

Audience Development... from Broadway to High School Hallway

Tony Award-winning producer Meredith Lucio talks with Green Valley High School Theatre Director Jennifer Hemme about the shared challenges of producing theatre.



Teacher
Jennifer Hemme



Producer
Meredith Lucio

Jennifer (Teacher): Many of us depend upon our ticket sales in order to be able to pay for future productions. How do we get the recurring customer that isn't just the parents of the kids that we teach?

Meredith (Producer): The ever-present "getting butts in seats" challenge. Audience development never goes away. On and Off Broadway, we constantly look for ways we can identify, track, and connect with our audience. The more I know about my audience, and what they like about my productions, the easier it is to craft the right message. There's a trend in digital ticketing that is now available on a community and educational level: segmentation. With segmentation, you don't only capture the basic information about your purchaser but also identify them by a variety of distinct subgroups.

The more we can connect on a personal level to our audience (or consumer) in dynamic ways the more likely we are to get them back for the next show. That usually involves figuring out what drives them and then speaking their language.

Jennifer (Teacher): Right.

Meredith (Producer): For instance, let's say you've identified a core group of dedicated fans who follow your Instagram and buy tickets to every show. "Word of Mouth" is still

the most effective selling tool for plays and musicals on Broadway. If you could tag that core fan base "Instagram", you could segment your messaging, offer special perks and incentives related to their interest, and give them a chance to engage on a more substantial level. Let your core fan base work for you!

Jennifer (Teacher): Sure. And normally using such a strategy takes time and effort. If we can use the platform that ShowTix4U provides, making that happen suddenly becomes a real possibility and not another one of those great ideas I'd figure out if I had the time and/or the money.

M (Producer): Yes! What a teacher does is much, much harder than what I do on a commercial NYC show. I have a team to manage all of the various aspects of my show; press agents, marketing reps, accountants, managers. I hire them. Most teachers are a "one-stop-shop." They do it all: from building the show to making sure the stage makeup is stocked and everything in between. So, the trick, I think, is to find solutions that save you time and do the task as inexpensively as possible.

J (Teacher): I remember, probably ten years ago, I did a special "Beauty and the Beast" lunch where kids and their moms could come and have a tea party with Belle.

A mother-daughter pair from Summerlin came - a forty-minute drive to my school. Every show I do, I send out an email blast to my customers who have purchased tickets from me in the past on ShowTix4U.com. Well this mom and daughter come back to the theatre for our musical every single year. That girl graduates from high school this year. They have a picture of the two of them in front of our theatre marquee for every year - since she was six years old.

M (Producer): That's great. The more your consumer - your client- feels like part of your community, the more likely your production will be a gratifying experience. And you get to be part of their community too.

J (Teacher): Absolutely.

M (Producer): I think that's why partners like ShowTix4U are so valuable. The more you can take off your plate but still have done expertly, the more you can focus on any one of the myriad other tasks that go into creating a production at the local level. When we can encourage repeat customers and focus their enthusiasm, our shows become more of a conversation. That's exciting for our audience as well as us as theatre artists.

J (Teacher): And it's about the whole experience. If they have a positive experience, all the way through the process, they're more apt to want to invest in you and come back for other shows. If they have a terrible/negative experience, trying to get tickets, for instance, you could lose them. I remember early on in my producing, before I had online ticketing, I had parents that would line up outside the theater door at 4pm in the afternoon for a 7pm show! They wanted to have the seats they wanted. To do so meant waiting for three hours to get them. And they were literally pushing each other aside as soon as the doors opened to try and get that seat. Those crazy parents - I love their passion for our shows and their kids' work. At the same time, it was not always a positive experience for them or me. Moving toward online ticketing allowed me to offer advance purchases where ticket buyers could choose their seat. Now they can have a nice leisurely dinner and then be at the theater 15-20 minutes before the show - ready to have a lovely time.

M (Producer): Right. You have the piece of mind knowing that your audience is well taken care of from the beginning of the process: buying tickets. The platform is inexpensive and they treat your customers even better than you probably could since you are also the

director, the wrangler, the props mistress ...

J (Teacher): Right!

M (Producer): ...the House Manager. There's also the sense that - I feel this as a consumer in other industries even - I have some security that I'll be taken care of if a problem arises. That's a HUGE bonus. It's all sunshine and roses when nothing goes wrong...

J (Teacher): Right.

M (Producer): ...but if I trust that you (or the ticketing platform acting as your agent) will make good if something goes wrong then I am exponentially more likely to participate as a consumer.

J (Teacher): It's golden.

Meredith (Producer): I've actually used ShowTix4U. I do a producing workshop in New York every year, and this year, for the first time, I used ShowTix4U to process payments. While putting it together I had a question, and boy! Their customer service was on it.

J (Teacher): Yeah?

M (Producer): I, as the client, really felt a sense of security using them because if a

question or a problem happens, I trust that ShowTix4U will sort it out so I get my tickets on sale as soon as possible.

J (Teacher): Honestly, I just don't have time to deal with all of those questions about seats and tickets.

M (Producer): Of course! You're also directing the show, building the sets, making props and costumes...

J (Teacher): And my Number One Priority is to teach. It's not to be the box office manager. Unfortunately there's not enough staffing and money, and help to be able to do it all. But with ShowTix4U, I can refer my customers to the online ticketing source or the call center, and they will take care of it with as much care and detail as if they were hired specifically by me just for my event.

M (Producer): Even though on Broadway, we have significant budgets and infrastructure, and - I say this in my workshop- you really have three big assets: Time, Talent and Money. And, if you're spending less of one of those assets, you usually end up spending more in another. Time, for instance, is really sometimes more valuable than money, especially if you're having to do it all.

J (Teacher): Yeah.

M (Producer): Let's go back to that first question; getting "butts in seats". It's a major focus particularly in educational theatre because you depend on that income to produce future shows. Ticket sales will always be a big part of "finding the money", but there are other solutions that could augment that income. Creating additional "Revenue Streams" and identify opportunities that will add to your production budget is a core part of maintaining a healthy balance sheet.

J (Teacher): I'm always looking for ways to insure I have enough of a budget to provide a dynamic theatre program.

M (Producer): You and me both! Be it the non-profit sector, community, educational theatre, or Broadway, finding the money is crucial. ShowTix4U is unveiling, along with a brand new website, a new initiative to help with that. In honor of that new program, I'll be focusing my EdTA workshops in 2019 on identifying and creating revenue streams that will augment your income potential.

J (Teacher): That sounds great! I'll look forward to it.

Until then, check out ShowTix4U.com for more of the conversation...



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\$250,000.