

## HIGH TOUCH MARKETING FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

High Touch is a business model that requires above average interaction with customers/patrons, versus low touch where interaction is minimal and transactional.

A high-touch business is one in which a customer places trust and partnership with a company or organization, and in many cases, a specific individual or team at the company. This is more of a "person-centric" model in which the relationship with the organization or individuals within the organization have a major impact on the acquisition and retention of the patron/customer. In a broader sense, any trust-oriented or relationship-driven business is "high touch." It means being proactive in how you engage with your guests - and anticipating their needs, and even their problems - and then resolving those at first contact.

The goals of high touch marketing are:

- Build relationships
- Capture their hearts
- Bring them into the "family"

To achieve these goals:

- Be a host – not a gatekeeper
- Be a friend – not a salesman
- Anticipate expectations and needs
- Provide high value, high quality, give them more than just a product
- **Don't be a used-car salesman.** By focusing on the patron/donor, we can remove the pressure of a sales pitch and earn the position of friend/partner. A clearer path to understanding their goals helps us provide the experience they are looking for. You never know who your patrons know, or who they will talk to about your organization and services. They talk a lot, more when they have a poor interaction than when they have a great one. If everyone speaks highly about your organization you will get more patrons and donors. If everyone speaks poorly it will only drive them away, and they will take potential ones with them. In the social media age, you cannot afford to disappoint.
- **Don't forget your manners!** Basic manners are part of being personal. *Always* greet your patrons and donors with a smile and a greeting. Say please and thank you! Make sure they get a chance to interact with someone on staff or a volunteer, board member, or artist. Have a human being they can call (or return one promptly) and work to fulfill their needs. Patrons/donors need to feel respected as individuals. They're paying for an experience, never just a product. They may happily provide further support, and potentially refer others, if they feel engaged.
- **Ask real questions.** Sincerity is a given, but it's too important not to mention. "How are you?" *isn't* rhetorical. It actually means, "How are you?" The answer will lead to better results. Asking real questions leads to real answers, which is valuable to both parties. In

other words, *listen*. Even the simple act of remembering a nickname, a birthday, or specific preferences will let people know their exchanges aren't perfunctory.

- **Include an authentic personal touch.** By observing how others incorporate the personal touch, we learn better how to implement it ourselves. Share engaging insights into yourself when you interact but do not monopolize the sharing. By crossing the bounds of business-like interactions, they get to know us people and we get to know them as people.
- **Follow up, like a real person.** Handwritten notes or follow-up emails make patrons/donors feel appreciated and singled out. Small things can have a big impact, so find a few ways to make people feel special.

The main point here is to always remember who pays the bills. Your patrons and donors are the lifeblood of your organization, so do not ever think that you don't "need" them. This will help build brand loyalty, it will build positive word of mouth, and it will simply feel better too. Keeping patrons and donors happy through personal interaction will provide what no device can: a personal touch.

#### High Touch Marketing Methodology/Donor Cultivation

**Emails:** Send emails to recognize that you received an online donation, processed a credit card, to remind patrons the day prior to a performance of event that they have tickets, the day after a performance to thank them for coming and invite their comments, and for special offers or to participate in a special or unique opportunity like a private reception, focus group, or other event. **DO NOT BE A SPAMMER!!!** Set a reasonable limit on the number of emails you send to patrons or they will tune you out. Always offer an opt-out for emails, eBlasts and eNewsletters and respect their wishes. Do not share email addresses with other groups. You should have an email policy listed on your website that states you will not share email addresses and you must honor that promise.

**eBlasts:** Use occasionally to announce a season, special performance, special offer, or to make a special announcement like a change in artists for a performance, a cancellation (does not replace other means of communication in this case). Again, use eBlasts judiciously. If used too often, patrons and donors will tune you out.

**eNewsletters:** Send no more than once or twice a month and make sure you really have some news to share. It could be an update on an upcoming performance, a big announcement concerning new staff, board or retirements, a big grant or contribution (with the donor's permission of course), or other interesting information.

**Websites:** Your most important external entry point is your website. It should be well designed, easy to navigate and up to date. Put your phone and address on every page of the website. Make sure the "Contact Us" page is easy to find and easy to use. You need a "Donate" button on every page as well. Offer an opportunity to sign up for the mailing list and email list. Make sure to have your performance schedule, class schedule, hours of operation,

audition notices, ticket costs or other fees, and any special events posted on the website. Make sure you have links on your website to your social media pages.

**Surveys:** Short surveys can be a great way to engage patrons and donors. Everyone likes to give their opinion, so asking for patron feedback, suggestions, or other information can be very productive and can result in new ideas that you may not otherwise have found. Surveys should be short and not too frequent although you should always encourage feedback, good or bad.

**Phone Calls:** Calling patrons who have missed a couple of performances or events, or a long-time patron who has not renewed a season subscription, is a good practice. It lets them know you care about them, that you are concerned about them, and gives you a great opportunity to make a personal connection. However, phone solicitations annoy everyone, so use judgement on when to call, and when not to call.

**Social Media:** Setting up a Facebook page for your organization is a necessity in today's world. There are many people who now get much of their information through Facebook and sharing through Facebook is an opportunity to reach new people. You should provide similar information on performance schedules, audition notices, etc. to that on your website. Twitter is optional, but another good way to leverage sharing to reach new people. Depending on the size of your organization and the staff resources available, you can also consider Instagram, Pinterest, and other social media, but the best practice is to pick one or two and concentrate on doing them well.

**Newsletter:** Optional, but can be a very effective marketing tool for your annual campaign effort. Can be one to four times per year, and it should be attractive, easy to read, informative and interesting. Sending it out a month or so before the annual campaign is a great way to remind patrons and donors about your organization. Attaching a personal note to those most important donors is a good cultivation tactic.

**Personal Notes:** This is the holy grail of high touch marketing and donor engagement. Personal notes from the Executive Director, Artistic Director, Development Director, or a Board Member are very effective. They do not need to be long – just a short sentence that lets the donor know you relate to them personally. Add a personal note to the first appeal letter, the second and third letters and always at the bottom of the thank you letter.