Word-of-Mouth and the Arts

Why and How We Need to Change the Way We Talk About the Performing Arts

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Abstract

In order to determine cost-effective ways for performing arts organizations (PAOs) to improve their marketing tactics, this paper examines the relationship between the commitment of the entire staff to an organization's marketing efforts and the effectiveness of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing. WOM, or creating dialogue between businesses and customers, is a powerful tool for businesses of all sizes. PAOs must create clear and concise messaging about their mission statement and productions to empower staff members to make decisions confidently as the organization grows (Heath & Heath, 2008, Sinek, 2009). Utilizing qualitative and quantitative data, including online surveys and face-to-face interviews with key staff members of PAOs in Seattle, this paper particularly questions whether the entire organization should be involved with marketing instead of relying solely on the marketing department by examining the relationship between the feelings of PAO staff and volunteers about their organization and the effectiveness of their organization's WOM tactics. The findings include a high number of patrons, staff, and volunteers talking about PAOs with other people online and offline. Interviewees mentioned creating a community with their marketing tactics, such as personally greeting patrons in the lobby and posting pictures online of performers backstage. These personal marketing tactics help build a community between patrons and PAOs. PAOs of all sizes can use cost-effective WOM marketing tactics to strengthen their relationship with current and potential patrons, but must first engage staff and volunteers in order to harness the power of WOM.

Keywords: marketing, stories, word-of-mouth, performing arts, community

Introduction

Performing arts organizations (PAOs) of all sizes have limited time and resources to send their message out to audiences. This project examines whether the entire organization should be involved with marketing instead of relying solely on the marketing department by examining the relationship between the feelings of PAO staff and volunteers about their organization and the effectiveness of their organization's WOM tactics. The results will be used to determine cost-effective ways for PAOs of any size to increase effectiveness word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing tactics. Marketing trends are moving away from one-way communications between a business and customers and moving towards creating a dialogue between businesses and customers. This trend gives PAOs an opportunity to use WOM marketing tactics to deepen the relationship between organizations and their audiences. The following literature supports that businesses must have a strong sense of identity and engaging content in order to effectively use WOM marketing tactics both online and offline.

The Power of Word-of-Mouth

WOM is a powerful, cost-effective tool for businesses of all sizes. WOM marketing is defined as building relationships between consumers and businesses through engaging conversations (McEnaney, 2007, Sernovitz, 2009). Marketers know that WOM is "often more influential than all other marketing efforts combined," (Bernstein, 2007, p. 112) and WOM endorsements and conversation from satisfied customers "remains the most potentially powerful

marketing tool" that businesses have (Kerpen, 2011, p. 85). PAOs can create relationships "the old-fashioned way — by talking to people, finding out how they liked our performances, and inviting them to come back," despite the size of the budget or staff (Rosewall, 2014, p. 211).

WOM is powerful online and offline, but "interpersonal WOM shared between friends" is more influential than recommendations from online sources, such as Facebook or Yelp (Meuter, McCabe, & Curran, 2013, p. 251). The power of WOM can also work against a PAO if they have dissatisfied patrons, but Nyer and Gopinath (2005) say "dissatisfied customers who complain to the marketer are less likely to engage in negative WOM behavior," (p. 948). Joanne Scheff Bernstein (2007) says that people who have had a bad customer experience taken care of "are more satisfied than those who have never had a bad experience," (p. 253). If PAOs create advocates for their organization by developing personal relationships, those advocates will not only introduce that organization to their circle of friends, but also defend that organization and its cause "if attacked by others," (Miller, 2010, p. 33).

Patrons will talk about an organization to their circle of friends and family, so it is essential for PAOs to have some control over the messaging they provide to people in order to create WOM that helps spread the word about their productions, rather than hinder it. Commitment from the whole organization is needed to respond and listen to patrons or else there is no use investing time into a WOM campaign (McEnaney, 2007).

Leadership and Staff

It is hard to deny the power of WOM, but it is difficult for WOM to ignite for a PAO without support from the entire organization. It is a challenge for some PAOs to engage the entire staff in marketing tactics because marketing is often associated with business goals rather than artistic goals. Ian Fillis (2011) says that artistic risk is "often aligned to the creativity, ideas and design of the artwork rather than any commercial connection," (p. 2), but it would be beneficial for PAOs to look at marketing as an extension of the artistic goals in order to be appealing to the whole organization. Everyone at a PAO who talks to customers has "an opportunity to create a word-of-mouth marketing experience, for better or for worse," (Kerpen, 2011, p. 173) and everything they say "can and will affect your business," (Stratten, 2014, p. 71).

If staff members at a PAO are unclear about the messaging of the organization in general or about specific productions, then WOM will fizzle out and its success will rely solely on the shoulders of the marketing department. In order to resolve this, Daniel Pink (2009) suggests leaders of an organization get together with staff members and ask them to write down what the organization's purpose is and see how the answers match up. His reasoning is that if people do not know why they are doing something, they will not be motivated to do it (p. 166). Leaders and key staff members should agree on the visual and narrative elements of their organization so that the messaging is consistent and patrons will be able to recognize the PAO quickly (Miller, 2010, p. 109).

PAOs must get to the core of their organization's existence so the message is clear and simple to remember. Heath and Heath (2008) and Miller (2013) warn organizations to avoid the Curse of Knowledge, or not being able to imagine what it is like to not know information after

learning it, so that information about the organization is accessible to people outside of the organization. If a PAO's purpose is clearly stated, then employees can make clear and accurate decisions about marketing without the founder's input (Heath & Heath, 2008, Sinek, 2009). This kind of clarity not only empowers staff to act on their own, but takes the pressure off of leadership to make all of the decisions as the company expands.

Turn Newcomers into Fans

"Target marketing", or targeting specific patrons based on things like age and geographic location, has traditionally been the way that marketers have designed and created their organization's content, such as blog posts and videos (Crane, 2013, p. 85). Creating content should instead be based on the level of involvement of patrons, including people who are advocates of an organization, patrons who come on a fairly regular basis, and people who are new to an organization and want to look around first (Bernstein, 2007, Huba, 2012, Kerpen, 2011, Miller, 2013, Sernovitz, 2009).

Miller (2013) suggests that people who are new to an organization are usually looking for a question to be answered, so information about programs is better than ways to volunteer or donate. Friends of an organization want stories that appeal to them so they know if they should become fans of that organization. Fans of an organization want to know how to help, so giving them a call to action is the best way to get them involved (pp. 96-99). Miller (2010) also suggests that calls to actions should remain diverse and flexible because fans will want to help in ways that suit them. Some fans will want to donate money while some would rather donate time or help with social media, so it is important for PAOs to have a list of ways people can help them and let the person choose how they can help. Moving people from newcomers to friends to fans includes offering helpful resources, thanking people for their help through personal and online communications, and making fans feel like they are part of the team (pp. 153, 159).

Create Engaging Content

People want to connect with each other and the easiest way for PAOs to facilitate this is by telling stories in their marketing content, such as blog posts and videos. Creating engaging stories about the people involved with an organization is highly recommended. Stories are easier to remember than data and it is more likely that people will share stories with their friends, creating the benefit of free WOM (Miller, 2010, p. 77). Stories grab and hold people's attention because "at a brain level, whatever is happening in a story is happening to us," (Gottschall, 2013). The part of the brain that is "responsible for all of our feelings, such as trust and loyalty," (Sinek, 2009, p. 56) does not have the capacity for language, so storytelling is a way for our brains to communicate those feelings to others. PAOs need to tell their story in a way that does not interrupt clients, but instead "engages them and gives them a reason to pass it along," (Safko, 2012, p. 27). Hearing stories from people who are involved with a PAO may also inspire the next marketing campaign (Neveril, 2008, p. 16).

PAOs do not need to invent stories for their marketing content, but they must become good at spotting them (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 237). Miller (2010) suggests that organizations look for stories from staff, volunteers, donors, headlines in the news, etc. to create engaging

content, like taking supporters behind the scenes, testimonials from supporters, or profiles of people who are working with the organization (pp. 64, 84). Stories should focus on one person in order to make them more powerful as it is easier for people to focus on people rather than abstractions (Heath & Heath, 2008, Miller 2013). Stories should also always reflect the agenda of the organization (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 237).

Appealing to people's self-interest is also important to engaging messaging. People want to know not just what something is, but why it is relevant to them (Godin, 1999, Heath & Heath, 2008, Miller, 2010). People expect information from a non-profit to add value to their lives, which is why it is important for the staff to have a clear mission and purpose so the messaging they create is easy to follow. PAOs should appeal to the "values and needs" of their audience (Miller, 2010, p. 58) rather than needs of the organization or the people the organization serves. Heath and Heath (2008) say that organizations should explain "*the benefit of the benefit*" because people do not buy quarter-inch drill bits, but rather quarter-inch holes to hang pictures of their children (p. 179). PAOs, however, should not appeal to self-interest too much or it will start to make messaging uninspiring to audiences (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 191). Sernovitz (2009) says that mixing monetary rewards into a WOM campaign does not often work. People will talk about an organization they like and it makes them feel good to spread the word to their circle of friends and family. There are often powerful emotions that motivate WOM, so offering a monetary reward to a loyal fan may even deeply offend them (pp. 14-15).

Though it takes an investment of time to create relevant content to share with audiences, the messaging can be repurposed for different visuals, formats, and channels so that supporters will not get tired of the same content, but the message remains consistent (Miller, 2010, p. 70). This consistent effort will provide PAOs with a great reputation, help engage supporters at any level (Kerpen, 2011, p. 133), and get them to act on the organization's behalf (Miller, 2010, p. 8). Although most PAOs are short on time, it is well worth the effort to create a powerful message for the organization and specific productions so staff members will feel more empowered to talk about productions and audiences will be able to find something that appeals to them.

Problems/Issues

From the literature I reviewed, it is clear that WOM is a powerful tool for PAOs of all sizes. Though cost-effective, WOM requires a significant amount of time before seeing results, which could be a deterrent for PAOs looking to increase their audience sizes immediately. It may be difficult for staff outside of the marketing department to see how important it is to have the whole organization involved with the WOM of productions and the organization in general. It may also be a challenge to know exactly how to implement changes to WOM. I will address these issues in my primary research.

Research Design

Based on the literature review, the entire organization should be involved with marketing instead of relying solely on the marketing department. Additionally, PAOs with staff /volunteers who feel connected to their organization will have more effective WOM tactics than PAOs with

staff/volunteers who do not feel connected to their organization. I gathered qualitative and quantitative data, including surveys and face-to-face interviews with local PAOs to see if this hypothesis is supported.

I created two surveys in order to reach a large population of people who attend performances and/or who work or volunteer at PAOs, and distributed the surveys through Facebook and email. The survey for performing arts employees and volunteers was created to see whether or not the way an employee/volunteer perceives a PAO's company culture and adherence to the organization's mission affects the way they talk about the organization. WOM marketing is something that can be used by any PAO of any size, so I distributed the survey to PAOs of various sizes. These PAOs included dance companies, orchestras, and theatres that were run entirely by volunteers with an operating budget of less than $100,000, and organizations with over five hundred staff members with an operating budget of over twenty million dollars. I did not include questions that would possibly identify which organization the staff member or volunteer worked for, since the survey included questions how the person felt about their organization's mission and company culture, and I wanted participants to feel comfortable answering those questions.

The survey for patrons asked patrons if they seek out content, like blogs posts, for a production and what their WOM actions are before and after seeing a show, to determine if creating content is important to patrons, as the literature review suggests. I distributed this survey to people who are involved with the arts community and to people who only see productions because WOM can come from any patron, whether they see two or twenty productions each year.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with key staff members at PAOs in Seattle, including Annex Theatre, Arouet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, and Seattle Public Theater, to look at what struggles are facing PAOs today, especially in terms of staff engagement in marketing tactics. These interviews were thirty to sixty minutes long and I asked the same set of questions to each PAO to see if there were any correlations between organizations. Operating budgets of these PAOs ranged from less than $100,000 per year and over twenty million per year (see Appendix A for interview questions).

Key Findings

WOM Habits of Patrons, Employees, and Volunteers

The staff/volunteer survey showed that there is a correlation between having a positive company culture and WOM. Out of sixty-two participants, sixty-one percent were staff members, nineteen percent were volunteers, and the rest were temporary employees (such as actors or designers hired for a specific production). Ninety-two percent of participants agreed their PAO makes decisions that reflect the mission statement and eighty-five percent agreed their PAO has a positive company culture. Sixty-one percent of participants agreed that their PAO creates interesting content about shows to share with patrons. The staff/volunteer survey revealed that only fifty-percent of participants agreed that departments within their PAO communicate effectively with each other. As hypothesized, the number of people who thought their

organization had a positive company culture was very similar to the number of people who enjoyed talking about the organization. Ninety-two percent of participants enjoy talking about their organization's shows to people outside of the organization, while only forty-eight percent enjoy participating in conversations online (such as the company's social media accounts or website). What is most interesting to me is that seventy-one percent of participants are more likely to participate in online conversations on the organization's social media accounts if other people at the organization were participating. This survey suggests that while most participants think their organization is making decisions that reflect the mission, there is room for improvement in terms of communication between departments and engagement in social media conversations (see Appendix B for full survey results).

The survey for patrons shows that patrons are talking about an organization before and after the show and that they are interested in learning more about the company and production before and after a production. Out of 103 participants, eighty-eight percent of patrons agree that getting a recommendation from someone they trust is important when deciding to attend a show, while seventy-six percent agree that positive reviews for a show are important. Seventy-six percent of patrons agree that knowing someone involved with the show and sixty-six percent of patrons agree that being familiar with the company producing the show are important factors before deciding to attend a show. This finding reinforces that interpersonal WOM is more powerful than online WOM.

Patrons will talk about the production both online and offline before and after a show. Before attending a show, eighty-three percent of patrons are likely to tell people they are seeing a show, while forty percent will post on their personal online accounts and eleven percent will post on the organization's online accounts. After attending a show they enjoyed, ninety-eight percent of patrons tell people about the show, fifty-four percent will post on their personal online accounts, and nineteen percent will post on the company's online accounts. After attending a show they did not enjoy, sixty-seven percent of patrons will tell people about the show, six percent will post on their social media accounts and two percent will post on the company's accounts. Patrons are talking about shows both online and offline, which gives PAOs an opportunity to spread their message to people outside of their own circle of patrons.

As mentioned in the literature review, interesting content about a PAO and its productions is important to patrons. Thirty-five percent of patrons will look for content about a particular show on a PAOs social media accounts and website before they see a show and forty percent will look after they see a show they enjoyed. Forty-one percent of patrons will try to learn more about the company before attending a show, while forty-seven percent will try after attending a show they enjoyed. Patrons are looking for content about PAOs and specific productions and talking about shows online and offline before and after shows (see Appendix C for full survey results).

WOM Tactics of Local PAOs

All of the key staff members I interviewed mentioned building a community online and offline to foster connections between their organization and patrons. Artistic Director Roy Arauz of Arouet cultivates a community for his fringe theatre by being present at performances and

chatting with people before and after the show. Since Arouet is growing and adding more productions to its schedule each year, Roy can no longer attend every performance, so he has board members and company members attend performances if he cannot be there (personal communication, May 6, 2014). Annex Theatre's Production Manager, Catherine Blake Smith, "cultivates the connection" by talking with people who are fans of Annex Theatre when she runs into them at other events around town (personal communication, May 5, 2014). These instances of interpersonal WOM help PAOs build connections between their patrons and the staff.

PAOs of all sizes rely a lot on social media to get the word out about their productions. Pilar O'Connell, Social Media Coordinator at Annex Theatre, has been moving away from exclusively using production photos for Annex Theatre's social media and is incorporating more fun and personal photos into the mix, like photos from rehearsals or using Facebook's "Throwback Thursday" hashtag to post pictures of staff members when they were younger. O'Connell says that this generates conversations from people who used to work with Annex Theatre reminiscing about the productions they were involved with, and Smith says these kinds of conversations could happen at a party. O'Connell says that staying "active" on Facebook by posting pictures continually instead of just near an opening night of a production has increased the "likes" on Annex Theatre's Facebook page by about eight hundred people (personal communication, May 5, 2014). Associate Director of Marketing Lia Chiarelli and Marketing & Media Relations Assistant Judith May Austin at Pacific Northwest Ballet know that not everyone who is a fan of Pacific Northwest Ballet on Facebook will buy a ticket to a performance, but their department creates content for people who want to know the rich history behind an upcoming production and people who want to smile at a picture of a cat wearing a tutu (personal communication, May 16, 2014). Making personal connections with social media helps PAOs reach a much larger audience than interpersonal WOM alone.

PAOs can reach outside of their organization to connect with the surrounding community. Communication and Public Relations Manager Cole Hornaday includes cross-pollination between other businesses in Seattle, like doing promotional videos for a Seattle Public Theater's production of *American Wee-Pie* with local Seattle business, Cupcake Royale (personal communication, May 8, 2014). This helps promote Seattle Public Theater's productions to people outside of the usual circle of patrons and creates awareness of other businesses in Seattle. O'Connell says Annex Theatre gets support from other theatres in the community, such as Macha Monkey Productions and Live Girls! Theater (personal communication, May 5, 2014). Reaching out to people outside of the organization helps PAOs build a supportive community and promotes their business to new patrons.

PAOs do experience negative feedback from patrons, but all of the interviewees reported a low amount of negative feedback online, which correlates with findings for the staff/volunteer survey. The interviewees rarely delete comments from the their social media accounts unless it is perceived as bullying, such as making negative comments about a performer's appearance.

Virtual Ethnographic Observations

From observing various PAOs online, there are a lot of instances where PAOs would write what they were doing and not why they were doing it. On my social media accounts and

the emails I received from PAOs, people often wrote what they were doing, including "Come see this show!" or "I'm doing this show this weekend. Don't miss it!" without giving me any real reason as to why I should attend. An email from Americans for the Arts on the topic of arts education did not keep my attention (which, as a Teaching Artist for many years, is disheartening) because it stated facts about an upcoming workshop rather than telling me a story about a child whose life had been affected by the arts (personal communication, May 8, 2014). While marketing my own surveys, I noticed that when I used a picture of someone I had interviewed on Facebook, the amount of "likes" I received was far greater than when I posted a survey by itself. However, the "likes" did not translate into people clicking on and taking the survey, just the picture. By posting the surveys without a picture, I received fewer "likes", but more people took the survey. People feel more connected to stories, so it makes sense that posts with pictures get more "likes" than posts without pictures.

Recommendations

My research shows that PAOs with a positive company culture do have effective WOM tactics, but there is still room for improvement in terms of creating interesting content to share with patrons and improving communication between departments to create more conversations about the organization online and offline. Here are my recommendations that can be used by PAOs of any size.

Simplify the Message

As supported in the literature review, it is essential to make sure the mission of an organization is clear. Heath and Heath (2008) say that organizations can make their message accessible by asking "Why?" to remind themselves of their core values and principles that underlie their ideals. When representatives from the Murray Dranoff Duo Piano Foundation said their purpose was to "protect, preserve, and promote the music of duo piano" at a seminar, most people did not see the value of protecting duo piano music because they did not know what it was. After asking themselves why duo piano was important to other people, the representatives told the audience a duo piano concert was like "having the sound of the orchestra but the intimacy of chamber music," which made people outside of the organization understand the importance of duo pianos (pp. 199-201). Leaders and key staff members at PAOs should go through the exercise of asking "Why is our mission important to others?" in order to create a clear message that will help attract people who believe in a PAO's mission and that will motivate staff and volunteers to keep the vision alive for years to come.

Engage Staff and Volunteers

Before a PAO can engage its audience, it has to engage the people who work or volunteer with the organization because a "deep sense of engagement…isn't a nicety. It's a necessity. We need it to survive. It is the oxygen of the soul," (Pink, 2009, p. 129). The staff/volunteer survey showed that half of the people working/volunteering with PAOs think departments communicate effectively with each other, so there is definitely a need to improve communication. Leaders of PAOs, such as the Managing Director and Artistic Director, should be able to communicate what their company believes in and why it exists because we are "drawn to leaders and organizations

that are good at communicating what they believe," (Sinek, 2009, p. 55). Once the message of the organization is simplified, it will be easier for leaders of PAOs to motivate others to work with an organization.

It is challenging to connect to patrons if staff members are not connected to each other, or as John Holden of British think-tank Demos said, "You can't change the quality of the relationship between the audience and the organization unless you change the quality of the relationship within the organization," (Parker, 2011, pp. 7-8). The managers at Seattle Repertory Theatre found that giving departments time to visit each other and see what they were doing for a particular production was more engaging and allowed the staff to hone their "elevator pitch" for potential audience members by learning about different aspects of the production (Parker, 2011, p. 12). PAOs should have regular meetings and events for staff and volunteers so people within departments can connect with each other and reinforce a sense of unity within the PAO. These meetings and events will build a community within the PAO, which will be inviting for audience members to join. After connecting with each other, staff members and volunteers at PAOs should make personal connections with patrons, such as greeting them in the lobby before or after a performance, to help those patrons connect with the company, not just the production.

Employees or volunteers should feel comfortable sharing the content of their organization. PAOs succeed when "people inside the organization feel protected. The strong sense of culture creates a sense of belonging and acts like a net," (Sinek, 2009, p. 105). If employees do not feel comfortable sharing content, it will make them feel disconnected from the organization and make it much harder for the organization to build a sense of community. Setting up clear expectations and giving guidance and training to employees who want to "participate in the greater outside conversation" will help PAOs with their marketing because it helps spread the work around to not just the marketing staff, but the whole organization (Sernovitz, 2009, p. 163). I also recommend that the marketing staff create a document for social media tips so the rest of the staff is trained on the technical details of using Facebook. In my observations, I noticed some staff members would happily share content on their personal Facebook page, but would forget to link to the event properly or did not know how to properly tag people. If one or two people at a PAO kept abreast of the current best practices of social media and had a quick training for the rest of the staff once or twice a year, they could maximize their WOM tactics at little to no cost. Another benefit of ensuring that employees feel comfortable creating and sharing content is that they will let their personalities shine through in the content, which helps organizations "build rapport with participants and supporters," (Miller, 2013, p. 114). Marketing staff can email facts and stories about productions, such as when a show was originally performed or a story about a performer, to staff members and volunteers so they have something to talk about to their circle of friends. This helps keep the messaging consistent and empowers people at the organization to talk about productions.

Interpersonal WOM is more effective than online WOM, but online WOM can spread much faster than interpersonal WOM and is not an opportunity that should be missed. Kerpen (2011) recommends PAO staff think of themselves as hotshots at a party to make their organization likeable on social media (p. 7), which is supported by Annex Theatre's increase in Facebook "likes" by creating online conversations that could happen at a party. If the host of a party approached guests and only talked about their upcoming show and how to buy tickets, the

conversations would quickly become uninteresting and it is unlikely that people would return to the next party. Though there are definitely times where posting links to buy tickets is appropriate, PAOs cannot expect patrons to be engaged if that is the only type of thing they are posting. It is easy to forget that there are people behind the computer screen, but the vitality of a PAO's WOM relies on staff and volunteers creating a dialogue rather than a monologue.

Create Content for Different Levels of Involvement

People do things "not because you force them…but because they wanted to connect," so storytelling is the most important way for organizations to gain supporters at any level (Godin, 2009). Storytelling is not something that is exclusive to the stage; sharing stories about the people who work or volunteer with a PAO can cultivate a community. When people make decisions, it will actually be based on a gut feeling rather than data (Sinek, 2009). If a person is asked why they made a decision, they will give a lot of facts because we want to feel good about our choices, so we make decisions with "our hearts (or guts) and then analyze selective facts in our heads to justify those decisions," (Miller, 2010, p. 52). When PAOs focus their marketing on data, like how many reviewers liked the show or the great deals available for tickets, it is not enough to convince people to come support a show. People want to connect on a personal level, so PAOs should create content that breaks down the wall between the organization and their audience and reminds everyone that they are people with an interest in the arts. Pacific Northwest Ballet posts videos with the story behind the upcoming production and fun pictures of ballerinas backstage, which creates content that people on any level of engagement with the organization will enjoy. Personal touches in marketing content, like photos of performers backstage, shows patrons all of the work that goes into a production. This will make patrons feel connected with the people at a PAO and will cultivate WOM much better than hyperlinks to tickets webpages alone.

PAOs must be sure to make a story accessible to audiences, especially if the theme of the show may not seem accessible to a large population. Making a story accessible will also appeal to group interest rather than self-interest. Group affiliation may be based on things like gender and class, and group interest trumps self-interest in certain situations that deal with principles, such as equality and human rights (Heath & Heath, 2008, pp. 188-191). When Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company produced *Oedipus el Rey*, an adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy set in Los Angeles barrios, they tried to figure out who would be interested in the production. Rather than following their initial ideas of marketing to gang members or prisoners, they looked at the overall themes to find how audience members could connect to the production. They decided to focus marketing messages to social workers because even though it was not their story represented in the play, the social workers were very familiar with the struggle of working with people in these situations. The idea was successful and the social workers felt very connected to the play on a deeper level (Grossman, 2014). Finding the common themes of a production will help PAOs tell the story of why their production should matter to potential audiences, which will help spread the word of the particular show. When PAOs provide stories about their productions for people to tell on their behalf, it helps create a sense of community between the organization and the audience.

PAOs can also create an engaged community by promoting the work of other PAOs. Large PAOs can make a big impact for smaller PAOs' marketing campaigns. Pacific Northwest Ballet promotes other dance companies in their social media and email blasts and ACT - A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle promotes local theatre companies with their Facebook statuses. These types of statuses always generate a lot of "likes" because they are helping smaller PAOs by creating awareness within their large audience base and generating positive buzz for their organization as well. Matt Lehrman, Principal of Audience Avenue LLC, encourages PAOs to promote people who used to work with an organization, such as making a post about an actor who appeared in a local production and is now appearing in her first Broadway show (Lehrman, 2014). Both surveys showed that staff and volunteers wanted to see more interesting content and patrons were looking for content before and after shows, so it is worth the effort to create interesting content for patrons and staff to share with each other.

Respond to Negative Feedback

Though my primary research showed that PAOs do not receive a lot of negative feedback, it is something that PAOs must be prepared to deal with. Miller (2013) suggests that organizations not delete any negative comments from their social media profiles as it will "come across badly," and make an organization seem less authentic (p. 331), though these refer to grievances such as discrepancies with a bill. Staff should address the complaint as quickly as possible in a respectful way, such as making a public comment like "Hi Tim, I'm sorry that your tickets were not at the box office. Please email us at PAO.org with details so we can resolve this issue. Thank you!" This addresses the complaint or concern to satisfy the patron and it sends out the message to the world that the PAO "listens to its customers and fixes problems promptly," (Kerpen, 2011, p. 79). Only forty-three percent of staff and volunteers surveyed felt comfortable dealing with negative comments online, so giving guidelines for them, like which email they should tell the patron to use for complaints, may give them more confidence to address concerns instead of spending time alerting someone who can fix the problem. PAOs should make it easy for customers to complain directly to their organization so they do not complain online. Customers who complain directly to an organization will have a reduction in dissatisfaction than those who complain online. People who complain online on social media sites will have an increase in dissatisfaction, be able to spread their dissatisfaction to more people, and be less likely to change their opinion even after the issue has been solved (Nyer & Gopinath, 2005).

Measure Success

WOM takes time to build, but PAOs of any size can measure increases in online engagement and staff/volunteers' attitudes towards the company. PAOs can send out an anonymous survey at the start of the year and the end of the year to see if morale, willingness to share the organization's media content, and communication between departments has improved. Organizations can also monitor traffic on their websites to see if people are staying on their website longer and see if there is an increase in social media traffic and engagement, such as more comments and discussions between patrons. Most of these tactics involve an investment in time and are either low-cost or completely free.

Conclusion

All of us seek connection in our lives, so it is time to create energy for arts to fuel those connections. PAOs must create captivating content to share with staff members, volunteers, and patrons so they can share with people outside of the arts community. All people across all cultures are captivated by stories, but most people want to be familiar with a production and company before they invest time and money into a production. By simplifying their core message, PAOs can help engage the people that work with an organization and keep the WOM strong and steady as it reaches people outside of the organization. Sharing stories about the organization and the people that work there will break down the wall between PAOs and audiences and create a deeper connection that will last for years to come.

For Future Research

There is still a lot to be researched on the topic of WOM for PAOs. A case study to see how these recommendations help PAOs increase their audience engagement and improve communications between departments would be the next step. Determining if there is any difference in WOM between patrons who are also involved with the arts in some other way (such as performing or directing) and patrons who only attend productions would also be helpful to increase effectiveness of WOM. Similarly, determining if there is a difference in WOM between staff members or volunteers that see productions outside of their organization and staff members or volunteers that only attend their organization's productions would also help PAOs increase effectiveness in WOM tactics.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Face-to-Face Interview Questions

1. How does your organization's staff communicate with each other about productions?
2. How does your organization create content for productions and the organization in general?
3. How do you spread the word about your productions? What do methods do you find to be most effective? Least effective?
4. How does your organization use social media?
      a. Is the whole organization involved with social media? How do you involve them? Do you have any guidelines for the organization to use?
5. How do you recognize fans of your organization? How about on social media?
6. How do you deal with negative comments about your organization/productions? How about on social media?
7. What is the most challenging aspect of working on marketing?
8. What is the most rewarding aspect of working on marketing?

Appendix B: Staff, Volunteers, and Temporary Employees Survey

8 Questions, 62 completed surveys
Q1: This 3-minute, anonymous survey is for anyone who currently works or volunteers at a performing arts organization*, including staff, volunteers, or temporary employees (such as a performer or designer hired for a specific production). If you work/volunteer for multiple organizations, choose one organization that you have worked with the most for this survey.

*Performing arts organizations include ballet, symphony, dance, theatre, opera, improvisation, etc. Thank you!

Q2: Please select your gender
37% Male
63% Female

Q3: Please select your age range
0%   17 or younger
6%   18-24
53% 25-34
29% 35-44
8%   45-54
3%   55-64
0%   65 or older

Q4: Are you a staff member, volunteer, or temporary employee (performer or designer/crew member) at your organization?
19% Volunteer
61% Staff Member
11% Temporary employee (performer)
3%   Temporary employee (designer/crew member)
5%   Other

Q5: How many years have you worked/volunteered for your organization?
11% Less than 1 year
55% 1-3 years
15% 4-6 years
5%   7-9 years
15% 10 or more years

Q6: How many hours a week do you volunteer/work at your organization? This includes time working remotely.
5%   Less than 1 hour per week
19% 1-5 hours per week
11% 6-10
18% 11-15
13% 16-20
3%   21-25
6%   26-30
2%   31-35
10% 36-40
13% More than 40 hours per week

Q7: Please select your level of agreement with the following statements about the organization you work/volunteer for

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The organization makes decisions that reflect the mission statement	31 50%	26 42%	4 6%	1 2%	0 0%
The organization has a positive company culture	26 42%	27 44%	3 5%	6 10%	0 0%
The organization creates interesting content about shows to share with patrons	17 27%	21 34%	15 24%	9 15%	0 0%
Departments within the organization communicate effectively with each other	6 10%	25 40%	17 27%	9 15%	5 8%

Q8: Please select your level of agreement with the following statements about your involvement with the organization

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy talking about the organization's shows to people outside of the organization	35 56%	22 35%	2 3%	3 5%	0 0%
I enjoy participating in conversations on the organization's website and/or social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	9 15%	21 34%	21 34%	8 13%	3 5%
I am more likely to participate in conversations on the organization's website and/or social media pages if other staff/volunteers are participating	14 23%	30 48%	13 21%	4 6%	1 2%
I feel comfortable sharing content (blog posts, events, etc.) about the organization on my personal website and/or social media pages	23 37%	27 44%	6 10%	5 8%	1 2%
I feel comfortable answering questions from patrons on the organization's website and/or social media pages	19 31%	19 31%	13 21%	8 13%	3 5%
I feel comfortable dealing with negative comments from patrons on the organization's website and/or social media pages	10 16%	17 27%	16 26%	14 23%	5 8%

Thank you for participating! Want to help more? If you have attended more than one performing arts event within the last year, please take this 4-minute, anonymous survey http://bit.ly/artspatrons. Please share this with anyone who has ever been captivated by the arts.

Appendix C: Patron Survey

10 Questions, 103 completed surveys
Q1: This 4-minute, anonymous survey is for anyone who has attended more than one performing arts event (ballet, symphony, dance, theatre, opera, improvisation, concerts, etc.) within the last year.

Q2: Please select your gender
33% Male
67% Female
(1 participant did not respond)

Q3: Please select your age range
0%   17 or younger
5%   18-24
51% 25-34
16% 35-44
7%   45-54
17% 55-64
4%   65 or older

Q4: How many shows do you attend a year?
28% 0-4
23% 5-9
15% 10-14
10% 15-19
24% 20 or more

Q5: How much do you usually pay for tickets?
9% $0/Complimentary tickets
37% $1-$20
30% $21-$40
13% $41-$60
5% $61-$80
4% $81-$100
3% $100+

Q6: How important are the following factors when deciding to attend a show?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Neither important or unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Very unimportant
Someone I trust recommended the show to me	33 32%	58 56%	8 8%	2 2%	2 2%
The show is getting positive reviews	13 13%	65 63%	14 14%	8 8%	3 3%
I know someone involved with the show	40 39%	38 37%	20 19%	2 2%	3 3%
I'm familiar with the company producing the show	25 24%	43 42%	19 18%	10 10%	6 6%
I can bring someone to the show	19 18%	34 33%	36 35%	7 7%	7 7%
I can learn more about the show through blog posts, videos, interviews with the cast, etc.	11 11%	32 31%	31 30%	17 17%	12 12%

Q7: When deciding if you will attend a show, how likely is it that you will ask yourself...

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely or unlikely	Not likely	Not very likely
Will I enjoy the show?	51 50%	43 42%	6 6%	3 3%	0 0%
Can I bring someone?	19 18%	38 37%	30 29%	9 9%	7 7%
Will I understand the performance?	6 6%	36 35%	28 27%	18 17%	15 15%
Will I be comfortable at the venue?	11 11%	35 34%	28 27%	20 19%	9 9%
How is this show relevant to me?	12 12%	36 35%	26 25%	21 20%	8 8%
Will this show be worth my time?	38 37%	45 44%	12 12%	6 6%	2 2%
Will this show be worth my money?	43 42%	37 36%	14 14%	4 4%	5 5%

Q8: Rate the likelihood of each action you might take BEFORE you attend a show

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely or unlikely	Not likely	Not very likely
I tell people that I'm going to the show	33 32%	53 51%	15 15%	1 1%	1 1%
I post on my personal online accounts (Facebook, Twitter, website, blog, etc.) that I'm going to the show	13 13%	28 27%	22 21%	17 17%	23 22%
I post on the company's online accounts (Facebook, Twitter, website, blog, etc.) that I'm going to the show	2 2%	9 9%	22 21%	32 31%	38 37%
I try to learn more about the show through blog posts, videos, interviews with the cast, etc.	9 9%	27 26%	31 30%	23 22%	13 13%
I try to learn more about the company by visiting their website/social media accounts	9 9%	33 32%	26 25%	22 21%	13 13%
I subscribe to the mailing list of the company that is producing the show	3 3%	19 18%	23 22%	21 20%	37 36%

Q9: Rate the likelihood of each action you might take AFTER seeing a show you enjoyed

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely or unlikely	Not likely	Not very likely
I tell people that I enjoyed the show	69 67%	32 31%	2 2%	0 0%	0 0%
I post on my personal online accounts (Facebook, Twitter, website, blog, etc.) that I enjoyed the show	25 24%	31 30%	18 17%	11 11%	18 17%
I post on the company's online accounts (Facebook, Twitter, website, blog, etc.) that I enjoyed the show	6 6%	14 14%	23 22%	27 26%	33 32%
I try to learn more about the show through blog posts, videos, interviews with the cast, etc.	7 7%	34 33%	21 20%	27 26%	14 14%
I try to learn more about the company by visiting their website/social media accounts	6 6%	42 41%	20 19%	22 21%	13 13%
I subscribe to the mailing list of the company that produced the show	7 7%	22 21%	23 22%	26 25%	25 24%

Q10: Rate the likelihood of each action you might take AFTER seeing a show you did NOT enjoy

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely or unlikely	Not likely	Not very likely
I tell people that I did not enjoy the show	21 20%	48 47%	21 20%	10 10%	3 3%
I post on my personal online accounts (Facebook, Twitter, website, blog, etc.) that I did not enjoy the show	2 2%	4 4%	15 15%	37 36%	45 44%
I post on the company's online accounts (Facebook, Twitter, website, blog, etc.) that I did not enjoy the show	2 2%	0 0%	6 6%	30 29%	65 63%
I try to learn more about the show through blog posts, videos, interviews with the cast, etc.	2 2%	9 9%	15 15%	39 38%	38 37%
I try to learn more about the company by visiting their website/social media accounts	3 3%	4 4%	16 16%	36 35%	44 43%
I subscribe to the mailing list of the company that produced the show	1 1%	1 1%	6 6%	28 27%	67 65%

Thank you for participating! Want to help more? If you work or volunteer at a performing arts organization, please take this 3-minute, anonymous survey http://bit.ly/artsstaff. Please share this with anyone who has ever been captivated by the arts.