

## **Sales Breakout Session Two**

### **The Box Office is Dead...Long Live the Sales Team!**

**Speakers:** Caroline Laurent, Edward Haversham, Stephen Skrypec

The focus of this session was on the changing role of the theatre box office, and ways in which the speakers and their organisations have adapted and developed new ways of working to meet the demands and difficulties of today's arts environment. Each of the speakers gave a short talk, while Edward also had a presentation - which is available to download on the Support Centre. We've provided some notes below on each of the talks, as well as some of the questions that the panel answered in the subsequent Q&A session.

#### **Caroline Laurent, Sales and Customer Care Manager, Sheffield Theatres**

Caroline's team at Sheffield Theatres do more than just sell tickets - they're up-sellers, fundraisers, marketers; they recommend hotels and build relationships with their customers. Sheffield Theatre's box office is very much alive.

Caroline manages a large team including full time, part time and casual staff, and in order to get the most out of the team she holds a monthly box office meeting during which the box office is closed for an hour to allow the team to sit down, take a breath and discuss what's happened and what's going to happen. This meeting allows Caroline to not just provide information to the team but learn from them as well - to plan as a team for upcoming challenges and figure out ways to deal with them. During this meeting other departments are invited to contribute, and the whole sales team sets targets and celebrates successes.

In terms of donations, while asking for donations for the refurbishment of the Lyceum Theatre was successful because customers were able to easily understand what they were contributing towards, changing to a more general ask proved difficult. The key thing was in the sales team being honest with Caroline and talking about the feedback they received when asking for different purposes. As a result they now have different ways of asking for donations, depending on what each member of staff is comfortable with - some ask customers to round up, others ask for fixed amounts, while some provide more details of what a donation will contribute towards.

For Caroline, a successful Sales team is empowered to make changes, and by talking and listening to her staff, by closing the box office and taking time to engage with them, she has been able to forge a strong team.

#### **Edward Haversham, Marketing and Box Office Manager, Princes Hall (see slides)**

For Princes Hall, the increasing proportion of online sales provides an opportunity to spend more time and engage more with the customers who do still call or come in person. Their box office team has grown over the last ten years, and even theatre technicians are trained on Spektrix and can sell tickets - the more people are able to sell tickets the easier it is to engage with customers.

In a geographic area with lots of choice for customers Princes Hall can't always compete on show title or price, so the focus is on staff engagement with customers. In order to help with

this Princes Hall celebrates its staff as its greatest asset, and works to constantly reinforce that their staff's role is to engage with customers, not just to sell tickets. Staff are encouraged to show their personality, and that of the venue - there are no box office scripts or call length targets, so each customer can be treated as an individual. Staff are encouraged to watch the shows and learn about the auditorium, and the online booking process, to empower them and help them start conversations with customers that will hopefully carry on for many years.

Princes Hall is built around integrated departments, not silos - box office staff understand why it's important to ask for customers' addresses, and how customers found out about the show. They have zero duplicates on the system, and check daily to ensure they maintain a tidy database, while Counter Quick sales account for only 1% of transactions as staff understand the additional cost of getting new customers to book compared to existing ones. To the Princes Hall the box office isn't dead, just evolving - it doesn't matter what someone's job title is as everyone works for the theatre and is in the business of selling tickets.

### **Stephen Skrypec, Head of Communications, New Wolsey Theatre**

At the New Wolsey, the box office as we know it is dead. After working with TRG Arts to take a thorough look at their data, Stephen and his team stopped and thought about what structural changes they would make if they could start again. As a result the marketing, sales and front of house functions now all fall under the Relationships team, which is responsible for looking after anyone displaying loyal behaviour. Everyone sells tickets and answers the phones, and they keep the ticket sales desk open until after the show, manned by the duty manager and front of house team. It's a fully integrated team who understand the journey that the venue is trying to take with its customers.

The New Wolsey is segmenting their data more than ever, with each customer segment following a different journey, and they're using tags to monitor and track these journeys. These journeys involve different asks for different customers, in order to make specific actions happen - for example for first time buyers the aim is to get them to buy again in same season. Existing, regular bookers are encouraged to buy 4-show season tickets, while existing season ticket holders are encouraged to become members or add a donation. These are all different conversations designed to facilitate the different objectives, but the key thing is that new customers where the relationships haven't yet been developed are not asked for donations - it's more important to create the good relationships first.

The results of this have been positive. During the last season first time visitors returning for a second show have risen from 1 in 12, to 1 in 6. Customers buying 4-show packages have risen by 40%, and overall box office revenue has increased. Sales can feel like dirty word, but there's nothing wrong with encouraging people to see more or to take risks on your artistic output, and to reward loyalty. There's nothing bad about getting people to engage more.

## Q&A session

**Q: How do you ensure the sales team adapts to changes in your organisation effectively and still deliver a high level of service?**

**A:**

- Keep your staff up to date with what's going on and any challenges you're facing. Staff matter, so make sure they're not an afterthought.
- Providing information about your wider business can help staff understand the decisions that are being made.
- Choose your priorities carefully. Everything is important in terms of conversations with customers, but you can't always cover everything in a conversation so be aware of what the most important things are.

**Q: Are there any tips for empowering sales teams?**

**A:**

- Introduce things that your staff have talked about. Ask your staff for their opinions, try things out, and let staff take ownership for their ideas. However don't ask for ideas but then fail to implement, as that can be even more demotivating.
- Be prepared to be flexible with your rules. Consider introducing magic moments - empowering staff to make decisions that will delight customers, such as giving free drinks to someone on a special occasion, or discounting tickets.
- Celebrate successes, and consider what success looks like as it's not always just about sales.
- Make sure to remove the fear of failure; people have to be able to try things without worrying about what might happen if they make mistakes.

**Q: Sheffield Theatres moved to Spektrix earlier in 2016. How did Caroline get her team on board with the change?**

**A:**

- Once the decision was made to make a change, staff were asked to write down what their ideal system would be like, then everyone sat down to discuss hopes and fears.
- Staff were then kept in the loop through the whole process.
- Their old system was turned off on the Saturday night, with Spektrix going live the following Wednesday. Staff were in the box office on the Monday and Tuesday while Caroline was getting things set up, and the team were involved in as many decisions as possible.
- Everyone was then excited about the training as they knew what to expect and had been involved throughout and kept in the loop

**Q: What were the most difficult aspects of implementing changes?**

**A:**

- Everyone taking calls at the New Wolsey was a big change! It was important to discuss the changes, figure out priorities and decide what to stop doing that wasn't mission-critical.
- Not stagnating, and always checking that the way things are done is still the right way. It's useful to look at other industries and see what other people are doing.

- Balancing standard policies with being flexible - things aren't always black and white, so while it can be comforting to have fixed policies to fall back on, it's important to try to make a difference with customers as you don't know what each person has gone through that day.
- Make changes, but don't change too much. Sometimes it's worth slowing down to take stock and compare where you were with where you are, before making further changes.

**Q: What was the most successful initiative to get people back through the door?**

**A:**

- Simply put, to ask: acknowledge your customers' visits and ask them to come back.
- Try sending a postcard to every first time visitor or re-engaged customer the Monday after they attend, asking customers to come back with an offer for 2 or 3 shows. If they come back, acknowledge again and follow up with another step. Make sure you keep this up every week, and keep going even when it's hard work.
- Automation. Use the pre and post-show email functionality, as you don't need to think about it once it's set up.

**Further reading**

If you're interested in anything mentioned in this session, please get in touch with the Spektrix Support Team to discuss it further. In the meantime, here are some Support articles that you might find useful:

- Potential duplicates: see [this article](#) with information on how to find and manage potential dupes on your system.
- Segmentation: [click here](#) for our Support article on segments in the Customer List builder.
- Pre & Post-Show Emails: [click here](#) for our Support article on how to set these up (you will need to use our dotmailer integration for this to work).