

A response to AMA Conference keynote: *Print, Keep It or Ditch It?*

As a business that offers both print and digital services, London+Culture Calling is always keen to join in the conversation about different marketing tools and techniques, and to keep abreast of current thinking in the arts sector. The recent AMA Conference in Leeds gave us the chance to do just that. We were intrigued to hear Thursday's keynote, hosted by Ed Newsome from Sherman Theatre and Pam Aldred of Edinburgh Playhouse: *Print, Keep It or Ditch It?* The keynote presented two sides of the debate by considering the relevance of the season brochure and whether it is still an effective way of communicating with audiences in the 21st century.

We still love print

The jury might be out on the season brochure in particular, but the overwhelming consensus gleaned from that session is that print as a whole is still a valuable tool in the arts marketer's box of tricks. This resonates with our experience at London+Culture Calling. The uncertainty of the Covid period has changed attitudes to print, especially the season brochure, due to a reluctance to commit time and budget to something immutable. Recent months have brought a return to pre-pandemic levels of activity across the sector, but with many marketers taking a fresh approach to print marketing that is both more creative and more strategic. We might be seeing fewer bulky season brochures passing through our warehouse, but we're welcoming significantly more leaflets, posters, beer mats, bookmarks, postcards, colouring pages and stickers!

Know your audience

The theme of this year's conference, *Audiences at the Heart*, should influence all of our marketing decisions, including those related to print. Edinburgh Playhouse's decision to retain a season brochure was driven by an audience survey that demonstrated its value, particularly to loyal attendees and mailing-list members. Sherman Theatre's choice to stop producing its season brochure was also tactical, and it has opted for a 'less is more' approach to print based on demonstrable audience need. For organisations with a diverse programme or a fickle audience, creating individual pieces of print with tailored messaging for specific shows and customers can be a more effective and targeted use of budget.

Print in all its forms can also be an invaluable communication tool for organisations and artforms with an older audience who might be overwhelmed in the digital space. Traditional leaflet and poster display out in the community is still an effective way of reaching out and engaging these customers.

Target your print campaigns

A small print run and a targeted distribution plan can reap rewards when you're developing new audiences or focusing on special-interest groups. The availability of increasingly sophisticated geo-demographic profiling allows distribution partners to pinpoint target audiences using a range of methods including door-drops, handouts and venue display.

A fantastic resource for arts organisations is The Audience Agency's Audience Spectrum, which can be used to devise targeted print campaigns.

Print and digital work best together

When it comes to marketing, print and digital are always better deployed together and there are numerous ways you can amplify your messaging with an integrated approach. If you've created a season brochure for a limited mailing, but lack the budget for a wider distribution campaign, consider using an online publishing platform such as Issuu to create a digital brochure that can be disseminated via a range of channels from third-party suppliers such as Culture Calling.

QR codes have been around for a while, but they've finally been fully embraced. A low-cost leaflet or postcard is a great way of driving new audiences to specific webpages.

What about making some noise online when you do produce a great piece of print? Edinburgh Playhouse created a *The Book of Mormon*-inspired TikTok to herald the arrival of its new season brochure. Themed leaflet handouts at live events and festivals can be used to create engaging content for social media.

The future

At London+Culture Calling we're keen to stay ahead of the game when it comes to developments in the world of arts marketing. That's why we're partnering with [The Audience Agency](#) to relaunch many of our print services using Audience Spectrum, so that we can be more targeted in where we display print for our clients. We're also commissioning the Audience Agency to help us understand our digital subscribers and visitors to our B2C site www.culturecalling.com so we can offer a wider range of segmented services to our clients. And because we're also keen to know how people respond to the different marketing tools, we're commissioning The Audience Agency to undertake research via the [Cultural Participation Monitor](#), to explore changing attitudes to print and digital marketing channels.

We hope to be able to share those findings with you at next year's conference!

If you'd like to continue the conversation or find out more about our services, please give us a call on 020 7275 7225 or email emma@londoncalling.com