

How to Ask Customers for Donations at the Box Office **Paula Kearney, Box Office Manager, MAC Belfast**

When the MAC decided to introduce the notion of asking for donations at the Box Office, Paula's team were very reluctant however due to the funding cuts in 2015, they needed to take action. At the time they had only £3,500 in donations, from online sales only, so they knew they had a long way to go.

The Box Office team were very uncomfortable at first, as they worried about offending people who couldn't afford to donate. So Paula started to think about how to break down these barriers and get more from her team. She started by running through what was difficult for them and found out if they had any ideas for making an ask.

They began a trial period, during which they just monitored the response of customers and of the team with no set targets to reach. During this period, Paula could see who was doing the best and they were able to discuss the feedback they were getting with the whole team, helping some of the people who had not been doing so well.

What they realised was that many customers were confused as to why they were asking for donations as they had forgotten to mention that they're a charity! They used survey monkey for the team to update (anonymously if they preferred) on their interactions, which gave Paula a sense of where the Box Office team stood.

As for the process of asking for donations, the team based their script on the sales basket in Spektrix and made it clear that it's not personal if people say no. Their target was to increase box office donations by 20% as that was the only form of fundraising they had to benchmark against. Eventually the team became much more natural and relaxed with the process.

Paula's top tips for making the ask at the box office are:

- Smile with your voice.
- Build a rapport with the customer.
- Memorise the ask and the reason for asking.

The team found that giving weekly updates with donation KPIs kept them motivated, while motivation slipped without these updates. This project reinforced the idea that Fundraising is an organisation-wide responsibility and that everyone needed to be better prepared to answer questions about *why* they're fundraising. The exercise with the Box Office team in the end raised enough money to bring a bus full of children to the mac at Christmas last year. One unexpected outcome was that they had enough money to have a free gallery exhibition. At this event, the Box Office team had the confidence and knowledge in place to ask for donations from attendees.

The MAC doesn't have a development team but now they have a Box Office team who are advocates for their charitable status and so far have more than five times last year's total and the same as the previous four years totals combined!