

PLAYING THE JOKER MARKETING AND AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

OVERVIEW

Playing the Joker toured to 18 locations, across a range of unconventional performance spaces primarily made up of sport clubs and hospitality venues. Four performances didn't take place due to poor sales and, in once instance, a clash of events.

Each participating host venue was offered a free schools or college performance on the day of their event. Only one club, Leigh, took up the offer and this was only a partial success as a communication breakdown meant the college knew very little about the show and, as a result, hadn't spread the word effectively. The feeling was that the time of year (May) was a contributing factor to the apparent disinterest from educational establishments as exams and other summer term commitments prevented buy in. Despite working on booking the tour from December 2013 onwards there was still a feeling that more time was needed for the host clubs to broker these relationships.

This was a huge disappointment for Red Ladder as it was genuinely thought that sports clubs may have better and stronger links with schools and colleges and these could be utilised by the company to re-engage with the educational sector right across the north of England.

Red Ladder found that there were incredibly varied attendance numbers with each club they toured to. What has been clear throughout the project is the necessity of marketing activity directly from the club to their members, as opposed to the visiting company.

Clubs who worked alongside sports foundations to promote the production had successful attendance rates, received positive responses from their club members about the play and hosted lively and exciting debates in their post-show discussions.

Performances which took place off the club's grounds did not achieve as high attendance rates, and feedback from audience members demonstrated that the novelty of a new kind of entertainment at their local club was a great persuader in their decision making to take the risk of coming to see something new.

Overall, the tour went incredibly well. This was newly chartered territory for Red Ladder and all the participating venues, and saw us host a range of accompanying activities including post show panel discussions, a new sports and arts marketing forum and a mid-morning show with free bacon butties.

TWITTER FEEDBACK

@CircleCIC – Big thanks to @RochdaleHornets& @RedLadderTheatr for really looking after us tonight at Playing The Joker!

@Fevcommunity – Great turn out for ‘playing the joker’ thanks to all who supported! Great piece of theatre, so pleased we were able to stage the performance

@FlatCapperette – Great evening watching Playing The Joker by @RedLadderTheatr at Fev. Thanks @Fevcommunity for putting it on

@Suzybluegrass – Great night @HunsletHawksRL tonight with @RedLadderTheatr ‘Playing The Joker’ is a knockout performance! Good luck with rest of tour.

@JamesFrewer – Brilliant to see @RedLadderTheatr’s show #playingthejoker – top show

MONITORING

Monitoring audience numbers, data collection and feedback was a challenge during this tour. Through the majority of the sports clubs we worked with, their internal/box office systems did not allow for us to collect simple box office data.

The majority of tickets sold were on the door, as opposed to pre-sales, and we were able to calculate the following:

- 730 people came to see Playing The Joker over the course of the tour
- 63% were between the ages of 25 – 64
- 18% were 65 or over
- 18% were 25 or under

We believe the main character of Eddie Waring impacted on this, as a figurehead of rugby league history his story would appeal primarily to older generations.

We also handed out small feedback postcards at the beginning of each performance. This questionnaire was deliberately short in order to encourage more attenders to complete them.

We received 310 filled out feedback cards throughout the Playing The Joker tour. Our questions were very simple, but do show a great deal about crossover audiences between sports and arts, as well as first time arts attenders:

- 10% of those who filled out the feedback form had never seen a play before.
- Of those 10%, 67% are more likely to attend more theatre as a result of seeing Playing The Joker.
- 26% attend the theatre once per year.
- 63% attend the theatre more than once per year, demonstrating a large amount of cross over between sports and arts audiences.
- Finally, 89% of those who filled out the feedback cards will attend the theatre again in the future.

We also obtained 151 new contact details from attenders wishing to subscribe to the monthly Red Ladder newsletter.

SPORTS AND ARTS MARKETING FORUM

At the end of the tour, Red Ladder hosted a new Sports and Arts Marketing Forum at Hull Truck Theatre. All participating rugby clubs and organisations from the Playing the Joker tour were invited, as well as a few key players in arts marketing and producing.

The forum was designed to broker new partnerships across sports and arts, join audience development initiatives across the two industries and get to grips with how to encourage theatre first timers to support their local arts community as well as their team.

A full report has been written and distributed following the forum, and it was decided at the end of the meeting that to continue and grow this new network, it would need the following:

- Clear objectives for each meeting focussing on how we can grow our audiences.
- Smaller, local networks to begin with which can potentially feed into one another once a year.

This meeting demonstrated the value of partnerships between sports and arts. Many topics were discussed, and the similarities between the two industries highlighted. By the end of the meeting, new partnerships were already being discussed between Hull Truck, Hull Kingston Rovers and the Rugby Football League including their Heritage Section for the Hull City of Culture programme of events.

LESSONS LEARNT

At the beginning of the forum an evaluation of the tour took place with the participating sports venues. Some of their perspectives were:

HULL KINGSTON ROVERS– Thought that an audience of 70 was low attendance, which was interesting as those from arts organisations believed this to be a great success.

The play forced them to think ‘outside of the box’ when marketing it: including approaching local businesses and hosting a Hull Daily Mail Quiz.

They realised £10 was too high a ticket price for their club members.

Hull University have now approached them to use their North Stand (where PTJ played) as a more regular arts venue.

LEEDS RHINOS – A great opening success, pitched directly towards their commercial members alongside a range of activities including dinner and post show discussions.

In hindsight, they would have also liked to have hosted a performance without dinner, in order to encourage more of their fan base to attend the play.

CASTLEFORD TIGERS – Unfortunately had to cancel their performance due to additional activities programmed in for that day, and as a result of losing the member of staff who originally booked the play.

QUEENS HOTEL – Didn't publicise the performance to their customers, and weren't invested enough in the play to have an impact on the audience numbers.

RED LADDER THEATRE COMPANY – The offer of Q & A sessions whilst interesting weren't perceived as adding value to the performance in terms of ticket price and so some of the venues' ticket prices were, on reflection, too high. A fairly universal theme was how surprised host clubs and audience members were in the quality of the script and performances. On many occasions people said 'they enjoyed it far more than they thought they would' and 'I didn't really know what to expect' and so, perhaps, some of the print and website information could have given more detail.

We had assumed that clubs would take performances and connect them to match days which wasn't the case as match days, universally, were already extremely busy and clubs didn't have space or time to promote something on top of the usual activities such as corporate lunches, speakers, competitions etc.

Where the event worked best was where a particular group or individual took hold of the project and ran with it. From the outside, whatever Red Ladder seemed to do, had little or no effect on audience numbers – they were, pretty much, driven from the host organisations. Despite great support from the Rugby Football League and Forty: 20 magazine, a strong press campaign and individual marketing initiatives at certain clubs if the host venue didn't embrace the project fully then numbers were disappointing.

At the Queens Hotel we failed, to a certain degree, to attract an 'arts crowd' and in Masham, similarly, a more traditional arts venue couldn't attract an audience.

The success of touring to untraditional performance spaces was often down to the organisation's structure. The culture of the club has been very important – it has needed a strong sense of community in order to be able to tap into an audience willing to take the risk on an arts event.

Press and PR Report – April 2014, Laura Barr

Playing the Joker

This is a new production of Anthony Clavane's show which opened as part of West Yorkshire Playhouse's 'A Play, A Pie and A Pint' night in November 2013. Red Ladder has received ACE Strategic Touring Fund money to tour the show to rugby clubs and non-theatre venues in Yorkshire and the North West.

Press-wise, there has been a regional focus to the campaign, rather than a national focus – partly because it's not a new show, and also partly because the tour is exclusively in the North. Coverage has focused on Yorkshire and the North West, covering areas of the tour.

We have concentrated on the angle of bringing theatre to non-theatre venues, attracting local non-arts crowds.

Anthony has done a great job on the interviewing front with a number of regional papers, including the Yorkshire Post and the Hull Daily Mail.

Radio coverage has included a slot on Peter Sandeman show on BBC Radio Leeds.

The press release was sent to over 220 arts/news related contacts in and around Yorkshire, covering each of the touring areas. Follow ups were established with much of the local areas where the tour is located and the following were secured:

Press includes:

Yorkshire Post

Nick Ahad interview with Anthony. 2 May

Hull Daily Mail

Interview with Anthony. 2 May

Wakefield Express – this will also be covered in the Pontefract & Castleford paper

Interview with Anthony. w/c 5 May

The Big Bookend

<http://theleedsbigbookend.wordpress.com/2014/04/23/playing-the-joker-opens-the-big-bookend-festival-2014/>

Hull Daily Mail

<http://www.hulldailymail.co.uk/Playing-Joker-hit-rugby-league-play-Hull-KR-s-KC/story-20978805-detail/story.html>

The Leigh Journal

http://www.leighjournal.co.uk/sport/leighcenturions/11123808.Playing_The_Joker_at_Leigh_Centurions/

North Leeds Life

<http://www.northleedslifegroup.com/2014/04/15/playing-the-joker-begins-rugby-club-tour/>

Big Issue in the North

<http://www.bigissueinthenorth.com/category/magazine/select>

A BRAND NEW SMASH HIT RUGBY LEAGUE PLAY, BY AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR & SUNDAY MIRROR SPORTS JOURNALIST ANTHONY CLAVANE.

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PLAYING — THE JOKER —



Sports and Arts Marketing Forum

Thursday 22nd May at Hull Truck Theatre

REPORT

In attendance:

Red Ladder – Emma Beverley, Chris Lloyd and Rod Dixon

Hull Truck – Kate Denby

Middle Child Theatre – Mungo Arney and Paul Smith

Leeds Rhinos – Gary Hetherington

Castleford Tigers – Jackie Wales

Rugby Football League – Julia Lee, Victoria Dawson and Tony Collins

1. **Playing The Joker Tour – update**

Chris Lloyd, Red Ladder's Producer, gave a quick update on the Playing The Joker tour through rugby league clubs, which was due to finish that evening in Hull at Fruit in Hull.

Red Ladder found that there were incredibly varied attendance numbers with each club they toured to. What has been clear throughout the project is the necessity of marketing activity directly from the club to their members, as opposed to the visiting company.

Clubs who worked alongside sports foundations to promote the production had incredibly successful attendance rates, received positive responses from their club members about the play and hosted lively and exciting debates in their post-show discussions.

Performances which took place off the club's grounds did not achieve as high attendance rates, and feedback from audience members demonstrated that the novelty of a new kind of entertainment at their local club was a great persuader in their decision making to take the risk of coming to see something new.

Some hosting venue's perspectives:

HULL KINGSTON ROVERS – Thought that an audience of 70 was low attendance, which was interesting as those from arts organisations believed this to be a great success.

The play forced them to think 'outside of the box' when marketing it: including approaching local businesses and hosting a Hull Daily Mail Quiz.

They realised £10 was too high a ticket price for their club members.

Hull University have now approached them to use their North Stand (where PTJ played) as a more regular arts venue.

LEEDS RHINOS – A great opening success, pitched directly towards their commercial members alongside a range of activities including dinner and post show discussions.

In hindsight, they would have also liked to have hosted a performance without dinner, in order to encourage more of their fan base to attend the play.

FEATHERSTONE ROVERS – Brought in a youth group booking.

CASTLEFORD TIGERS – Unfortunately had to cancel their performance due to additional activities programmed in for that day, and as a result of losing the member of staff who originally booked the play.

QUEENS HOTEL – Didn't publicise the performance to their customers, and weren't invested enough in the play to have an impact on the audience numbers.

Conclusion: is the success of touring to untraditional performance spaces down to the organisation's structure? The culture of the club has been very important – it has needed a strong sense of community in order to be able to tap into an audience willing to take the risk on an arts event.

2. Ticketing

A question regarding ticket offers and their success rates was posed to those representing sports clubs.

LEEDS RHINOS – Have a text message scheme offering £2 off a match ticket if bought before midnight the night before the match. This message is sent to 50,000 people who they choose through the demographics highlighted in their data. Rhinos make a specific effort to capture detailed data about their fan base, and are very specific with who they target and why for any ticket offers.

Rhinos also conducted some research into the behaviour of their season ticket holders:

- 60% of their season ticket buyers do not renew after the first year.
- 40% renew, but 30% of these people do not renew after their second year.
- The optimum for season ticket holders is 7 years: after this they are 90% likely to renew their season ticket every year.

Rhinos use this data when deciding what ticket offers to send out, and to ensure they are careful not to give more recent season ticket buyers a better offer than those who do renew.

All clubs agreed that any ticket offers need to be planned way in advance of the start of a season, and be strategic as opposed to a last minute solution to low sales.

Could theatres adopt season tickets?

For a venue in Cumbria this worked very well – they simply worked out the average spend of their database and offered a season ticket which fit within that. An important note – an eclectic range of events should be available but without too many options which may make it confusing.

Additional charges for card payments on theatre tickets and high parking fees can often deter people from attending the theatre – the whole package needs to be thought through for a night of entertainment, not just the performance.

3. Theatre attenders vs Sports fan bases

THEATRES – it was questioned whether for a theatre the challenge comes from hosting different productions each week, which makes encouraging repeat attenders difficult as it is never the same product.

Perhaps the familiarity of a sport makes communicating what the event is much simpler. Whereas with an arts piece, the quality can often vary and is very subjective – whilst an audience member may enjoy a solo performance by one artist, it is not guaranteed that they will enjoy a solo performance by another artist a week later.

MIDDLE CHILD – often talk about ‘risk’ when marketing an event. How big is the risk for your audience? £10 for a ticket is a large risk for an event which may not be properly explained in all of your marketing activity.

[Here it was suggested that the posters and flyers for Playing The Joker may not have been literal enough, e.g. club specific print may have been more beneficial]

Middle Child is currently trialling anew audience development tool by attaching familiar events, such as bingo and quizzes, to arts events. They are doing it through their ‘Not Quite A Pub Quiz’ event at Fruit, Hull.

It was agreed across the board that there is a 3 step process to encouraging first time arts attenders to become returning and regular audiences:

1. They are unfamiliar and come across an arts event outside on ‘home turf’ e.g. at their local sports club.
2. They become slightly familiar, and attend another arts event at the same venue.
3. They are familiar, and now comfortable enough to attend an arts event at their local arts venue.

It is necessary to create comfort zone, as places such as theatres and galleries still can have an intimidating position in their community – associated with the white, middle class elitist stereotype.

Whereas a sports club has a personality, often through one person that governs that relationship (e.g. a manager or Chief Executive) – this encourages an affiliation and affection towards their building.

4. Ambassadors

HULL TRUCK – are currently trying to develop an ambassadors group.

LEEDS RHINOS – Have a successful ambassadors scheme which they have grown over the last 2 ½ years. Their process, roughly, included:

1. Targeting community groups and visiting their sessions to begin conversations.

2. Spreading into local schools, through the community groups, and from there into local businesses.
3. Beginning to create 'fan clubs' who have their own base – e.g. a pub or a café – which becomes a hub for their meetings.
4. Encouraging regular meetings in these hubs as social occasions.

In order to make this scheme a success, it is necessary to put the resources and staff behind it. At least one full time member of staff on the project is required in order to make direct contact with potential members of the ambassadors scheme, and put in the ground work to pull it off.

"It may look expensive to begin with, but the reward is completely worth it."

5. **Playing away from home**

TOURING COMPANIES – In some senses, touring theatre companies are always the away team.

What conversation needs to be had between visiting companies and venues about looking after new audiences those companies may have developed for their building? E.g. a special ticket offer for bringing in our 'away fans'.

OWNERSHIP – Whose audience is it? If an audience base goes from Leeds Rhinos to the West Yorkshire Playhouse, who facilitates that?

A more prominent network between untraditional arts spaces and local arts venues should be encouraged in order to keep audiences circulating across a broad set of events.

e.g. Sports clubs may have a dance programme, but may struggle to get funding from local authorities for it. Partnering with a dance company or arts venue could assist in raising these funds and developing audiences for the programme from traditional arts attenders and sport attenders.

HULL CITY OF CULTURE – a potential event to trail this with between Hull Truck and Hull Kingston Rovers.

6. **What is the benefit for sports to work with the arts?**

- New audiences: using arts as the vehicle.
- Recognising the synergy between sports and arts: we're all looking for new customers.
- Similar leisure industries: lots of crossover of interests.
- Press/PR benefits: sports can often be left in the back pages.
- An obligation to bring more culture to their fans.
- Gives sports the opportunity to tell their story through a new avenue.

7. **Legacy of the Sports and Arts Marketing Forum**

If we were to continue and grow this new network, it would need the following:

- Clear objectives for each meeting focussing on how we can grow our audiences.
- Smaller, local networks to begin with which can potentially feed into one another once a year.

This process has demonstrated the value of partnerships between sports and arts.

If anybody is interested in hosting one of these forums, please get in touch with Chris Lloyd – chris@redladder.co.uk

8. Playing The Joker Statistics

We received 310 filled out feedback cards throughout the Playing The Joker tour. Our questions were very simple, but do show a great deal about crossover audiences between sports and arts, as well as first time arts attenders:

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- 26% attend the theatre once per year.
- 67% attend the theatre more than once per year, demonstrating a large amount of cross over between sports and arts audiences.
- Finally, 89% of those who filled out the feedback cards will attend the theatre again in the future.

Following the tour we obtained 151 new email addresses to sign up for regular updates from Red Ladder. A follow up email has been sent, and so far 53% of those we sent it to have opened and clicked through to further links about our work.