

APACA Conference 2004 report

APACA

APACA CONFERENCE 2004 REPORT

by Suzette Watkins, Vice President APACA

Craig McGovern, welcomed delegates with an incredibly well briefed and positive address. This was an excellent start, underlining the theme of Working Together

Senator the Hon Helen Coonan, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, spoke in place of the **Hon Rod Kemp**, Minister for Sport and the Arts. She was largely delivering a platform for noting the achievements of the Howard Government over the period of the last administration. *'I am ambitious for the arts sector to move to centre stage'*. Her essential message was that the Government wishes to encourage access and equity, and a climate in which arts and culture can thrive. However, I felt that the achievements she mentioned in her speech were all the 'high or elite arts' and she seemed to have failed to grasp that the majority of delegates at the conference were from smaller towns or cities. She made considerable mileage over the increased access to the arts in rural and regional Australia (although remote did not seem to figure) through increases to the Regional Arts Fund and Playing Australia

On the other hand, **Sue Natrass's Keynote Address – Working Together** – simply made you want to bottle her and her common sense. *'We need the arts to help us cure and survive the pain in the world'* The highlight of her talk for me was her insistence on positive, open communication. 'Open, honest, respectful communications are positive ingredients in working together'.

Since the 80's there has been a real dependence on sponsorship in the arts. These days the emphasis is on partnerships and these partnerships are toughly negotiated and have tightly written agreements.

To make these relationships and partnerships work, we need to define the qualities of openness, trust, equality and respect very early in the relationship.

In talking to potential partners:

- Go back to plain language
- Start talking from the heart
- Don't fall into using the stock phrases and jargon
- Put in a bit of shock value – if they're hearing what they expect, they're not listening
- Giving value to everyone's opinion and everyone's skill will allow you to come together and work together

Sue was incredibly honest in telling of her own experiences, offering a bad example from her past experience. The real underlying problem in that particular case was that she and her Chairman at the time 'did not share the same value base'.

I loved her final words: *'don't work with a negative, destructive arsehole. It spoils the outcomes and destroys the fun'*.

Working Together – New Audiences

Mel Jennings: Arts Ambassadors

The idea in itself is incredibly simple: use your community networks – brief people to go out and tell other people. These people spread the word and gather feedback for you. They provide insight and connection to the community or communities that otherwise would not be reached. *'They must have bucket loads of passion and excellent communication skills'*.

They represent the target audiences, be it students, parents and families or specific communities. They can be paid or volunteer workers and you can use them for festivals, art centres, or specific projects.

What do they do?

- Sell tickets
- Distribute publicity
- Run focus groups
- Accompany people to specific events

It's all built on personal relationships between the ambassadors and the target group. They are part of the target group and know how and where to talk to them. It's easy to say but quite complex to put into practice as it involves real listening skills on the part of the ambassadors. What it builds is a bridge between people on the street and art venues. The only trick is to pick the right people and brief them really well.

Mel outlined a couple of great success stories using 'ambassadors'. One was the *Frontliners* scheme at Edinburgh Festival, where they developed a network of 300 people with 'talking business' – hotels, cabdrivers, hairdressers – all of whom were well briefed and worked at creating a 'buzz' in the city.

Ambassadors: a theatre group in London's West End, which encourages new groups to attend. They achieved 25% of all new group sales.

Gareth Wreford: Developing new audiences

'Most disabilities are not visible. We don't always know who these people are'.

One person in five has a disability and this increases with age. There are others within the community who are also affected by disability – partners, friends, relatives and principal carers etc. It's also true to say that most people affected by a disability have lower incomes.

There is a considerable lack of skills or knowledge on how to attract this large and growing sector as a new audience. How do you take the first step? Where can we go for support?

To attract this audience, it is critical to include access information in all marketing. This includes the website as it may be the only information some people can access.

Some advice:

- Treat people with disabilities as a target market.
- Start small, assess needs, then think through the process
- Include someone with a disability in advisory groups
- Consider a pricing strategy for this market
- To sell the 'unsellable show', choose words based on quality of the production

Anne Marie Moon: Audience development

QPAC attracts an annual attendance of between 650,000 and 750,000 people. Anne Marie outlined some methods of approach to audience development that have worked at QPAC

- Out Of The Box children's festival of theatre
- Women's Voice (partnership)
- Cross-organisational team. Audience engagement is a two-way street to audience development and a long-term strategy. QPAC meets monthly with the major players in Queensland to work together on projects
- Non-traditional audiences (in conjunction with Arts Queensland). Try to find other people who fit the archetype and bring them in.
- Incentive programs along the lines of the Ambassadors. Around 25 – 30% of audiences for musicals are group bookings
- Hook up with an internet dating agency for a singles night

Rick Yamine: Reaching Non English Speaking Background audiences

- Three million people in Australia and 25% of the population of Victoria and NSW speak a language other than English
- 79% of Australians speak English, but that leaves a whopping 21% who do not. What are we doing to attract them?
- The Indigenous population in Australia is more than 410,000 (or 2.2%) This group is rarely targeted or considered in programming
- 1.9% of Australians are Buddhist and 1.5% are Muslim.
- There are also people of NESB's in the aging demographic.
- Reaching these people through Ethnic media is vital, as not everyone reads English language publications or listens to English language radio

Innovations:

Rod Wilson: Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre debuts fly system safety device. DAEC's Operations Manager Brett Davies has developed a locking plate to prevent counterweights from falling out of cradles in theatre flying systems. "We explored everything that was practical in the sense of being able to fit these plates onto the unit with a one-hand operation. The plates are yellow and easily recognisable as a safety device. I like the fact that you can stand back and see our flying system is safe".

The problem had been apparent in most theatres around the country for quite some time but had only been looked at seriously after a fatal accident occurred in Sydney three years ago. Brett suggested the idea of a safety locking plate to an engineering firm, who in turn undertook to develop a prototype.

The plate has been embraced by Work Safe Victoria and has also attracted interest from local and overseas theatres. The locking plates featured in a recent CX magazine article as the latest safety innovation for theatres with counterweight flying systems.

Neil Finlayson: A flexible new employment option

As a result of discussions with presenters and staff, it was acknowledged that there was the need to reduce the dependence on casual labour, specifically in technical areas.

Variable Time provides security of employment to the staff, retention of knowledge and skills to the organisation and has given our presenters a consistent labour force.

As an employment method it is a modification of part-time employment, by providing a total number of hours to be worked over a period of time.

In delivering flexibility to both staff and the organisation, variable time has allowed us to adjust our labour force to meet our operational needs.

Suzette Watkins: a new guarantee against loss

Asking local business for a guarantee against loss for a specific Season show. This is a surprisingly effective way to afford more theatre season shows, as the venue is not taking the risk.

Several businesses were approached, with a 20% take-up rate. You have to be incredibly honest with the businesses approached, opening your books to them as they need a comprehensive budget to see where all the money goes. There is a need for considerable education of the proposed partner, as most are amazed that theatre productions don't make money. You also have to be able to quantify the benefits to them. Did it work? Mostly. Would I do it again? Definitely!

Scott Rankin:

Participation is central to the arts. What Community Cultural Development does is create attachments

In this proposed project, the Victorian College of the Arts, Big hArt and APACA members are working in a three-way partnership with those in the community who are excluded from participation. It's harder to hurt someone if you know the story

Big hArt has the expertise, APACA has the infrastructure and the national spread, and the VCA has the course in CCD at post-graduate level.

They propose to work with five arts centres over five years on projects involving groups in the community such as early childhood, the elderly, Indigenous people, people with a disability and youth. The VCA offers 6-week placements in these centres for students studying CCD to give them a real taste of how CCD works in a live community.

Advantages of the project include: building attendances, building Box Office returns through participation, taking art into the community and back again.

These projects are participatory and reach right out to the government at the Federal level. Big hArt will produce statistics to show the advantages, eg youth at risk – drop in juvenile offenders, drop in recidivism rates. Scott cited an example of a project in Wollongong involving people with a disability. Big hArt brought in the money and created a show employing 14 people with a disability exploring their world through multi-media. Key buyers in Government and corporate circles were brought in to attend the show along with 'buyers' of the centre's facilities, showing them opportunities to employ a new workforce.

Senator Kate Lundy: *Laboring Together for the Arts*

'I'm the Shadow Minister for all the things that Australians are best at'

Senator Lundy spoke on Labor's focus on regional arts, their determination to keep appointments apolitical and the need to strengthen our national institutions.

It was a rare chance for APACA members to hear first-hand the policy initiatives of the Labor Party. APACA will continue to work with all political parties in development of arts policy.

Festival or Famines – Working Together to Ease the Pressure

This panel discussion, with different perspectives, brought up some interesting points of view on the relative value to the community and effect on the 'year-round provider'

Sue Natrass:

- It all gets back to the Artistic Director and the Centre Director and how they get along.
- People who are on the ground year round know how far you can push that audience.

Lyndon Terraccini:

- If we're doing our job, there will be no need for a Festival; the arts centre will be able to take it on
- Outcomes for a Festival ought to be clear from the outset. Artistic Directors need to have some guidelines. Not tell them how to do it, but have some kind of artistic outcome in mind.
- Festivals need to work much more on engagement with the community (to build up community cultural worth)

Clive Scollay:

- The Artistic Director's role is cultural expression at the local level. They are there to assist the development of a sense of place outside of the Performing Arts Centres
- They should involve the community in expressing the spirit of place. In the case of the Yeperenye Festival, it was the AD's place to develop cultural collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous and to develop something uniquely Central Australian

Craig McGovern:

- Set up commercial protocols for hiring etc, with firm partnership guidelines. This sets the parameters for what a Festival can and cannot do in/with the venues.
- Festivals can't block out a period of time and then not use it. There should be no surprises.
- We will still sponsor the festivals in terms of rental etc, but we need the ability to hire to others within that time

Boards and Management – Working Together: A panel discussion

Kelvin Cordell:

- There is a benefit to having a formally structured Board, in that it puts you outside the Council processes. For example in the realm of finance, where corporate benefactors won't give to local government.
- Don't be afraid to question decisions that the Board makes. Share failures and successes.
- Have knowledgeable people on the Board from areas like accountancy, law, marketing, theatre knowledge and experience, catering/hospitality, media, tourism, education, stakeholder reps.
- Keep the ratio of Council to non-Council 1 – 3.
- Go through a recruitment agency to do the process. Make a noise about getting expressions of interest and then be active during the recruitment process.
- The Chairman must be someone you can work with.
- Establish committees: Finance Review, Marketing and Programming. Arrange for a Development committee to do the asking on your behalf.

Craig McGovern:

- Can the Board add value? If you don't believe that, you won't let them and they won't.
- Be careful not to dump on any difficult Board members in public – your staff will follow suit.
- Senior executives sit in on the first 2 hrs of Board meetings at QPAC. Senior management team get all the Board papers.
- Agree everything with the Chair before the meeting.
- Set the year's meeting schedules in advance to everyone knows when they are and can arrange other work around the meetings – not vice versa. Produce an A3 rollout sheet of Agendas for the year. Different meetings will discuss different aspects of operations – plan this cycle in advance
- Take all papers as read. This may need some education of the Board members, but then you can have quality time discussion on the issues.
- Give out good quality papers to Board with no spelling mistakes. Make sure everything adds up.
- Have a summary table of actions and keep them there until it's done

- Don't be afraid to disagree with the Committee – we're hired to be the management
- Don't let the Board get too operational. Get the Chair to agree on this
- Give them a job description, charter of responsibilities and an induction process with a checklist.
- Don't go for a board full of arts people.
- Instigate feedback loops. Review your position. Review your performance as a Board. Get Board members to rate their own performance.

Carolyn Baker: (Australian Institute of Management – NT and Qld)

- Take a formal Board structure, even if you don't have an ASIC structure
- Most critical relationship is between Chair and CEO
- Boards exist 'to encourage companies to create value' and can help each other at a high strategic level
- Skill mix is crucial, but it must fit the profile of the organisation, Focussed strategic skills, electronic and web-based marketing and IT and great legal skills are a must.
- A Board is to help managers manage, management helps boards decide.

Sue Natrass:

- Boards help buffer you against outside influences and is a neutral third party view, monitoring the risk
- The primary job of the Chair is to support the CEO
- Do what you know and believe is right for the organisation
- Induction is essential – it is a very fragile ecology in which we operate
- Review of Board is essential. Ensure one on one interviews, questionnaires for Board performance evaluation. Performance appraisal is two way – put the questions back to the Board.
- What we're all looking for is a well chosen, well managed strong relationship.

Working Together on Touring:

From an amusing and illuminating introduction involving dreaming about what touring might be, from various perspectives, this session rapidly developed into a frank and open discussion of some of the current issues in touring in Australia today.

Penny Miles opened the debate with some 'simple rules' for touring

- Sponsorship – accept it!
- Royalties – pay them!
- Deposits – pay them!
- Marketing – don't forget it!

This opened the way for some constructive general discussion

Sponsorship – have the dialogue as early as possible in the relationship, setting out what each party's responsibilities to their sponsors are. There was much discussion on whether it is reasonable for the venue to be asked to hold to a deliver on a contract made by the producer with their sponsor.

Royalties – the rights issue or flat fee needs to be part of that early dialogue so everyone is aware of the state of play before the contracts arrive. Aim to have no surprises in the contract.

Deposits – just pay them. The cash flow of the producing company is the issue. Subsidies often come in after the show is on the road, but the producer has real costs well before that time. Deposits are an essential mechanism to get touring to happen.

Contracts – Could/should we have an 'industry standard template'? The Blue Heelers have already started that discussion.

Marketing – it IS everyone's responsibility. It was acknowledged that the marketing materials available are not always perfect. Can touring co-ordinators assist venues and producers to produce something that more closely meets the needs of the touring venues? Can producers consider that the marketing image developed for the city season may not be the best image for the tour? Can this be considered in the early design phase?

A suggestion was made that venues could develop a partnership with a local business who can colour photocopy the posters and fliers, making that their sponsorship.

National touring infrastructure:

The development of a national touring infrastructure was debated at some length. Here it became apparent that this a not new issue and it was acknowledged that Blue Heelers do need some support. Resourcing is the major issue – formalising the 'goodwill' structure that has operated in the past. There was some discussion on the previous round of Playing Australia and the issues of touring shows which have not yet been produced. APACA determined to seek clarification from Playing Australia on this issue.

It became clear that APACA, AMPAG and all other players in the national touring circuit need to continue to lobby for a doubling of the original Playing Australia funds.

The Great Debate: That The Arts Outrun Sport

This was an incredibly light-hearted but pungent debate looking at the arts/sports divide. I was so entertained that I utterly forgot to take any notes, but who can forget Wendy Harmer's subtle (and not so subtle) demolishing of the negative argument, Lisa Forrest's utterly unexpected humour, Tom Keneally's impish larrikinisms or Ron Haddrick's gentle and quite persuasive arguments. Campbell McComas was a brilliant Moderator – we were lucky to have him – who made the summing up and wrapping up of the arguments just delightful. Of course with the crowd in the auditorium consisting of the APACA members and a good sprinkling of the public at large (thanks to a generous partnership with QPAC, the Brisbane Festival and QUT) the outcome was a foregone conclusion, but it was one of the most entertaining debates on the subject I've seen.

Then, of course, there was the social program.

The bus tour to venues, while not really a social program, was a great way to meet new people and see new places. Bronwyn again did a fantastic job as bus monitor, although she swears she won't do it again. It's a great way of seeing into the guts of other venues and finding out how other people deal with what are often common challenges. QPAC was certainly an eye-opener to many of us who have not worked in a major venue.

The cocktail party's magnificent location was a fabulous backdrop to the real beginning of the conference. Welcomed by QPAC and given an address by the Hon Anna Bligh, Queensland Minister for the Arts, the delegates had a great time. Several informal dinners, drinks etc were the natural progression from there, and afterwards the Casino proved an irresistible drawcard to some, who looked a little seedy the following day. They really needed the coffee and coffee plungers thoughtfully provided in the conference bags. Great idea!

Most of us took the time out to see as many shows as possible, and we thank the various companies and venues who offered such good deals. This is an important part of the conference, especially for those of us from isolated places, where what we bring to town is all there is.

The conference dinner produced some surprises, although some people were more surprised than others. The setting was inspired, with the Brisbane River and surrounds showing to their best advantage. Janet Seidel was a treat, for those who listened.

But the main business of the night was the APACA Touring Awards – *The Drivers*. It was good to see so many of the recipients there to pick up their awards. Plenty has been written about the awards themselves, but it was great to know that APACA is honouring those who work on the pointy end of touring – the companies, the crews, the designers etc. Congratulations to all recipients.

Thanks to Christine, Cherrie, Genevieve and all those who worked so hard to make this the best conference ever! How can we top that? Look out for 2005.

See you in Canberra