arts training, professional development opportunities, a funding scheme and an advocacy agenda.
- Wealth of images documented during youth arts trainings
- Professional networks and contacts
- Monthly e-bulletin (Youth Arts News) which has over 1200 subscribers

The main issues in respect of our website were:

- Design

Our website is too text heavy and does not capitalise on the wealth of images and visual documentation at our disposal.

- Applications

Currently, when we show images documenting our work (from trainings etc.) we use [flickr](#) to do this. While this is a nice feature to have on this website, it takes traffic away from the site when people click into the application. We should be trying to avoid this, by keeping people on our site.

- E-bulletin

Our e-bulletin Youth Arts News is a very important tool for us to communicate with the sector. We use an application called Mail Chimp to create and send the bulletin. This works fine, except for the fact that we are not drawing people back to our website. All the news is contained in the e-bulletin with no links to our site. [*note from Arts Audiences: readers who are interested in the “the digital loop” may be interested in looking at the mentoring report of [Marcella Bannon, Director of Droichead Arts Centre](#)*].

5 Key Priorities

Out of this process, we came up with the following five main priorities/ practicalities for improving our online presence:

1. Integrated e-bulletin and website

In order to attract more traffic to our website, it is vital that we capitalise on the established success of our e-bulletin Youth Arts News. To do this, we have created a noticeboard section on [our website for news](#). Instead of our e-bulletin containing every bit of information on each news item, it will only contain teasers. Subscribers to the bulletin click on the title for a news item and will be directed straight to the ‘full story’ on our website noticeboard. Not only will this greatly reduce the length of each monthly e-bulletin, it will ensure a greater level of traffic to our website. This new system was piloted on the 2nd April. See an example of our new newsletter [by clicking here](#).

2. Explore the capabilities of our content management system (Drupal)

Instead of using external applications like flickr to display photographs from our programme of work, we need to explore the potential of our content management system to do this. This will help ensure that the traffic on our site remains there and isn’t directed elsewhere.

Having a self contained photo gallery will also enable us to display images of youth arts in action from around the country. We are now considering the possibility of having a ‘Year of Youth Arts’ gallery on our website.

3. Creating a more visually dynamic website

To help us come up with ideas for this, we met with Niamh Collins, Online Producer (RTÉ), and Micheal Lisovski, Platform Manager (RTÉ). The key advice was:

- We need a main feature for our homepage. We should ask ourselves, ‘what is a message we want to get across?’ ‘What’s our call to action?’
- We are using too much text to explain who we are and what we do. We should also use images and video to do this.
- Keeping the site updated with regular information is essential. Out-of date resources and articles shouldn’t be on the homepage.
- The text we are using on the site is too small. It makes it hard to read information and is not attractive.
- Need to pay attention to detail and fill the screen with images and applications.
- We should consider creating a campaign page on our site. Campaign should be understood in its broadest sense – a call to engage with our programme of work. It could also be an important tool for our advocacy work.
- Give visitors the opportunity to sign up to our e-bulletin on site.

4. Integrate website maintenance with daily work

Having dedicated time to update the website and manage its content is vital. The website is our calling card and is the first port of call for many people new to our programme of work.

Maintaining the website only on an ad hoc basis will lead to the site appearing stagnant and out of date.

5. You Tube Channel

It's relatively easy to set up a YouTube channel and the upload videos. We can even categorise the videos under different genres/ topics etc. A YouTube channel will keep the traffic away from our site unless we can direct people to it. We should therefore make sure that any video put on the YouTube channel has our web address at the end. We have to ensure that we have consent from groups/ individual's whose videos are put on our channel. We can't put up any videos that have copyrighted music.

In Conclusion

Over the course of the mentoring, our plans changed from working towards developing an online community to a much more realistic plan for strengthening our online presence at its core. Developing and maintaining a strong website, and facilitating increased traffic is essential for any future ambitions to develop forums, blogs etc.

Underlying the mentorship process was a critical and realistic reflection on what we can currently achieve in terms of developing our on-line presence. Such critical reflection, we believe, has proved extremely valuable.

We have a more focused idea around what we practically need to do to develop our website. While the five priorities above are specific to our own plan of work and context, they are nonetheless relevant to other organisations – particularly organisations wishing to strengthen their website as a main calling card for clients.

An action plan was formulated with deliverable and realistic timelines to prioritise the website project. It is envisaged that phase 2 of the project will focus on the Social Networking priorities including You Tube.

The National Youth Council of Ireland's Arts Programme would like to thank RTÉ Publishing for their invaluable mentorship and time over the last three months. In particular we would like to thank Lucy Campbell, Muirne Laffan, Niamh Collins and Michael Lisovsky. We would also like to thank James Kelly (Arts Council) for this opportunity and for his support throughout the mentorship process.

RTÉ Publishing manages five leading brands – [RTÉ Guide](#), [RTÉ Aertel](#), [RTÉ.ie](#), [RTÉ player](#) and [RTÉ News Now](#) and has built significant multimedia hubs or “mega sites” around RTÉ's core content areas of News, Sport and Entertainment. Working with RTÉ News, Sport, Television & Radio, RTÉ Publishing creates packages and distributes content on digital platforms to extend the reach of these properties in new markets.

The National Youth Council of Ireland's Arts Programme is a partnership approach for promoting and developing youth arts in Ireland. NYCI's Arts Programme aims specifically to realise the potential of young people through good quality arts practice in the youth service and to develop appropriate policies and activities at local, regional and national level. NYCI's Arts Programme is funded by the Arts Council and the Youth Affairs Unit of the OMCYA

Youth arts can broadly be defined as, ‘young people taking part voluntarily in creative, cultural or expressive activity outside of the formal education process. It can encompass participation and appreciation, as well as engagement with arts work specifically created by with or for young people’. Arts in Their Lives (NYCI’s Youth Arts Policy 2003-2007)

For more information on youth arts and the work of NYCI’s Arts Programme, please visit www.youtharts.ie