

## **Creative Marketing – what can the arts learn from the corporates?**

**Speakers:** Emma Kirby – Marketing and Sponsorship Analyst, Australia Council for the Arts  
Adam Zammit – Managing Director, Peer Group Media  
Vicki Middleton – General Manager, Legs on the Wall

**Chair:** Kristy Wilson, SAMAG Committee Member

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By Frances Derricourt

Doing the hard sell.  
Finding your niche market.  
Developing your corporate strategy.

These sentences do not sit comfortably with the arts world and traditional methods of seeking funding – the language of marketing and selling can be full of dirty words which seem inappropriate when used in an artistic context. But speaking at the October SAMAG Seminar, three marketing experts argue that having a savvy marketing plan which will appeal to corporates as well as the traditional arts markets does not mean having to sell your soul. It's about making the right relationships with the right people, learning to be proud of the product you have and developing the best strategy to convince others of the value of that product.

Vicki Middleton came to Australia in 2005 to take on the position of General Manager of Legs On The Wall, and at the SAMAG Seminar tells the audience of how she redeveloped the organisation's marketing strategy. This fascinating case study shows that a step away from traditional funding sources and towards a more sustainable relationship with the corporate world can be a positive move, and can indeed help strengthen an organisation's artistic identity and fuel independence.

Legs On The Wall are a physical theatre company, well-known for their daring outdoor shows which attract large crowds of people, many of whom are not traditional theatre-goers. They also develop smaller scale works which are performed in more traditional spaces and tour around the country and the world. When Vicki joined the company she found an organisation with strong brand recognised locally and internationally, but a company which lacked a consistency in its marketing materials and needed to develop a strong marketing message to a variety of audiences.

The process began with a brainstorming session within the company, which gave people a chance to think about who they were, why they did what they did and who they did it for. "I felt the staff brainstorming session was really important because I wanted everyone in the organisation to have some kind of input into the rebranding of the company", says Vicki. The company found it really interesting to see how they perceived themselves and what they believed was crucial to their identity – their long history, international reputation and their role as Australia's leading physical theatre company

The brainstorming session then fed through to a marketing meeting which involved board members and marketing experts. By then, Legs on The Wall had collected funding from two sources – a Theatre Biz grant from Australia Council and revenue from two successful corporate shows. From the marketing meetings it was decided that the company wanted to maintain what it saw as its 'pumping heart' - the

creativity and performance - but also wanted to make use of the commercial potential of its performance space (the Red Box) and develop a corporate events arm of the company. "Whilst corporate or commercial can be considered dirty words in the arts we looked at more positive things about it", explains Vicki. "We took the 'Robin Hood' approach, because we found that by making shows for the corporate world we could then employ more artists, we could develop skills and increase awareness of Legs on the Wall. So we wanted to embrace this section while staying true to our artistic side".

Vicki and her team realised they needed to develop new logos and marketing materials which represented all three areas of the company – the venue, corporate shows and artistic shows. These materials had to be flexible and last for a period of time, and be of a very high quality because suddenly they were competing with the corporates.

They briefed three design companies, and the final choice of logos cleverly used the colour red and the image of the red box to tie into the different areas of their business. The designers then came up with a marketing package which used the red box theme again in the form of a case which held a promotional DVD and printed cards advertising the different areas of business. This flexible design meant that the marketing pack could be tailored according to its use, whether it be for an international fair, a corporate presentation or for the Australia Council.

Finally they launched their new branding with an event at the Red Box, inviting 250 event managers where they staged their new show and handed out their new pack at the end of the night. After all of this "it's very important we evaluate the success of the pack over time and we'll be looking for feedback from industry peers, measuring new bookings and trying to measure brand awareness", says Vicki.

This case study shows that a successful marketing strategy involves understanding what corporates want and how to deliver in order to build a positive relationship. Adam Zammit, who runs a youth and entertainment marketing agency called Peer Group Media, argues that in order to understand what corporates are looking for you have to realise they will never initially be looking for the arts. "They don't have any idea how to use the arts, so you need to deliver a marketing plan into a corporation, you have to do their job to get them involved".

Emma Kirby, who currently works in the Australia Council and has had much experience marketing in the commercial world, agrees that arts companies need to learn how to think for the corporates. "Corporates work with artistic organisations because they're exciting and interesting and creative and that's what they want to have access to". As an arts manager or marketer, the challenge is to get inside the corporate mind and show how your own product is of value to them.

However, recognising and pushing their marketing value can be very difficult for people in the arts who aren't used to selling their wares. "You have to be able to sell and it's an ugly thing, and selling uses a language which isn't comfortable with the arts community" says Adam. Emma adds that arts organisations tend to play themselves down and don't realise how much they can offer a corporate organisation. Artistic organisations often have a deep emotional connection with their audiences, and that is a very valuable thing to a corporate. Emma uses the example of Westpac Bank who worked with Ministry of Sound to add some glamour and excitement to the usually dull world of banking.

Adam emphasises that when vying for corporate sponsorship, the arts is in competition with other big players such as sport. Your enemy is the media buyer who will want money to go on a big outdoor campaign or a television commercial, and therefore it is crucial you "understand what you do have as an actual currency and how to articulate that ... knowing how to make numbers better than they are is a nice skill to develop". Vicki agrees that in Australia the arts is never going to be as high profile as sports, so in the case of Legs on the Wall they avoided vying for corporate sponsorship and instead banked on the high value of their own product.

The strength of the arts is also the creativity of ideas, and this is crucial when developing marketing strategies which stand out from the crowd. The latest buzz term is 'experiential marketing' which basically involves more tactile ways of bringing a brand to consumers and being more personal with the marketing message – a perfect fit with the arts. Adam uses the example of V Energy drinks who came to Peer Group Media wanting to develop a closer relationship to the music industry and link their branding of 'get up and go' to the energy of independent artists. Instead of just sponsoring an independent band, Adam instead organised them to sponsor the Australian Independent Record Association which in turn led them to sponsor local produce stages for unsigned bands. "In doing all that work for the brand we found a role which was real and which will last".

Emma adds that this example shows that when you're looking to build a relationship with a corporate you're looking for someone with a similar energy. Therefore instead of selling out in order to get money, it's actually really important to be clear on what you're doing it and what principles drive you. To build the most successful relationships "you have to be very true and firm in your artistic integrity and then go and find like-minded people".

So what's in the future for arts marketing? All three speakers see great potential in the digital revolution, noting that video is an effective and relatively cheap method of showing your product to a large number of people and the web offers great opportunities to spread your message. This is good news for art organisations with smaller budgets, and highly creative teams. "The arts should do what it does best", says Adam. "Don't follow corporate marketing approaches, think outside the square and be creative in the ways you want to engage with the audience". Vicki adds that where the arts lack money we make up for in great ideas, people are simply looking for what makes them more huggable and "the arts is more huggable than anything else out there".