



Something Like Empathy, Nwando Ebizie

Online Audiences Toolkit



Finding the people that matter to you

The influence of digital technology on cultural experiences has grown exponentially in recent years. For me, this hasn't been about organisations gaining millions of followers online. Rather, the magic is connecting arts and cultural work with people who may not have known it existed otherwise, for whom it truly resonates.

With venues closed and performances and exhibitions cancelled during COVID-19, arts and cultural organisations found themselves having to evolve at pace to meet the needs of audiences who no longer had the choice to attend in person. Many lessons were learned, with new technologies and approaches adopted at astounding speed during the most stressful of times for the sector.

And while doors have slowly reopened, those digital audiences remain – with new expectations. There is now huge potential for the sector to continue to reach people online, unrestricted by geography or situation.

But the growth of digital can be challenging: we know from our work that it can be overwhelming to wade through the technology, jargon, platforms and content to get to the bottom of what is really worthwhile for your organisation.

We hope this Online Audiences Toolkit will help you address this challenge. Inside you will find guidance on how to find your target audiences online; how to produce engaging digital content, and how to measure your success.

I have seen first-hand how powerful it can be to discover audiences for your work that you never knew existed, or would have thought impossible to reach, and I hope that this guide can help you take your next steps towards them.

There are audiences online waiting to see your work – let's get started!

Fiona Morris is Chief Executive and Creative Director, The Space.

Contributors



Katie Connolly

Digital Producer, The Space

Katie is a digital producer who has worked with creatives and creative organisations across the UK to produce digital work that focuses on new platforms and takes advantage of new distribution opportunities.

She has worked in a range of strategic and digital management roles in the public, charity and academic sector, including all of the BBC's major youth brands, Youth Sport Trust and University of Birmingham.

Katie was an early member of the BBC's digital guerillas innovation group, a team of specialists developing digital content for BBC TV, radio and digital, with a focus on young and diverse audiences. While there, she worked with digital partners including Radio 1, CBBC and BBC Three, before being asked to join the BBC Three team full-time.



John White

Chief Operating Officer, The Space

John has overall responsibility for the operational delivery of The Space's programmes. Since 2013, he has managed the process of commissioning over 350 digital projects from UK arts and cultural organisations and overseen training programmes including workshops, mentoring and the provision of online learning materials. John has 20 years' experience as a digital consultant, advising Arts Council England, the BBC and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, amongst others. He has led and contributed to several policy initiatives in the DCMS's Culture is Digital programme.

John was previously Managing Director of Amuzo, a BAFTA-nominated, multi-award winning games agency, where he ran a digital team delivering games for clients including LEGO, CBBC, Disney and Warner Bros. Prior to this, John was Commercial Director and digital consultant at marketing agency VLP where he set up its interactive division, working with clients including the Radio Authority, Railtrack and the Richard Rogers Partnership.



Sarah Fortescue

Head of Distribution, The Space

Sarah specialises in distribution within the broadcast and digital sectors. Her projects have featured on the BBC, Channel 4, Sky Arts, Nowness and The Guardian. Sarah has worked with organisations on a range of campaigns, including cinema distribution and DVD creation, pay-per-view, SVOD and AVOD distribution. She has also served as Executive Producer on a number of interactive projects, which have been nominated for a range of international awards including a Webby.



Rob Lindsay

Head of Programmes, The Space

Rob is The Space's Head of Programmes, providing guidance to organisations on digital production and audience engagement. He has worked in arts and broadcast for almost two decades, including positions with the BBC and Birmingham Royal Ballet, and in addition to his work for The Space, is guest lecturer at University of Birmingham, where he delivers an MA module in Social Action Video.



Rachel Broomhead

Content Researcher and Writer

Rachel is a writer, editor and digital producer with a background in the museums and heritage sector. In her digital production work she specialises in long-form storytelling and experiments widely with new platforms and formats to reach new audiences. In 2019 she was the Executive Producer on the English Heritage podcast Speaking with Shadows, which won the 2020 UK Heritage Award for Best Contribution to Heritage.

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Part 1: Who?

How to work
out who
your current
and target
audiences are



What do we mean by online audiences?

Historically, when you said “audiences” to cultural organisations, they thought of their *physical* audiences: the people who sit in their concert halls, theatres and exhibitions.

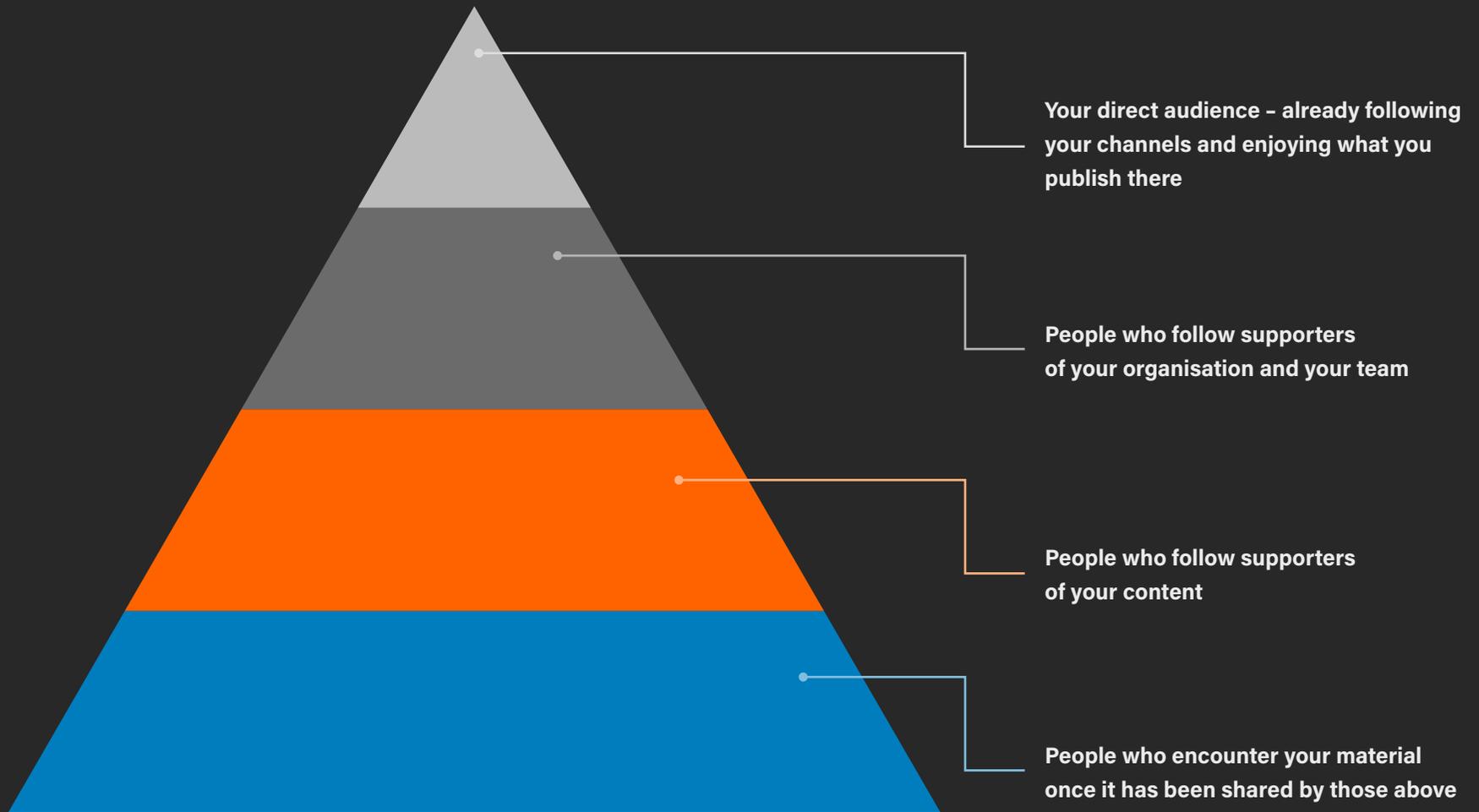
But virtual audiences have become increasingly important to everyone, and your organisation has one: whether that’s the people who buy tickets through your website, who like a Facebook or Instagram post about an upcoming event, read your programme notes online or watch a short video interview with a featured artist. And whatever your size or profile as a company, that virtual audience has potential to grow.

Online audiences might overlap with the physical audiences coming into your space or building. But they might be unique. In fact, online engagement may be the only way they interact with your project or organisation ever. Your physical audience may be limited by location, but your online audience has no limit. Therefore, it’s worth thinking about how to make their digital journeys as powerful as they would be if they were discovering content in the organisation’s main physical space.

Your online audience may also include people who are being introduced or reintroduced to your work and who you can attract to an event, exhibition, visit or performance with content that’s pitched in the right tone and on the right platform for them.



Your online audience is split into four tiers, each increasing in its potential size if you engage well with them.



What do we mean by online audience engagement?

In its broadest sense, 'online audience engagement' means publishing content online and using digital means to attract audiences to it. However, arts and cultural organisations can engage with audiences online in many different ways and for many different reasons. Here's just a sample:

To show art/creative work

This could be by capturing an artwork, installation or performance through video, photographs, or sound recording or through digitising your collection or library.

To deepen the knowledge and understanding of an artwork/collection of works

This could be through articles, podcasts or video content and allows your audience to build their knowledge about work you are performing or hosting.

To interact directly with audiences

This might be through one or more of your social media channels and allows you to build a conversation and a community around your work.

To introduce your brand to a wider audience

This might be through your own social media channels or by partnering with other organisations, influencers or media outlets in order to connect you to a broader audience who might be interested in your work.

To highlight a certain event, show or experience you are hosting now or in the future

This is digital marketing where you are aiming to convert those engaging with your content online into ticket buyers.

To offer digital tools to help fans of your work to act as online ambassadors

You may have supporters who are active online, and perhaps even have substantial numbers of followers on social media. It can be extremely beneficial to supply this type of supporter with the kind of digital content that will empower them to champion your organisation to their followers.

To nurture support and interest in your art form more broadly

Your aim may not always be organisation-specific – projects like World Ballet Day bring together companies from all over the world to raise the profile of an art form together.



What is an online audiences audit?

Not sure how your digital content is being received online? Tried a few things out but not sure who watched or listened to them, or whether to do more?

It can be helpful to take stock and evaluate your online offer and audiences. For this we recommend doing an online audience audit.

This is an assessment of your current digital audience: who they are, what they like and what they respond to. It may also include where they are based, what their interests are and their ages, depending what information you can obtain. This enables you to work out who is in your current base audience, and from there you can work out where there are opportunities to develop.

During an audience audit, you will assess:

- Who is following you and interacting with your content on social media platforms
- How your content is doing: what is being clicked, shared and commented on
- What it feels like to be in your digital spaces – your website and your social media platforms.



For more details about metrics and how to use them, please see [Part 5](#)



Rob Lindsay, Head of Programmes at The Space, explains the key to an audience audit:

“Leave your ego at the door and be brutally honest with yourself – you may represent a huge institution of great legacy and acclaim but that doesn’t mean your online content is working. It also doesn’t mean that you already have the broad, diverse audience you would like.”

He adds that you also need to ask yourself, if someone on your team is already putting lots of energy into digital, is it having any results? And are the results worth the time and effort currently being invested, or could that energy be better spent elsewhere?

How can I do an online audiences audit?

There are lots of different analytics packages that are available to help you to assess who is engaging with your content – almost all the big social media companies offer them and Google Analytics has a free service that allows you to measure and track the activity of visitors to your website as well as their demographics and behaviours.

Google Analytics and social media insight packages can be useful if you are seeking particular information (for example, the average age or the gender split of your online audience). But they ought to come with a health warning: they offer reams of data so you will need to think how best to use it to further your aims and ambitions – data on its own will not increase your online engagement rates or boost your numbers.

Rob explains: ***“There is no point using insight tools unless you are going to give your team the time and space to talk about their implications. Google Analytics is free and you can pull lots of data from it about your website, but it’s not necessarily clear how to use the data it offers or turn it into actionable insights. The problem for many arts organisations is not how to get the data, but what it actually means for you.”***

Nevertheless, Rob says that there are a couple of specific tools that can be very useful:

“On Facebook’s video function, you can see who the most notable sharers of your video content were and how many views they generated. This can be useful to work out who your own pool of ‘influencers’ are.

“On Twitter, you can run a search with a filter that only shows tweets that earned more than a certain number of likes or retweets so you can easily work out what your most popular content has been.”

However, Rob says that an online audience audit can be undertaken simply by setting aside enough time to properly look at your followers on social media, what your most popular content is and by having a frank discussion internally about the look and feel of your website and social media channels.





Rob's top tips for a successful audit are:

- ✓ Be honest – approach the audit as if you are a new team taking over legacy platforms and try to view them objectively.
- ✓ Look closely at who is engaging with your content and who is sharing it – not all your followers are sharing, or even seeing, all your content. Remember that social media is meant to feel social, so personal recommendations are important.
- ✓ Assess what content is working – gaining the most views, shares, comments and likes. Is there a particular type of content that resonates with your audiences?
- ✓ Pay attention to **when** things have done well and **why** they have done well – what has connected the content to the audience?
- ✓ Finally, look at examples of the types of people your organisation would like to target and work out who they are following and what kinds of content they are responding to positively.



For more details about metrics and how to use them, please see [Part 5](#)

Who should my target audiences be and how can I reach them?

After your audit, you will have a picture of your existing audiences – what kinds of people they are (this may include geographic location, age, etc), how and where they are engaging with your content and what has worked best for them.

From here, you can look to increase and/or broaden your online audiences whilst maintaining your current audience base.

Who to target

Your new target audiences should be:

- **Linked to your organisation, art form or project mission**
- **Identifiable**
- **Reachable**
- **In numbers that justify your time and effort**

It's important to remember that you can't be everything to everyone, especially online. This means your target audience shouldn't be 'everyone' or even 'everyone under 30' – this will actually make it harder rather than easier to create content that works. Be focused about who it is you want to connect with online, and how your work will chime with them.

Mindset

The starting point for building online audiences is your approach.

"You need to be serious about it," Rob explains. "One piece of content does not build an audience - you need to be prepared to commit to these audiences long-term and you don't want to lose your existing audiences along the way."

Use your audit

Go back to the results of your audit and see what you discovered. What did you find out about your existing supporters, especially those who have actively engaged with or shared your content in the past? What are they interested in? Do they represent a particular demographic? What is their behaviour online? Why do they care about you?

You can use the information you gleaned from your audit to work out what's working and for whom. The result may be an online audience development plan that is about shifting the tone or the type of your content (or of some of your content), or it may be about making your current content 'stickier' so it's seen and shared by more people, or it may be about trying something new altogether.

As Rob describes, you need to be honest about what has worked and what hasn't worked – if you have 1000 followers on Facebook and your recent Facebook posts have only garnered 3 likes, your content isn't working. Plus, bad posts harm your channel – web and social media companies like YouTube and Facebook are watching how all the content across their sites perform using an algorithm. They know if no one is engaging with your content, and it will make them less likely to foreground the content you post. [See more details on social media algorithms.](#)

Turn your fans into digital cheerleaders

Once you have worked out who your existing supporters are online, the first step in audience-building will be transforming them into cheerleaders who trumpet your work to their networks.

Your most important cheerleaders will be the people who are active online and have their own large and active networks. They are your own pool of 'influencers' so make sure you know who they are at this early stage.

At the beginning of an online audience development push, it's also valuable to speak to senior staff and talent within your organisation/production/studio and ask them about influential contacts who might be willing to act as online ambassadors, says The Space's Head of Distribution Sarah Fortescue.

She suggests going to your Artistic Director, Executive Director or Board members and finding out who they know who could act as online cheerleaders by sharing your content online thereby bringing you to the attention of new audiences. Sarah says: ***"It can be amazing which names fall out of those little black books who are willing to do something relatively small to help an organisation they have a relationship with."***



Case study Spot On Stories

By Rachel Broomhead

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Spot On was in the middle of a live tour. They had been bringing professional performances to under-served communities in rural Lancashire for over 25 years, but now the team behind the project had to find new ways to reach their audiences.

What followed was Spot On Stories: a series of low-cost films delivered via social media channels. Here, we look at how Spot On connected to their target audiences online and the challenges they faced along the way.

Knowing your audiences

Spot On knew they wanted to reach the same audiences they tried to connect with through their live work.

“The people of rural Lancashire don’t have easy access to arts venues, so we bring the arts to them,” says Robert Howell, the co-director of Culturapedia, the company that manages Spot On. *“We stage performances in what we call ‘non-velvet’ spaces – often local libraries and community centres.”*

“The people who come to our live shows are passionate and curious about the arts,” Robert says, *“and often come as families.”* With such long-standing knowledge of their communities and supporters, Spot On’s shows were already audience-focused. *“We had the performers and artists all lined up and ready to go, it was just a case of finding a way to record and deliver the shows and find our audiences online.”*



Finding the medium

In April 2020, Spot On partnered with Lancashire Libraries – and later, The Space – to record a series of low-cost short films. Each film was about 10 minutes long with a focus on storytelling, whether spoken or sung, and featured artists who were already working with Spot On. In this way, the team took advantage of their existing production work and audience knowledge to adapt their live shows for a digital audience.

Katie Connolly, the executive producer on the project, says the task was then to find the audiences and communities that Spot On would have engaged with in person, and seek them out effectively online.

“Simply pressing ‘publish’ on Facebook and YouTube wouldn’t be enough,” she says. “We needed a strategy to ensure the content was shared more widely.”



Reaching your audiences

The key to Spot On's success was targeting their content to existing local communities. *"We talked with the team about their local networks and partners,"* Katie says, *"and they set up a seeding network with the council and regional BBC radio stations, who shared Spot On Stories' videos on their online channels when they were published. This helped find those local audiences, and took views of the videos from in the 100s to in the 1000s."*

In all, Spot On Stories had 21,000 views and engagements across all videos on all channels – a figure they couldn't have reached without their seeding strategy. *"As a small independent arts organisation, we simply don't have the capacity to build up our own social networks as much as we'd like to,"* says Robert. *"Being able to cross-post on the feeds of regional libraries and arts organisations meant that we expanded our reach, while still staying focused on local audiences."*



Robert is frank that there are limitations to digital audience engagement. *"It's hard to replicate the moment in a live performance when you see peoples' faces light up, or feel the emotion in the room – the metrics from YouTube and Facebook simply can't give you that."*

Nevertheless, the responses Spot On Stories received through social media, were overwhelmingly positive, and the team are now working with local supporters to co-curate a new round of films.



Top tips

- Take advantage of your existing audience knowledge
- Be clear about who your target audience are
- Use the networks of partner organisations to boost your reach and find that target audience online.

Part 2: Where?

How to find your target audiences online



Where should my content go?

The short answer to where your content should go is:

You need to be where your audiences are

During your audience audit, you will have worked out which of your platforms are the most impactful and assessed examples of individuals in your existing and target audiences and where they are most active online. You now need to use that research and let it guide you to the platforms where your content will be most effective and engage your target audience.

Rob adds: *“Don’t automatically assume that you have to post content on the site or platform you associate with that type of media, e.g. videos to YouTube. Most content can work across a host of platforms. You need to be where your audience is and make the content work for them there.”*

“Also, try to avoid making people click through to different websites, such as posting a link on Facebook taking people off to your YouTube channel. Audiences like to stay in one place, especially on mobile. You already have their attention, and can post the same message in more than one place, so why create obstacles?”

There are two main arenas online where people consume cultural content:

1. **Social media platforms**
2. **Other websites, including news sites, specialist genre publishers, on-demand/streaming services and so on**

Social media platforms present the biggest opportunities in terms of volume but – depending on your project – more specialist platforms may be worth investigating as they can offer you a more targeted approach.





Social media: where should I start?

When it comes to your social media strategy, our advice is to ask yourself the counterintuitive question:

Which platforms are we going to allow ourselves NOT to post on?

Rob explains: *“When it comes to social media platforms, give yourself a break. There will always be somewhere else that you could put your content and you need to ensure you don’t get sucked down the rabbit hole of trying to be everywhere at once.*

“Remember: if you are successful and build an audience on a certain platform, you will have a community to manage there and this will require time and resources.

“And to build that audience you will need to be present, and consistent – three episodes of a podcast isn’t enough to earn a place in someone’s media diet, and neither is a single Instagram story. You really do need to be serious about your profiles online.

“So, allow yourself to focus, and say no to platforms if they are not right for your audiences or your content. If you’re just there to experiment, then by all means do so, but you don’t need to be everywhere at once – really think about where your target audience is and go to them.”



Can you give me an introduction to the pros and cons of the major social media platforms?

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram: the major social media platforms all have strengths and weaknesses, and they all have restrictions. For example, unless you can get special permission from the platform ('whitelisting'), Twitter limits the length of your videos (except for live streams). Some channels work well for sharing content between users, some rely on hashtags and search terms. So you need to do your research and work out how to make your content work for your chosen platform and its audience.

But what are the different platforms best for?
And what to be wary of?



Facebook



Twitter



Instagram



YouTube

Good for...

- ✓ Making your audience your advocates through its share function
- ✓ Discussion directly with an audience
- ✓ Personal and human stories, which makes it very good for arts content
- ✓ An enormous potential audience thanks to its huge number of users

- ✓ Topical discussion
- ✓ A sense of immediacy
- ✓ Public sector content
- ✓ Playfulness and experimentation
- ✓ Making the news: Twitter is a major source of news stories for online journalists so if your content goes viral on Twitter, it may well be picked up by the mainstream media

- ✓ Visual content
- ✓ Portrait video formats - if you're looking to start a TikTok account then Instagram Reels are a great way of experimenting first, allowing you to develop your video skills with your existing audience
- ✓ Engaged users - as a newer platform, it doesn't yet have the legacy of older and dormant follower accounts that some of the other social media platforms have
- ✓ Posting content for yourself and others to embed on external websites

- ✓ Hosting video content that can be embedded on other websites - this is how it is most flexible and useful
- ✓ As a single source for your content: a YouTube video can be embedded on multiple other sites meaning that if you need to take it down - perhaps after a licensing period expires - and you remove it from YouTube, it will be removed from all the other sites where it was embedded simultaneously

Be wary of...

- ⚠ As a content publisher sometimes it can be difficult to navigate
- ⚠ Organisations with smaller followings can find it hard to gain traction
- ⚠ Analytics data available has been known to change without warning

- ⚠ Arts organisations and professionals getting into internal conversations - there is risk of the sector talking to itself too much on Twitter and not appearing inclusive

- ⚠ There is no native (within-site) way of users sharing existing posts
- ⚠ Discoverability on the site can be challenging as a result, and building an audience requires dedication and time

- ⚠ Using it as the sole location for your video content - it can be very difficult to find things on YouTube unless viewers have searched specifically for your content or channel, or unless you have paid YouTube to promote it. Embedding a YouTube video elsewhere, where your audience may find it more easily, can offer better results
- ⚠ Building subscribers to a YouTube channel often requires a level of resource and regularity that is beyond the means of many arts organisations

How else can I get my work in front of new audiences?

Amazing Men - Eggs Collective



The Space's Head of Distribution Sarah Fortescue sums up her approach to online distribution in one word:

Partnerships

Thinking imaginatively about partnerships

Sarah says the first step for any online distribution strategy is to think about **who** your piece of content might speak to beyond your traditional audience.

"Ask yourself: what is the subject matter of this work? What are its themes? Next, think laterally about which audiences those subjects and themes might appeal to, and then think about where those audiences might be online."

"The next step is to approach those online channels and make a case for partnering with them or for them hosting your content by clearly articulating how your content is relevant to their audience. In my experience, people often say yes if you can demonstrate that you understand their audience and content."

Sarah describes a project she worked on with the contemporary dance company Candoco for The Space. *"Candoco is made up of disabled and non-disabled dancers, so I thought that a national disability equality charity might be interested. I also thought - given the nature of the piece - that the viral content website Upworthy could be a good partner. Upworthy promotes positive and progressive news and were happy to run a feature."*

Scope shared Candoco's Facebook post with their own Facebook audience and a feature on the Candoco dancer Jess Dowdeswell was watched by over 3 million people through the Upworthy site.

Partnerships like these can bring your work to audiences well beyond fans of your artform and can be an effective way of building new audiences online.

Sarah offers her advice on how to brainstorm partners that could work for you.

Ask yourself:

- **What are the messages in this content?**
- **Who do we want to see this who aren't existing arts audiences and how do we get them in front of it?**
- **Who are the organisations that will be interested in the themes of this content?**
- **Who are potential ambassadors for this work, either because of their relationship with us as an organisation or because of their interests?**



Partner brands can add stardust, not just numbers

In terms of partnerships, it's also worth thinking about the context they provide for your work. Certain brands can add stardust and authority to your project. These sites may not be where your work gets the most views or clicks, but may give kudos to your project that adds considerable value and brings it to the attention of opinion-makers in your sector.

Making your content into a story makes it easy for partners

When you are approaching partners, especially news and arts websites, you need to think like a journalist and transform your piece, its stars or its themes into a narrative with a hook. You also need to make it clear when you contact them **why** the content is relevant to them and will resonate on their site.

Sarah explains: *"I like to think about it as a hybrid of PR and digital marketing - pitch a story with an angle and then offer embedded content (perhaps a video, or 360 footage, or a selection of high-quality still photographs) within the article as a kind of payoff for readers."*

Sarah says that offering embedded YouTube or Vimeo videos to other sites is a good way to showcase your content to their audiences. In terms of destinations for embedded video, don't just think about big news platforms, think about who in your peer network might host your video content on their site - perhaps the theatres your production will tour to, for example. Make these people into online distribution partners too.



Are there other online distribution channels I should consider?

Creative platform choices

Arts and cultural organisations are increasingly looking at ways in which they can host their creative work online for audiences, whether presented for free or behind a paywall. Sarah Fortescue, The Space's Head of Distribution, describes three main ways of hosting:

1. Using a free-to-use player, such as Vimeo or YouTube.

The main benefit of this is that content can also sit natively on your respective YouTube/Vimeo channels, and feature in playlists, increasing overall views.

2. Using a custom player with a sign-up page ahead of the content.

The main benefit here is that it allows for audience data capture, so even if you are not charging for work, you know who's watching and can tell audiences about future events.

3. Using a platform, such as Overture or even Vimeo OTT, to monetise work by putting a paywall on it.

There has been a sizeable increase in organisations using these platforms to allow for digital income generation as well as data capture.

If you are considering charging online audiences for access to your performances, it is important to be realistic. Ask yourself – how large an audience can we expect? How does it compare to our live audiences? Setting up payments and marketing will take time and resource, so make sure the investment is worth it for the income level you are likely to generate.



On-demand platforms

On demand platforms include:

- **BBC iPlayer**
- **Netflix, Amazon and Apple TV**
- **Marquee TV, which hosts arts content**
- **NOWNESS, which hosts cultural video content**
- **Digital Theatre and Digital Theatre+. Digital Theatre+ hosts performance content for educational use and Digital Theatre is its sister platform where audiences can watch theatre productions online.**

On-demand platforms are competitive and can feel out-of-reach, but Sarah says not to be put off if you feel your content could really work there.

She advises that you research the platform in detail and approach commissioners (especially any broadcasters) well in advance of the project opening, explaining clearly why you think it would be right for them and their audiences.

"It may seem like a dark art approaching commissioners, but these platforms can be worth exploring as they are looking for exciting content. After all, if you don't ask, you don't get!"

The key to successful distribution is to really think through what the content you're offering is, who it is for and where they will find it. Lots of platforms are actively seeking creative content. It's your job to find them and make the right pitch to them.



Stephen Rea in Cyprus Avenue – Royal Court



Sam Taylor



Sam Taylor

Case study

Silent Uproar's *A Super Happy Story*

By Rachel Broomhead

In 2018 theatre producers Silent Uproar were looking for new ways to engage audiences with their critically-acclaimed musical, *A Super Happy Story* (About Feeling Super Sad). The show had already won an award for Best Musical at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and was heading overseas to tour in the USA. Sensing that there were opportunities to reach new audiences on different platforms online, the team decided to work with the storytelling site Upworthy. We look at how the partnership took shape, and how Silent Uproar adapted their content to appeal to Upworthy's audiences.

Knowing your message

A Super Happy Story challenges taboos around depression by celebrating that 'it's ok not to be ok.' Silent Uproar Associate Producer Martin Atkinson describes it as a nimble and intelligent piece of storytelling. *"It's great fun," he says, "but it never fails to leave me on the floor - and I've seen it about 64 times."*

To tap into its important messages about mental health, the team had already partnered with the charity Mind to offer volunteers at live performances - if anyone in the audience identified with the feelings of the protagonist, Sally, they could talk to a volunteer to share their experiences and find support.

When Silent Uproar brought The Space on board to help grow their online audiences, Head of Programmes Rob Lindsay realised that Upworthy could be fruitful partners to spread news of the show. *"We knew that the show's positive mental health messages were crucial to its success and impact, so Upworthy seemed like a great fit with their uplifting news stories,"* says Rob. The potential for a successful partnership was clear, but with a new platform came the need to talk about the show in a new way.



A SUPER HAPPY STORY (ABOUT FEELING SUPER SAD)

Finding the hook

Silent Uproar already had a high-quality trailer which they used for their own social channels, but when Rob sent the promo to the Upworthy team, they replied saying it wasn't quite right for their audiences. *"They were interested, but they needed more story beats."* At the same time, the team realised that the so-called 'most miserable day of the year' was round the corner – the third Monday in January.

"It was a great opportunity to deliver a positive mental health message," says Rob, "and suddenly we found ourselves with a tight deadline to turn around a new social video for Upworthy."

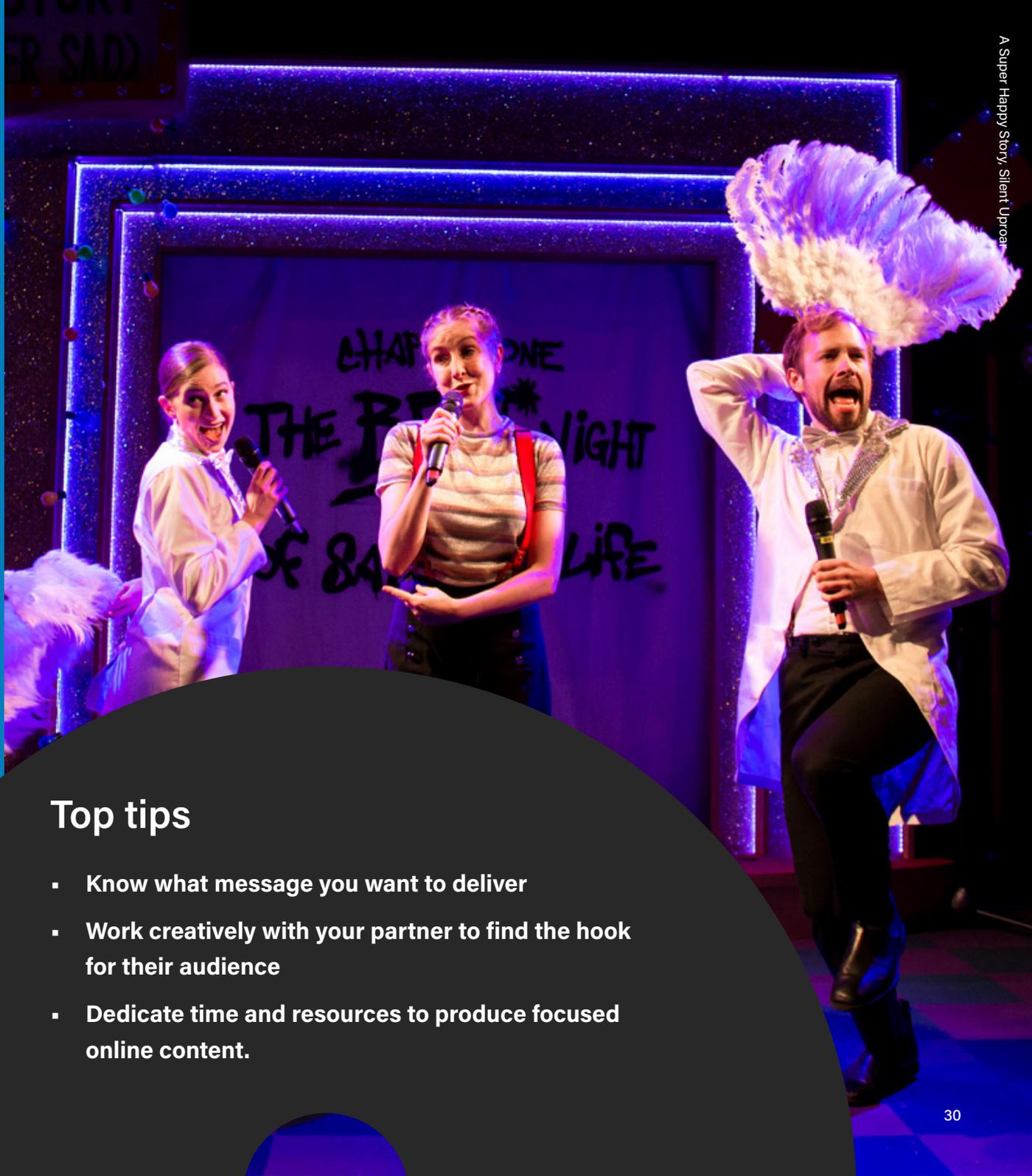
Rob cut the video material into a new form, using text on screen to tie in to 'Blue Monday', and include additional material showing how effective the piece had been with the communities who had seen it. Upworthy loved it, and the new cut went out in time for the January deadline with the hashtag #ItsOkNotToBeOk. *"The new trailer focused less on Sally's story, and more on the message that it can be fun to talk about depression – it was the hook that Upworthy needed,"* says Martin.



Partnership working

The Upworthy film was watched 40,000 times, far exceeding Silent Uproar's targets and extending the reach of the show. *"Through Upworthy we reached an international audience just in time for its USA tour," says Rob, "and those audiences connected primarily through their interest in mental health - they might not ordinarily have looked to the arts for this kind of discussion."* Off the back of the coverage from Upworthy, the Silent Uproar team also reached out to mental health charities in the USA, enabling them to raise awareness of a sensitive and difficult topic.

But the partnership with Upworthy revealed how focused online content has to be in order to find new audiences on other platforms. *"You are essentially creating new content for your partner," says Martin. "We had no capacity to do that in-house at the time, but I now work with a Content Creation Manager whose job is dedicated to producing really focused pieces of content like this."*



A Super-Happy Story, Silent Uproar

Top tips

- Know what message you want to deliver
- Work creatively with your partner to find the hook for their audience
- Dedicate time and resources to produce focused online content.

Part 3: What?

What content works



Dos and Don'ts for creating great online content

Rob Lindsay
Head of Programmes,
The Space

What to do

DO: Focus your efforts. One effective piece of content is far, far more beneficial to you than a wealth of poorly performing material.

DO: Assume that your reader, viewer or listener has no idea who you are. Great content attracts an audience by being shareable, and that means that it needs to make a great first impression on the friends that your existing fanbase shares it with.

DO: Consider in advance what point you're trying to make about your organisation or its work, and then develop that into a story that your target audience cares about. This isn't a new idea, it's the basis of most of the positive press coverage that your organisation has ever generated. Think of your content as a press story that you're creating yourself, rather than a marketing brochure.

DO: Prepare a script outline for any audio/video content, in order to test whether or not your story is as compelling in practice as in concept. You can develop your story further when you come to edit, depending on how your recording sessions go, but writing a script outline first will quickly show you any gaps you have in your narrative and should be the first way you deploy your valuable time and energy.

DO: Give yourself permission to cut down the material in order to most effectively tell your story. This is the case even if it's just text and photos, and *especially* if it's sound or video. Efficient, effective storytelling is key, so don't just edit around bloopers and repetition. Cut out material – even material that you love – if it doesn't contribute to the point you're trying to make with this piece of content. Then save it, make a note of it, and use it elsewhere as part of your next great story.



What not to do

DON'T: Forget to establish your story up front, and hook people's attention. You won't do that if your video starts with logos slowly fading in and out, or your podcast rambles for three minutes before you introduce your topic and contributors. Remember, for new audiences this might be your one shot at making a great first impression, so start communicating, and quickly!

DON'T: Take people's attention for granted. There's no perfect length for an article, podcast or video, but be brutal with yourself. How much of people's time do you honestly need to ask them for, in order to make your point?

DON'T: Wrap your message in acronyms, jargon and industry speak. Viewers, readers and listeners will not pause your story while they go and look up the meaning of unfamiliar words. They'll just switch off and forget about you.

DON'T: Neglect your social copy. This is true regardless of the content you decide to create. When you publish it, you'll need to type in a title, and probably a caption. This is where a number of publishers unintentionally undermine the strength of their own content. By filling out your caption field with "Check out our new video!" or "listen to the latest podcast in our series" you've given readers precisely no reason to do so, and included nothing that will make your material appear in search results. Don't neglect this opportunity to demonstrate value, with a clear explanation of what your piece is about, and perhaps even with a simple quote or headline from the piece itself.

DON'T: Forget to use text in the videos that you create. 85% of Facebook videos are watched without sound, by people on commutes, in offices, on the sofas of family living rooms with the TV on in the corner. As well as subtitles, text lets you quickly impart statistics, set out bold headlines, and introduce contributors through captions, while they get on with talking about your story. You also want your work to be accessible to the broadest possible audience. If you're not using text on your screen, you're denying yourself a valuable and effective communication tool. Many platforms will let you upload subtitle files too, vastly improving the value of your piece.



Caroline Jarwala, 100 Masters, Creative Black Country

Case study 100 Masters

By Rachel Broomhead

Creative Black Country's 100 Masters started life as a real-world exhibition celebrating local craftspeople voted for by the public. But it was their digital outputs that propelled the project into the limelight. At the beginning of its digital life, the project's Facebook page had 22 followers. Within a few days it had over 80,000, and one of its films has now been watched 10 million times. What did they get so right?



Caroline Jarwala, 100 Masters, Creative Black Country

Setting the project aims

Parminder Dosanjh, the Creative Director at Creative Black Country, says they had clear aims from the outset. ***“We knew we wanted to create some films, we knew we wanted to increase our following, and we knew that we had to do a lot of it in-house,”*** she says. In order to achieve the results they were looking for, they applied to The Space’s commissioning round for help.

“The first thing we did was to draw up a playbook,” says The Space’s Rob Lindsay, who advised on the project. Parminder hadn’t heard the term before but describes it as ***“a bible or kind of toolkit of guidelines for how we produce material”***. She says it was central to the films’ success.

Rob says there were a number of decisions Creative Black Country made at this initial stage that they stuck to religiously throughout the project. ***“In order to reach a global audience, we decided to avoid mentioning local place names, and we wanted to appeal to people who were struggling to fulfil their own creative ambitions - that meant seizing on stories where the artist had overcome obstacles, where the message was you can do this too.”***

Finally, they also decided that the films should be as visually arresting as possible, and that’s how they came to kick off the series with the story of Caroline Jariwala – the story that very quickly reached 10 million people.



Caroline Jariwala, 100 Masters, Creative Black Country

Crafting the story

Caroline is an artist who works with mosaic, and not only was she herself a charismatic character on camera, but her art provided a spectacular backdrop. *“Her whole house is covered in these wonderful, joyful mosaics, so we were gifted some brilliant opening footage,”* Rob says.

It was this combination of rich content and careful narrative decisions that enabled them to produce such a shareable film. But it was overlaying this footage with text that was key to the film’s appeal to audiences. *“We had a short caption at the very beginning of the film that simply said ‘Caroline got an E for Art at A Level,’”* says Rob. *“Immediately it creates intrigue - how did this person get past such a discouraging, critical moment to build a life as such a brilliant artist?”*

To ensure the narrative was as punchy as possible, the team were ruthless in the edit. *“We had over 30 minutes of interview footage,”* Rob says, *“but the final film came in at just over a minute and a half. We really focused in on delivering the most essential, arresting nuggets of information.”*

Sharing the story

The film was shared on the project’s Facebook channel, and those posts were the final jigsaw piece in the puzzle. They went out with a pull quote from Caroline: *‘Art isn’t about passing a blimmin’ exam!’*; and that proved to be a highly effective hook. *“In the analysis we did afterwards,”* Rob says, *“we found that people who were commenting on and sharing the video were responding in particular to that quote - it sparked a conversation.”*

The film’s success was all down to a thoughtful, rigorous creative process. By taking the time at the beginning of the project to establish the content objectives, then teasing out the narrative hooks and cutting the content down efficiently and effectively, Creative Black Country reached a global audience and set a model for other organisations around the world.

Top tips for producing great online content

- Make a plan
- Be ruthless in your edit
- Text matters, both on screen and in social media posts.



Part 4: How?

How to help people find your content



What can I do to give my content the best chance?

Social media algorithms

Most of the channels we've spoken about – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube – use algorithms to decide what content to show you.

As a result of their algorithms, all these platforms register how well content is performing and how many views, likes and shares it's getting. They are specifically looking at how well the content does in its first 24 hours on the site and then checking in on it day by day.

As a result, your publication strategy needs to be geared around getting maximum hits in the content's first 24 hours online.

You can't do this alone. You will need other advocates and supporters to draw people to your content in order to show the algorithms that your content is popular as soon as possible.

What you need is a seeding strategy.



What is seeding and how can I do it?

Seeding: an introduction

Rob explains what seeding means:

“Seeding boils down to telling someone that you have made something great and asking them to share it.”

It is using publishers, partners and influencers to share your content on social media in order to reach bigger audiences which will in turn give your content a boost and make it even more visible thanks to those algorithms. And to make that happen, you need a seeding strategy. First, a quick explainer...



Native sharing

Native sharing is sharing within a platform – if a platform has a ‘share’ button, it means users can share content to their followers without leaving that site. Native sharing is something that Facebook, Twitter and Soundcloud make easy.



Non-native sharing

Non-native sharing means people have to go to a different website in order to share existing content. For example, a YouTube video – although it is hosted on YouTube – can be ‘embedded’ to view on other sites. This can be extremely useful. Tweets can also be embedded, which means they can work as news or feature content on blogs and other websites.

Seeding strategies

A successful seeding strategy is the means to get the word out there about your content and – with the help of your networks, influencers and cheerleaders – generate views and a buzz around it.

And you need help. That means approaching partners, news sites and influencers and pitching your content to them with impact by explaining why it would be great for their audiences.

When you make these approaches, don’t go cap in hand as if you are begging for a favour. If you have made a really good piece of editorial content, be proud to ask them to share it. ***“It’s about making good things and telling people they are there,”*** Rob explains.

And then you need to time things with your new partners to generate the ‘hit’ the algorithms are looking for. This means coordinating timings with them around the launch of your content and asking them to act at a particular time (within the first 24 hours of it being uploaded).

Content can be uploaded onto sites such as Facebook and YouTube without being public so you can show it to your potential partners ahead of the launch date. Likewise, on Vimeo you can password protect your videos until you are ready to publish. This means you can get your content lined up, your partners can preview and then you can go live with them all sharing within the key 24-hour launch window.

The Space's Top 5 Tips

For approaching potential publishers and partners

1

First, ask yourself: Who are your target audience following?

Search on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter by topic and make a list of publishers and partners who your target audiences are following AND who you think your content will work for.

2

Email or direct message them with personalised messages.

3

Before you make contact, ask yourself: Why should they care?

As the creator, remember the reason they will care is nearly always different to the reason **you** care.

4

Be clear about what you are asking for

You are usually contacting them because you can offer something of interest to their followers/audiences, but what is that and what do you need them to do?

5

Do the hard work for them

Provide a range of stills and/or video clips and write suggested copy for their website or their social media platforms.

What are my options if I have some money to pay for digital marketing activity?

Sarah Fortescue, Head of Distribution at The Space, says it is sometimes worth paying for ads on social media in order to target your desired audience. She explains: *“By paying for ads, you make your content more targeted than you could ever hope to achieve yourself. Social media companies hold lots of data on people and paying for sponsored content is the No.1 way of making those assets and algorithms work in your favour.*

“1.6 billion users on average visit Facebook every day. Targeting means you can navigate to the people amongst them who are most likely to be interested in your content. Using their systems, you can list the demographics, geographical location, interests (and much more) of your target audience and the platform will seek out matches on the site. All the personal details are anonymised but if you are trying to get to a certain audience, it can be a really clever way to find them.”



Rob describes one Facebook paid-for service that can work well for arts organisations, depending on their aims: Lookalike Audiences. It works by taking, for example, 1000 of your followers and analyses their likes, dislikes, demographic, etc and then finds 1000 more people like your followers. You can then use this as a select target audience for your Facebook profile or content.

Ads can hugely increase the visibility of your content and therefore your brand – from cutting through to your target audience to giving your video content priority on YouTube. And with social ads you can do a lot with a small two or three-digit budget.

Sarah describes a project where social ads delivered: *“Creative Folkestone created a film at Derek Jarman’s Prospect Cottage. **Strange Concord: Music & Words from Prospect Cottage** featured actor Ben Whishaw reading extracts from Derek Jarman’s **Modern Nature**, along with music from avant-garde composer John Zorn and contemporary classical composer Henryk Górecki. By utilising social spend, it was possible to target specific audiences in ad campaigns across Facebook and Google, to ensure the film was made viewable to those interested in classical music, Prospect Cottage, and Derek Jarman,”* Sarah explains.



Furthermore, Google Ads has a great deal for charitable organisations, which many arts, cultural and heritage organisations are. For registered charities approved by Google, it offers free Google Adword advertising spend worth \$10,000 a month. Among other features, this enables organisations to appear prominently in the 'sponsored' box that comes up at the top of a Google search results page on certain terms, if they use their budget to bid on these terms. This visibility enables those organisations to potentially compete with commercial and large organisations.

Sarah says: *"In the online life of any digital content you don't have long to build up optimisation, but Google's free ad spend can make you much more visible, which is why I always encourage arts organisations to look into it."*

"For example, if you have just launched a live stream of your latest performance, you will have a lot of competition on a Google search. However, if you use Google ads and play around with key words to ensure you have optimised your messaging, someone typing in 'theatre livestream' might find your stream. This just wouldn't be possible without promoted content."

I've published, now what?

When you are in the middle of a busy project or production, what to do afterwards may be the last thing on your mind. But you need to think about what comes next: If you attract a crowd, have you got more to offer them, and what will they want to do next?

Sarah stresses how far-reaching the impact of a digital success can be for a cultural organisation: *"A hit can give you data that will inform the marketing plan for your next production; it can give you information that will help you to pitch for another digital project and improve on the last one; it can increase your brand equity and visibility, give you more insight into your audience, including where they are geographically, which might inform your touring plans.... a digital success can impact the whole organisation."*

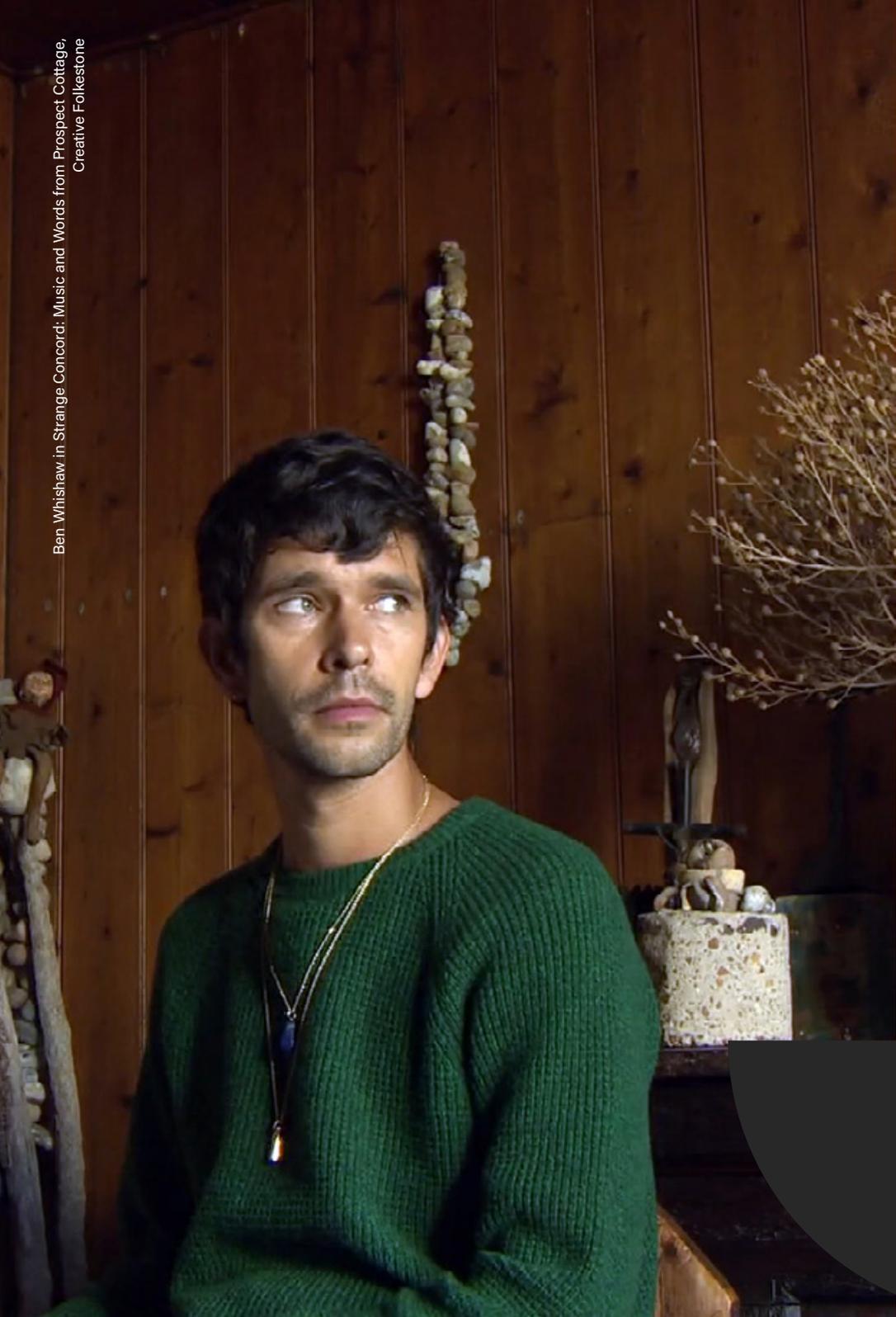
So as The Space's Head of Programmes Rob Lindsay outlines: *"Have a plan - are you geared up for success? If you are looking for a younger audience for your work, are you going to offer a deal on student tickets to get them into your building? If you have a podcast and it's a hit, when will the next episodes land?"*

"A good analogy is a successful first date: why would you put all that effort into choosing the perfect restaurant, picking an outfit and ensuring the conversation flows easily if you are never going to contact that person again?"

But the key to gaining the kinds of information described above and the – and perhaps most important – stage in your digital audience development strategy is to measure your engagement and success.



Kas Reimagined – Jonathan Watkins © Marv Martin



Case study

Prospect Cottage

By Rachel Broomhead

In autumn 2020, the arts organisation Creative Folkestone experimented with a live broadcast of a production that was more akin to arthouse cinema. Inspired by Derek Jarman's diaries *Modern Nature*, they shot a film in Jarman's former home – Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, Kent. It was challenging and avant garde in its style but had great potential to reach a wide variety of audiences. In the end, the film was watched approximately 50,000 times – far exceeding the targets set for it. We investigate the marketing and distribution strategy that made it so successful.

Simple messaging

Titled *Strange Concord: Music and Words from Prospect Cottage*, the finished work was a complex and innovative piece of film making, which wove experimental classical music performances with readings from Jarman's diary entries – but that didn't mean the marketing had to be complex too.

The film had several associations that gave it instant appeal. Jarman himself is an iconic figure amongst both film fans and LGBTQ+ communities, and Prospect Cottage is a widely revered and popular destination that had just gained press attention after a campaign to save it for the nation. But perhaps the biggest appeal of all was the star Creative Folkestone had enlisted to read extracts from Jarman's diary – actor Ben Whishaw.

"Ultimately it was a really simple message," says Owen Kimm, the Marketing and Communications Manager for Creative Folkestone. *"We just ran it with the line 'Ben Whishaw reads Modern Nature at Prospect Cottage! That's all viewers needed to know:'"*

Seeding strategy

Once the marketing angle had been settled, the next task was to find ways to distribute the film. *"We had a long lead-in time, which gave us the chance to draw up a really comprehensive seeding list,"* says Owen. *"Although it might seem like a niche film, we actually found that there were plenty of avenues to explore to find supporters – there was the British Film Institute (BFI), who hold many of Jarman's works, LGBTQ+ campaigning organisations such as Stonewall and local Pride festivals, the donors who had helped to save Prospect Cottage, and our existing audiences at Creative Folkestone – to name but a few!"*

Seeding *Strange Concord* amongst these organisations and accessing their audiences involved asking for support on their respective social media channels to coincide with the film's launch. *"We found that posts on Twitter and Instagram did really well, because they required very little investment from the partner organisation,"* says Owen. *"They could just retweet us, which only takes seconds, or make an Instagram story, which disappears in 24 hours and doesn't interfere with their own feed too much."*



Paid advertising

The 70-minute film was broadcast 'as live' via YouTube and was then available to view online across multiple platforms for one month. In addition to the seeding strategy, Owen says that paid advertising enabled them to massively extend their reach on these platforms. *"We didn't have a big budget - we just put about £500 into Facebook ads and about £300 into Google ads - but the response to them was brilliant, especially on Facebook."* They received about 20,000 views on YouTube and another 20,000 on Facebook, with the rest on Twitter. *"We'd only set our target at 15,000 views, so it totally surpassed our expectations."*

The film itself was high risk in its concept, but the results show it is possible to find online audiences for challenging and experimental work – if only you get the marketing and distribution right.

Top tips

- Keep the messaging simple and focused
- Make time to develop a comprehensive seeding strategy
- Put money into paid advertising, even if only small amounts.

*"It was a big step into the unknown," says Owen.
"We all had our doubts – but we're very glad they
have been proven wrong!"*

Part 5:

Metrics and measurement



Why measurement is important and how to do it meaningfully

Talk of digital analytics and metrics can be confusing. However, if you are going to be successful with your digital audience development, measuring your success is essential. John White, Chief Operating Officer at The Space, looks at some core principles and practical advice to help you plan your approach.

The measurement minefield

As described in the earlier chapters of this toolkit, finding data to measure online activities is not an issue. Google Analytics and the data dashboards of social media platforms provide a wealth of information.

In fact, the challenge is often trying to select the most relevant metrics from the bewildering array available. As well as picking meaningful metrics, it's equally important to have a consistent plan for monitoring, analysing and taking action based on the results you see.

Beginning with the end in mind

As with any form of evaluation, your starting point should be to think about why you are undertaking the digital activity, John says.

“What are your objectives? Which of these are most important and which are secondary? You might be wanting to undertake digital marketing to raise brand awareness or drive ticket sales; you may have educational content you want people to engage with; or you may want audiences that can't reach your venue in person to experience an entire performance online. Measuring success for each of these objectives will require you to gather different types of data and set different targets.”



SCREEN: six areas to consider

Once you've identified your objectives, John advises using the acronym SCREEN to think through the types of digital metrics that might be most relevant to track:

Segments

Who do you want to engage?

Tools such as Google Analytics or the audience data you get from your social media accounts can tell you a lot about the profile of the audience you've reached on a particular channel, such as age, likely gender, location or even topics of interest. But engaging digital audiences across a range of platforms means it can be very hard to have a joined-up picture of your audience segments.

A realistic approach is to group online audiences in terms of the behaviours you want them to take. For example, you might think about the different digital content that will appeal to existing audiences interested in finding out more about this season's programme, versus new audiences who are unfamiliar with your art form. How important are these different audiences to you and how can you best meet their different needs online?



Flood, Slung Low

Content

What type of content or experience are you providing?

You may be publishing video or audio, providing a process such as ticket purchasing or offering an interactive experience such as a game or website. The type of experience you want the audience to have and the platforms you will use to deliver that experience will be significant factors in what metrics are relevant to you.

Reach

How many people do you want to see your content?

This can be one of the simplest metrics to gather and understand. But remember bigger is not always better. Having a small but hard-to-reach target audience view your content can often have more value than it being seen by thousands of people. There's also the question of what counts as reach. Someone scrolling quickly past your post in a social media news feed may not have noticed at all. Think about what you consider to be a worthwhile engagement with your content.

Engagement

What pattern of engagement do you want?

Measures such as time spent on your website or the percentage of a video watched can offer a good indication of engagement. But if people are purchasing a ticket or looking for visitor information, longer duration may not be positive. Could it indicate they are struggling to complete the process or to find what they want? There may be several different patterns of engagement you want, all with different ideal durations.



Windrust: Movement of the People - Phoenix Dance Company © Brian Slater

Experience

How will you know if the audience's experience is high-quality?

It can be hard to obtain data about your digital audience's experience. Social media comments and online reviews are good sources of qualitative data, but remember you are more likely to receive comments from those who felt strongly (positively or negatively) about an experience. Depending on the digital platform you are using, you might be able to survey your audience directly, but be realistic about how much data you can gather, as numbers of survey responses tend to be low.

Remember, there are several aspects that make up the quality of a digital experience: the work itself, the quality of a recording, how easily it was made available to people online. When looking for data on online audience experience, focus your efforts on those aspects you're most interested in.



Next

What do you want them to do afterwards?

Finally, you should consider what the ideal next steps would be for your audience after they have experienced your content. In some cases, the digital experience might be a means to an end where your primary objective is to get them to take the next step, such as a social media post designed to drive ticket sales. In other cases, the content may be an end in itself, like a film of a live performance that you want the audience to watch in its entirety.

Whatever your goal, good audience development principles mean you should consider what the next actions are that you want the audience to take so that they deepen their relationship with you. Maybe they could sign up for email updates, follow you on social media or are there other ways to encourage them to view subsequent content or return to your website in future?



What does “good” look like?

When deciding what to measure, it can be useful to decide what your target level of performance or improvement should be: what would be a “good” result to justify the time and money you are investing?

John advises that looking at what similar organisations are doing with their online content has some benefits: *“You might glean some information from publicly available data on views, likes, shares and comments. However, don’t get too caught up with comparisons. Another organisation may have different target audiences, different objectives for their online activities and different levels of staff resource, experience and money to apply to what they are doing.”*

“It can often be better to use your current performance as a benchmark and then set targets that build on this. Consider undertaking a simple audience audit that looks at the current number of followers you have on different platforms, traffic levels on your website, average watch duration on your video content, or other important metrics you’ve identified. This will give you a baseline so that you can set targets for improvement that are realistic for you.”



Seven next steps

So where can you start? These steps will help you to shape your approach to digital metrics:

1. Identify your objectives for the digital activity you are planning
2. Use the SCREEN acronym to consider what you need to track to know if you're succeeding with each objective
3. For the platforms you are using and the content you have, pick specific metrics that you will monitor
4. Look at what similar organisations are doing and benchmark your own performance so you can set realistic targets for these broad metrics
5. Come up with a plan for regular reporting and reviewing
6. If you need to focus on a particular area for improvement then use more in-depth metrics and analysis to diagnose issues and plan changes
7. Periodically review your overall approach. Have the objectives changed? Are you still using the best mix of content and platforms? Do the metrics or targets need to change? What else could you do better?

Appendix

[Getting started with Google Analytics](#)

[All about keywords: What they are, why they matter and how to use them](#)

[Keyword Planner](#)

[Introduction to Search Engine Optimisation](#)

[5 steps to help you tell a better brand story](#)

[Optimisation tips for YouTube's search bar](#)



For further resources and case studies and for information about The Space projects mentioned in this toolkit please visit The Space website [Resources](#) and [Our commissions](#) sections.



Supported using public funding by

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The organisation commissions arts projects, offers online audience and digital skills development, and provides a production and distribution pipeline to ensure that these projects reach a wide and diverse range of audiences.

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