CASE STUDY: PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

The Perth International Arts Festival is the oldest annual international multi-arts festival in the southern hemisphere. The three-week long festival, held annually in February, attracts more than 300,000 patrons to events in Perth and as well as in the Great Southern region. It has grown in the past fifty-five years to become a festival of major international standing with an enviable worldwide reputation and an astonishing breadth of work.

Coralie Stupart, marketing and audience development manager with the Perth Festival, works closely with Lisa Lough from CATALYSE® to design the annual research program, the results of which are a key strategic resource for the organisation. Since the first market segmentation research in 2005, Coralie and Lisa have worked closely to develop a research tool that provides actionable information and to develop an organisational culture that embraces the research and uses it as a basis for constructive analysis and continual improvement.

The 2005 market segmentation research identified eight community segments, four of which are festival supporters to varying degrees, and four of which present an opportunity to build involvement with the festival. Details about each segment covers demographic data, who comes to what performances, what attracts them to attend, and much more that assists in the marketing process. Having these market segments changed the way the festival operated from that point, the segments being used as a basis for programming and marketing decisions with the aim of continually increasing the paid audience at each festival. The market segments are now part of the organisational language, with everyone in the organisation aware of the segments and constantly thinking about what would appeal to each segment as a way of meeting their needs, boosting their festival experience, and constantly improving what is on offer.

During the festival, research on patron experiences is done onsite at selected events to monitor the segments, which leads to decisions about how to increase commitment, build a larger percentage of people who are diehard festival fans, and what programming might bring new people into events. The patron experience research tests the extent to which people know it is a festival event and their commitment to the festival, and also rates the event experience by looking at such factors as venue, ambience, performers, value for money, quality of sound and vision, seating, customer service, and a range of other factors. The research data and analysis enable proactive decisions to be made so as to better service patrons, to remove barriers to their participation, and to improve style, tone, and content of messages.

A brand perceptions study is also undertaken each year to determine how the community feels about the festival and the festival brand. This is a phone survey, that has a sample of 400 and a more strategic focus. Results of the research are eagerly anticipated, and are scrutinised and discussed at length by the whole organisation. The value of the research findings includes:

- the board looks for information about the health of the brand and for strategic insights
- the general manager and artistic director use the information in setting strategic direction; with a new artistic director appointed every four years the research results are a good source of background information
- programming and production staff look for evaluations of programming decisions, event experience, venue favourability, and whatever will be helpful in planning for the following year
- ticketing and operations staff look at ticketing preferences, customer service issues, human resources and brand management issues, and points to focus on during inductions
- the sponsorship team looks for patron profiles to match with sponsor requests
- the marketing staff looks at audience development and brand management, information which feeds into decisions about marketing planning and how to build more engagement with the arts
- the public relations team works closely with the marketing and audience development team to develop key messages and to constantly improve the process of building relationships with the audience segments.

Coralie Stupart is working to an objective to double the paid audience over a five-year period. From her perspective, research is a critical input to this objective.

Contributed by Gae Synnott