

***Talking Theatre is more than a Test Drive:  
Two audience development methodologies under review***

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## **Abstract**

Test Drive the Arts (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre) and Talking Theatre (Scollen) are two successful audience development methodologies committed to building new audiences from non-attenders. This paper details the two methodologies to explain their similarities and differences, and to examine these in relation to the findings of case studies in the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand and Australia. Although Test Drive the Arts has helped performing arts organisations in the UK to retain 30% of the new audiences who participated in their program, the New Zealand pilot of this scheme in 2007 has fallen well short of the mark. Talking Theatre has retained 30% of its participants as returning new audiences for performing arts centres in regional North-Eastern Australia by placing strong emphasis on post-performance audience reception, and by investing more in mutually beneficial relationships between new audience members and performing arts organisations.

## **Introduction**

Talking Theatre (Scollen) and Test Drive the Arts (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre) have thrived in an environment where in the last two decades arts establishments have had little choice but to focus increasingly on audience development. Decreasing audience numbers and increasing competition for leisure time have forced the arts industry to review its practices and priorities to ensure its survival into the future. Since the late 1990s the Australia Council for the Arts and its various state counterparts have required organisations they fund to demonstrate a commitment to audience development. In the United Kingdom after 1997 it similarly became a matter of public arts policy to concentrate more on attracting non-attendees to galleries, museums and performing arts venues<sup>1</sup>. The governments' commitment to audience development created a positive climate for the formation and growth of Talking Theatre and Test Drive the Arts. Both programs sought to build new audiences for performing arts organisations by shifting the companies' concentration away from product to the public.

Test Drive the Arts (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre) has become an internationally successful audience development program. In 2007-08 it was readily accepted by Australian and New Zealand government arts agencies and the large performing arts companies they subsidise to participate in the program. Since its inception in 1998 in Manchester (UK) Test Drive the Arts has introduced thousands of people to the arts and has assisted participating performing arts companies in the UK to retain 30% of the newcomers as patrons. At the same time Test Drive the Arts was piloting its program in Manchester, a similar (but different) audience development system was piloted in Brisbane, Australia (Scollen, QUT). The SPPAR (Scollen Post Performance Audience Reception) method for audience development (later to become known as the Talking Theatre strategy in 2004) was tested in Brisbane theatre companies from 1998-2000. This methodology later featured in a three-year Queensland/Northern Territory-wide audience development study (2004-06)<sup>2</sup> to assist fourteen regional performing arts centres to better engage with their communities and to build new audiences. Like Test Drive the Arts, Talking Theatre found that 30% of participants in the program returned to purchase tickets at full price. Unlike Test Drive the Arts, Talking Theatre included three free performing arts experiences for individual participants, it placed stronger emphasis on post-performance audience reception, and it invested more in mutually beneficial relationships between new audience members and performing arts organisations. This paper details the two methodologies to explain their similarities and differences and to examine these in relation to the findings of case studies in the UK, New Zealand and Australia. It is hoped that from this comparison performing arts organisations will find a system that best suits their audience development needs and aspirations.

## **Two audience development programs with new audiences in mind**

Audience development is a planned process, which enables and broadens specific individual's experiences of the arts. It involves breaking down the barriers which stop

people participating in or attending the arts – physical, psychological, social or lack of information<sup>3</sup>.

Test Drive the Arts and Talking Theatre understand the need for performing arts organisations to become client-focused and to broaden their audience base by actively inviting non-attenders to experience the arts. “While maintaining relationships with existing patrons is important, the long-term stability of the organisation dictates the need to create relationships with new patrons or existing patrons with low levels of identification.”<sup>4</sup> However, both audience development programs recognise that any situation or product not previously encountered assumes a level of risk and uncertainty for the inexperienced. This can cause a fear of the unknown which then heightens the perceived risks associated with the activity. For example, Talking Theatre found that the risks chiefly include not enjoying or understanding the performance; wasting time; wasting money; not fitting in with the theatre crowd; and consequently appearing or feeling foolish. Such concerns make the prospect of theatre attendance too daunting for many people who elect to engage in other entertainment options they are more familiar with. The provision of a free introduction to the theatre seeks to overcome the concern of wasting money on tickets, and the additional pre-attendance guide of ‘handy tips’ about theatregoing also seeks to remove the new audiences’ concerns of feeling foolish and out of place. However, from this point the audience development programs diverge with significant impact on the performing arts organisations and new audiences participating. The names Test Drive the Arts and Talking Theatre squarely state the very essence of each of these audience development programs.

## A snapshot of two audience development methodologies

	<b>Test Drive the Arts</b>	<b>Talking Theatre</b>
<b>Ideology</b>	Try before you buy	Listen and Learn
<b>Incentive</b>	Participant provided with 2 complimentary tickets to attend 1 live performance at the venue	Participant provided with 3 complimentary tickets to attend 3 live performances at the venue (1 ticket per show). Each performance varies in style and content.
<b>Additional performances</b>	Participant invited to attend 2 <sup>nd</sup> performance at a discounted rate and 3 <sup>rd</sup> performance with an incentive (eg. complimentary drink).	Participant invited to attend future performances (incentives offered on occasion as provided to subscribers or friends of the theatre)
<b>Participant commitment</b>	One performance and one questionnaire	Three performances, 5 questionnaires, and 3 group discussions.
<b>Length</b>	One year	One year
<b>Data Collection</b>	Feedback questionnaire sent to home following attendance at first performance	Pre-show questionnaire (completed at participants’ homes); post-show questionnaire completed at the venue immediately after each of the three

		performances; post-show focus group discussions immediately held at the completion of the post-show questionnaires; post-program questionnaire (completed at participants' homes).
<b>Outcomes to date</b>	Avg 30% participant return rate to purchase tickets	Avg 30% participant return rate to purchase tickets + up to four paying guests each time the participant returns outside of study conditions.

## Test Drive the Arts (TDA)

TDA believes it is important for consumers to 'try before they buy' and so the program applies this dictum to new audiences who trial a free theatre performance to find out if attendance appeals to them. Andrew McIntyre, Co-director of Morris Hargreaves McIntyre states, "It's a simple concept that goes like this: you wouldn't buy a car without test driving it first (or a pair of shoes for that matter) so why do we expect non-arts attenders to take a punt on the arts?"<sup>5</sup> There are three essential steps in TDA to turn a non-attender into a long-term audience member. They are: (1) introduce people to attend a live performance for the first time and provide their tickets free of charge; (2) provide an incentive for them to return and purchase tickets; and (3) encourage the new attenders to become long-term paying audience members by offering further incentives and by staying in touch with them via email.

TDA claims to enable performing arts organisations to commence relationships with members of the public who do not normally attend their establishments. However, it may be truer to state that TDA provides the environment for an introduction to occur rather than a relationship to develop. As McIntyre states

I think it's about personal invitation that makes the difference...it's about a person reaching out to another person to say, 'please come to this, I want you to come to this', and I think that's what breaks the deadlock.<sup>6</sup>

TDA invites newcomers to step up onto the first rung of the loyalty ladder<sup>7</sup> but this program does not ensure organisations commence a relationship because the new audience members and performing arts organisations operate at arms length. This is due to the online methods used for registration and feedback, the lack of socialising with participants while at the theatre, and the phase-out transaction-focused process applied at each of the stages of the program. Such an approach ensures that large numbers of people can participate in the program at once, and that there is opportunity for the organisation to recover some of its costs by receiving payment from participants for tickets to other performances later in the season. However, it also asks the new audiences to begin buying tickets at Stage Two of the program after only one experience at the venue (that they may or may not have enjoyed), and to communicate with the organisation via email or the occasional telephone conversation (if the participant has not responded quickly enough online) throughout the stages of the program.

Although this approach is likely the best in terms of economy of scale, it does not enable a meaningful partnership to form, instead keeping the relationship a transactional one. The danger with this approach is that the new audience does not develop an allegiance to the organisation nor a sound appreciation of the organisation's purpose and circumstances. It also does not expect the new audience to reflect on the experience and relate these thoughts back to their initial concerns about theatregoing. Likewise with this approach, the organisation could be forgiven for perceiving the new audiences as 'bums on seats' rather than people who have particular reasons for non-attendance, specific needs for entertainment and culture, and valuable insights into theatregoing and live performance. It also does not expect the organisation to look critically at its own processes and outward behaviours as part of its audience development commitment. In other words, this approach does not instil empathy toward the other nor self-examination of practice and principle.

## **Talking Theatre (TT)**

TT applies another well-known saying 'listen and learn' when seeking to build new audiences. This program centres on the accumulation of knowledge for both new audiences and performing arts organisations to increase patronage. It asks organisations to listen to new audiences to inform future planning that will impact on audience growth and it invites new audiences to increase their interest in, and understanding of, theatre by sharing their reception of the experience in post-performance discussions with peers. TT's standpoint is that in order to build new audiences organisations need to understand their target markets, and discover how they experience product, before they can make successful decisions about disseminating advertising and choosing programming. TT supports March and Thompson's (1996) assertion that artists or arts organisations cannot really understand their product until they know how the consumer or audience perceived it. Indeed, it can be argued that the patron is central to the arts experience<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, it is vital for organisations to initiate relationships with non-attenders to better understand their needs and perspectives and to share with them the organisations' products and objectives. Such a relationship will benefit both parties and inform their future decisions and actions. Right from the beginning, TT provides a welcoming and social atmosphere for non-attenders in the program. It makes clear that their thoughts and feelings are important for the ongoing improvement of the organisation, and that their willing attendance and participation is a positive way for them to engage with the arts for the first time.

TT asks people to register to participate in the program by telephone and are then sent a welcome letter and a questionnaire to complete (to generate demographic and psychographic data about the participants). Their first visit to the venue sees them greeted by the allocated staff member who provides them with their ticket, advises them of the layout of the venue and introduces them to other participants in the program. The participants sit together in the auditorium and then immediately following the performance they gather in a quiet and relaxed setting at the venue to enjoy light refreshment and to complete a brief questionnaire asking for their reception of the performance<sup>9</sup>.

Once the questionnaires have been collected, the participants speak together as a group for one hour sharing their thoughts and feelings about the performance, about the venue, and about their experience of theatregoing that evening. The discussions are recorded and facilitated by the staff member (or designated external facilitator). After establishing the purpose of the group discussions, the facilitator plays a passive role to encourage the participants to direct the topics of conversation and to interact with each other rather than answer a series of facilitator-posed questions. The unstructured, free-flowing discussions generate substantial qualitative data that provides insight into the elements of performance and of theatregoing that are important to new audiences. The participants then return to the venue on another two occasions (ideally within a 2-3 month timeframe) to attend performances free of charge, to socialise with the other participants whom they met previously, and to take part in post-performance questionnaires and group discussions each time. A few weeks after their final visit to the venue as part of the program, the participants are sent a questionnaire asking them for their feedback about the program, the venue, and the likelihood of their future attendance.

TT's commitment to audience reception in combination with arts marketing principles ensures both the new audience member and the performing arts organisation learn from each other and respect what the other can bring to the relationship. The field of theatre audience reception is still in its infancy stage; emerging in Europe and Scandinavia in the 1980s. It seeks to understand the perceptions and reactions of audience members to performance and to the theatrical event as a whole. It "...essentially deals with the spectator's intellectual and emotional experiences in the theatre."<sup>10</sup> It is now generally conceded that monitoring audience attitudes and experiences is a vital component of 'best practice' arts marketing. There is growing evidence of the importance of motivational, experiential and attitudinal research as a means of both shoring up loyalty among regular arts audiences and attracting new audiences<sup>11</sup>. The essence of the TT approach concerns conversation and reflection and as such it sees a range of audience reception methods applied throughout the program. These methods not only gather the thoughts and feelings of new audiences to aid the organisations' in their decision-making for the future, but assist the participants to think more deeply about their experiences at the theatre to increase their interest in, and knowledge of, theatregoing.

The TT (2004-2006) post-performance group discussions were found to be popular because they provided the opportunity for the participants to listen to others' ideas (78.5% of respondents); to have their own thoughts and feelings valued (62.5%); to have the space and time to think more about the performances (60.5%); and to get to know other people (60%)<sup>12</sup>. In fact, many of the participants stated they enjoyed the post-performance discussions as much, if not more, than the performances they were to talk about. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents stated they had a greater understanding of the performances after taking part in the post-performance group discussions. Sixty-six percent of the respondents also stated that they would be more likely to attend live performances in the future if they knew they could meet other people afterwards to discuss them. Two quotes now follow as examples of the comments made by participants in the program.

*I totally enjoyed the project. The performances, social interaction and the hospitality of the Centre added up to a lovely experience...Everyone was able to speak freely and have their two cents worth.*

*I really enjoyed the group's feedback, it gave more insight into the whole thing.*

In addition, TT found that the research was helpful to the performing arts centres' staff as it gave them direct insight into new audiences' reactions to their organisation, programming, promotion and pricing. Two examples of staff comments now follow:

I think the project is producing very useful information - even if some of the information from the study group is only reinforcing things that we have assumed or perceived to be. It's helpful for us in our negotiations up the line.

*It was amazing running the focus group after the show. They (participants) reacted in a completely different way to how we expected... It's making me re-think our next marketing campaign.*

TT not only enables performing arts organisations to commence relationships with members of the public who do not normally attend their establishments, it goes further to foster a partnership between the two based on communication and trust. Two-way communication is essential for developing and managing relationships<sup>13</sup>. In addition, Hennig-Thurau and Hansen (2000) indicate that the development of trust helps to reduce the risks perceived by customers. This is vital when engaging with new audiences who feel uncertain about the arts experience.

At the heart of the TT program is relationship building and knowledge transfer to create a partnership that works to overcome the barriers to attendance and to switch people on to the arts. This partnership develops through face-to-face communication and by repeat visits to the venue. TT ensures the participants become familiar and comfortable with the venue, its staff, and its protocols. (Throughout the program the allocated staff member has interacted with the participants developing a rapport and providing support). TT enables the new audiences to experience three different productions which they can compare to help form opinions of the kinds of performance they enjoy. It provides them with opportunity to socialise with other inexperienced theatregoers and to benchmark their reception with those of their peers. The post-performance audience reception sessions provide safe and friendly discussion environments which assist the participants, via self-reflection and engagement with others' ideas, to learn about theatre and theatregoing. Quality feedback from the participants to the organisation, combined with their direct engagement with a range of performances, the organisation, and the perspectives of other participants, creates a meaningful two-way dialogue that helps each party to learn from the other and to feel valued by the other. This sharing of information leads to increased understanding of new audiences and their needs by the organisation, as well as an increased interest by the participants in live performances and a greater confidence to attend outside of research conditions.

However, any engagement with relationship marketing literature will result in the discovery that relationship marketing is only appropriate when seeking to build long-term relationships with an established audience base. Any attempts to build new audiences from those not currently in attendance are relegated to the field of



transactional marketing and are seen to be somewhat lacking and short-sighted in approach.<sup>14</sup> According to the key differences highlighted in a table in Hennig-Thurau and Hansen (2000) between the concepts of relationship marketing and transactional marketing, TT as an audience development program for new audiences, features strongly as a relationship marketing tool. Yet, the table clearly states that the acquisition of new customers is the fundamental strategy of transactional marketing. However, this paper demonstrates that it is possible to utilise relationship marketing strategies to foster partnerships with new audiences and to use this approach to enhance organisations' understanding of non-attenders' thoughts and behaviours, while helping new audiences to overcome the barriers that have prevented their attendance in the past.

## **Criticisms of audience development – short-termism and reliance on government subsidy**

Although it is clear that the data generated by programs like TT is highly valuable to arts organisations, a dominant concern in recent literature is that the labour intensiveness of audience development, coupled with lack of ongoing revenue, has encouraged an attitude of short-termism to audience research. Particularly among smaller not-for-profit organisations this has resulted in a tendency to approach projects tactically rather than strategically. Without more coordination of audience research, it is often noted, these 'hit and run' or 'shot-gun' approaches risk turning many audience development projects into mere 'box-ticking' exercises.<sup>15</sup> This outcome was directly observed when half of the regional Queensland performing arts centres participating in the subsidised TT program (completed at the end of 2006) elected to take on the TDA program in 2007-08 (financially supported by the Federal and Queensland State Governments). Although feedback about TT from the organisations was positive and the initial results generated were pleasing, it seemed many of them would rather move on to the next subsidised audience development scheme than continue to use a tested strategy that relied on their investment to resource it.

This and many other outcomes like it falls prey to the common criticism in Australian and American literature that audience research appears designed to address the general problems of an existing subsidised arts culture underpinned by the need to solidify government support, rather than generating practical outcomes like more paying customers and visitors.<sup>16</sup> However, TT and TDA are not programs designed to achieve greater subsidy from government but instead actively seek to generate paying audiences for performing arts organisations and to cultivate a culture of financial accountability and self-sustainability within the arts sector.

## **Box Office Results when using TDA or TT**

TDA has reportedly achieved 30% return rates for participating performing arts organisations in the UK, however New Zealand equivalents in 2007-08 have struggled to retain 3% of their participants. The success of TT (2004-06) in North-Eastern Australia saw 30% of non-attenders return to the participating PACs and bring 1-4 paying guests with them. Yet Australian performing arts organisations in Queensland have elected to trial TDA in 2008-09 instead.

## United Kingdom

The experience of Test Drive in the UK has been that it actually makes money for organisations, so within a year of somebody coming, the amount of money that's come back through the box office is greater than the amount of money that's spent on the scheme<sup>17</sup>.

According to Andrew McIntyre, the best example of TDA success is the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra which has run the program for four consecutive years and has increased its audience by 44% over the period. McIntyre<sup>18</sup> also claims that different venues in the UK who utilise TDA are "...typically getting somewhere between 30 and 40 percent coming back and paying full price..."

## New Zealand (NZ)

From early 2007 four performing arts organisations participated in a TDA pilot project in NZ: Christchurch Symphony, The Court Theatre, Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra and the Auckland Theatre Company. The preliminary results are now available from Auckland Theatre Company and the Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra.

### Auckland Theatre Company (ATC)

The ATC initiated its TDA pilot project in February 2007. The objective of the pilot TDA program was to financially cover costs. In order for the pilot to break even the ATC expected to enrol 833 participants (and their partners) in the first stage of the program. They believed that one-third of the participants were likely to return for the second offer, and one-third of these participants were expected to take up the third offer in the program.

However, the attendances and income levels were not as high as anticipated. A little over 50% of the expected first round offers were accepted by the public (430 participants and their guests). Of the 430 participants in round one, only fourteen agreed to accept the second offer in the program. By McIntyre's prediction (based on UK results), ATC should have generated 129 paying customers (or 30% of participants) by undertaking this study. However, by offer two ATC had only retained fourteen participants (or 3%) of the sample. The low result meant that ATC elected not to pursue offers three or four. ATC states on page four of the Mid-interim Report "At this stage we do not believe there would be a significant number of purchases made independently as offer two provides better cost value." The initial aim of the TDA program at ATC was to generate \$25,000 new revenue. At present, it has generated \$1,300.

Michael Adams<sup>19</sup> from Auckland Theatre Company states,

*It's hard to know why people didn't return for the second offer. Was it because they didn't like the second-offer package? Was it because they didn't want to go to any of the shows on offer? Or did they feel they didn't need supporting any further?*

### Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra (APO)

The APO initiated its TDA pilot project in November 2007. This organisation achieved slightly better results than the ATC by attracting 602 participants to offer one and retaining 37 of them (6% of sample) for offer two. This result again fell short of the predication of 30% return paying audiences espoused by TDA's creator, Andrew McIntyre. Stuart Angel<sup>20</sup> from Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra states,

We can't compare ourselves to Britain because the environments are different. We have to set realistic targets for Auckland because we're not going to get one-third of our test drivers to become long-term supporters.

Yet in Australia the TT program did generate a 30% participant return rate for the performing arts organisations participating in the study.

### Northern Australian Regional Performing Arts Centres Association (NARPACA<sup>21</sup>)

The TT program sought to build new audiences both in the short and long term for fourteen regional performing arts centres (PACs)<sup>22</sup> in Queensland and the Northern Territory. The program sought 336 participants (24 people at each of the 14 venues) and arrived at 237 in total.

From March 2004-June 2006, TT generated a 110%<sup>23</sup> increase in ticket purchases by all participants in the project<sup>24</sup>. Twenty-nine percent of all participants returned, on average more than once, which was 177% up on their previous attendance. Factoring in the guests that they brought with them resulted in a ticket multiplier of 397% per participant (or a ratio of 3.97 to 1). Therefore, the ratio of ticket purchases to participant effectively reimbursed the PACs (within 12 months) more than the equivalent cost of three complimentary tickets as originally provided.

According to the box office returns figures (up to June 2006), many of the participants purchasing tickets chose to return to their PAC more than once. Also important to note was the finding that approximately 9% of participants in TT during 2004 returned to their PAC for the first time in 2006. This indicated that other participants in the 2005 cohort could return in 2007 or 2008 further increasing the percentage of new audiences paying full price for tickets at their local PAC.

The final questionnaire sent home to participants to complete found that 73.5% of the respondents had encouraged others in their community to attend the local PAC since taking part in the *Talking Theatre* project. This in turn saw other new audiences introduced to the PACs. Most of the returning participants brought 1-4 paying guests with them who were not in the TT program<sup>25</sup>. TT assisted the PACs to further tap into new markets as participants persuaded peers within their networks to begin purchasing tickets to live performance. Not only were 93% of the respondents more interested in live performances since taking part in TT, but 31.5% paid to attend a performance at their local PAC *during* their involvement in the program.

## Conclusion

Both Talking Theatre and Test Drive the Arts believe it is important to develop new audiences for the performing arts sector to ensure its long-term sustainability and growth. Both audience development schemes personally invite non-attenders to experience the arts first-hand at no charge to reduce some of the initial barriers to attendance. Both state that they can retain for performing arts organisations on average a 30% return rate by those who participate in the programs. Yet, ideology separates these two methodologies ensuring the overall manner in which research is carried out and the central goal that drives each of them is dichotomised. Talking Theatre's 'listen and learn' policy means knowledge transfer is core, whereas Test Drive the Arts' 'try before you buy' mantra has monetary transaction at its heart. Following the initial introduction to the arts, Test Drive the Arts operates through a series of lessening discounts to wean the new audiences into becoming regular attenders. Talking Theatre relies on a series of free attendances with strong emphasis on post-performance discussion to develop knowledge and expectation within the new audiences providing the tools for future paid attendance. Achieving the same percentage of returns as Test Drive the Arts, Talking Theatre also generates far more detail and insight into new audiences' expectations, reactions, suggestions, and development via the relationships that have been built between the performing arts organisations and the new audiences, and between the new audience members themselves.

Current literature states that relationship building is only possible between performing arts organisations and their existing customers. This paper contends that relationship marketing can be utilised to develop new audiences too and it seems the most appropriate way to gain the best outcomes from non-attenders and organisations. The next step is to investigate whether other *new audience* development programs are grounded in relational concepts and to benchmark these programs against traditional transactional marketing methods.

Test Drive the Arts pilot projects in New Zealand last year fell well short of the retention rate expected based on previous UK results. A Test Drive the Arts pilot project is now operating in Queensland, Australia with many performing arts organisations involved. The outcomes of this study are eagerly awaited to see if this pilot achieves results in keeping with TDA UK or with TDA NZ. Many of the participating organisations in the TDA Queensland pilot were part of the Talking Theatre program (2004-2006) and achieved on average a 30% return rate from those in the program. The next logical step is to test Talking Theatre in the organisations associated with the New Zealand TDA pilot to see if results such as this can be achieved there.

Meantime, an adapted version of Talking Theatre is planned to be trialled in the wider regional arts community in Australia from 2009-10. This audience development project will see if the Talking Theatre approach can translate to increased patronage for galleries, museums, and other community-run arts and cultural events. The very nature of community (an inter-connection of multiple relationships) predicts that Talking Theatre will be successful in this environment.

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<sup>1</sup> O'Regan 2002; Hayes & Slater 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Talking Theatre: An audience development programme for regional Queensland and the Northern Territory* (2004-2006) was a three year research project funded by the Australian Research Council, Northern Australia Regional Performing Arts Centres Association, Arts Queensland, Arts Northern Territory, and the Queensland University of Technology. Chief investigators on this project were Dr Jacqueline Martin, Associate Professor Jennifer Radbourne, Associate Professor Brad Haseman, and Dr Rebecca Scollen.

*Talking Theatre* (TT) sought to build new audiences both in the short and long term for the fourteen regional PACs associated with the project. The research endeavoured to develop a profile of non-theatre-goers in regional areas, to understand their reasons for non-attendance, and to discover their reactions to live performances, and to the PACs who presented them.

The goal of TT was to make contact with regional non-theatre-goers and to uncover their attitudes to the performing arts industry and in particular to the fourteen participating PACs; including their programming, pricing, promotion, and facilities. By listening to the views of the selected participants in each of the regions, the PACs were placed in a stronger position to make effective decisions to positively impact on this significant segment of the community – interested non-theatre-goers.

A professional development component of TT sought to provide PAC staff and volunteers with the capacity to successfully undertake research of this nature in the future as part of an ongoing commitment to audience development and relationship building.

<sup>3</sup> Werner, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Swanson and Davis, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> McNaughton, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Newztel News Agency Ltd, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Rentschler *etal*, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Rentschler *etal*, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The post-performance questionnaire has a closed format to generate quantitative data for statistical purposes.

<sup>10</sup> Martin, J. & Sauter, W., 1995.

<sup>11</sup> A significant number of recent academic arts and arts marketing publications in Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand have documented theatre, museum and gallery projects now engaging front-of-house staff in qualitative research aimed at

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measuring how values, emotions, show experience and service quality affect overall customer satisfaction and attendance intention (Scollen, 2007; Barlow & Shibli 2007; Hume, Sullivan Mort & Winzar 2007; Slater 2007; Boyle 2007; Werner 2003; Davies 2005; and McCarthy, Brooks, Lowell & Zakaras, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Results derived from the final questionnaire sent home to all participants and completed and returned by 57% of the sample.

<sup>13</sup> Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Hennig-Thurau & Hansen 2000, Hayes & Slater 2002, Rentschler *etal* 2002.

<sup>15</sup> McDonald & Harrison 2002; Hayes & Slater 2002; Slater 2007; Davies 2005; and Boyle 2007.

<sup>16</sup> O'Regan 2002; Costantoura 2001; and DiMaggio and Pettit 1999.

<sup>17</sup> McIntyre in RNZ "Arts on Sunday", 2006.

<sup>18</sup> RNZ "Arts on Sunday", 2006.

<sup>19</sup> McNaughton, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> McNaughton, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> The Northern Australian Regional Performing Arts Centres Association (NARPACA) is a large regional theatre network formed in 1983 as an administrative support group focused on the activities and requirements of regional performing arts centres (PACs) throughout northern Australia. The great distances between the individual PACs and between northern Australia and the country's southern states (where much of the resources for the arts were located) meant that this network was vital in overcoming isolation and invisibility. Today NARPACA also operates as a powerful lobby that presides over a touring circuit of immense value. The fourteen participating PACs are situated in towns or cities that range in population size from 9,000 to 200,000 people. The locales vary from tropical, sub-tropical, hinterland, grassland, and desert, with a plethora of industries (eg. rural, mining, manufacturing, education, health, and tourism) that employ the residents. Each PAC differs in size (venue, seating capacity, staffing, and funding), which directly impacts on theatre programming, promotion and marketing, and audience research and development.

<sup>22</sup> Araluen Centre in Alice Springs, Darwin Entertainment Centre, Cairns Civic Theatre, Mackay Entertainment Centre, Townsville Civic Theatre, Burdekin Theatre in Ayr, World Theatre in Charters Towers, Mount Isa Civic Centre, Pilbeam Theatre in Rockhampton, Nambour Civic Centre, Caloundra Cultural Centre, Empire Theatre in Toowoomba, Ipswich Civic Hall, and Logan Entertainment Centre.

<sup>23</sup> These statistics are derived from the TT project PACs' participant box office sales figures from March 2004-June 2006. It should be noted that the participant returns



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figures are based on box office data records which only highlight the names of those who have purchased the tickets. Therefore, if participants returned but their partners or friends (who were not in TT) purchased the tickets on their behalf, these paying participants and their guests will not have been included in this statistical analysis.

<sup>24</sup> The World Theatre was not included in the results presented here because no members of the public elected to participate in the TT program in Charters Towers.

<sup>25</sup> It is unclear whether the results of TDA in the UK included the number of guests who began attending performances (or whether participants returned with guests).