



THEATRE ALLIANCE
OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

The Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia strengthens and leads the region's richly diverse theatre community by promoting positive awareness and serving as a resource for information, professional development and advocacy.

Free Night of Theater – Philadelphia

Best Practices to make Free Night of Theater succeed in Philadelphia

May 28, 2008 at 4pm

The Wilma Theater, Studio

Notes taken and typed by Michelle Jacob,

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I. Karen – Welcome

A. Philadelphia's past participation

1. Fourth year of Free Night of Theater program, Philly was one of the pilot cities.
2. Awareness and audience development tool, turn Free Night participants into ticket-buyers and subscriptions.
3. Review stats from 2006 and 2007.
4. Theatre Alliance provided Free Night inserts, curtain speeches, press releases (paired with BA announcements), provided page of TA website and PFG, links to Free Night national website through which reservations were made.

B. Review goals for 2008 participation

1. Would like more participants in past years.
2. Target date: October 16 (extended through November 9 to allow for more opportunities to participate)
3. On sale date: October 1
4. This meeting is to ask: What can the Theatre Alliance or TCG do to help this program be successful in 2008?

II. Phillip Matthews, Director of Communications, TCG

A. Free Night of Theater program overview

1. Free Night of Theater is TCG's annual national audience development initiative to attract *new audiences* and raise public *awareness* about live theatre.
2. Currently, the Free Night of Theater program has over 100 participating cities. Every city's Free Night of Theater program is different. Some cities, Philadelphia included, have not been as successful in terms of numbers of participating organizations and ticket-buyers. This program can only be as successful as the individual theatres are involved, excited, and dedicated to the program.

B. Goals and Responsibilities

1. The goal is to put aside traditional competitions and work together to overcome the perceived barriers of price and time that discourage patrons from attending theatre.
2. 2008 Program goal is to have over 700 theatres offering 75,000 free tickets nationally

3. Offer Free Night performance beginning on October 16, additional performances/tickets can be offered and are encouraged.
4. Best practices
 - Assign box office/admin staff to manage event
 - Curtain speech welcoming new theatergoers to the theatre 'family' (single most effective tool)
 - Follow up with TRG single ticket retention efforts
 - a. The day after the performance, send an email to those who attended the show to follow-up and promote the next show.
 - b. Also, send emails to no-shows promoting upcoming show for another opportunity to visit company.
 - c. TCG hopes to do training on this follow-up strategy in Philadelphia soon.
5. The Free Night program is one piece of an effective overall marketing campaign; use to what works best for your city and individual organization.

C. Web-site Demonstration

1. www.tcg.org
 - TCG manages national Free Night program through weekly scheduled teleconferences. More information on website on the Free Night of theatre program, including past year overviews, "Frequently Asked Questions" and "What Free Can Do For You" pages.
2. www.freenightoftheater.net
 - For a complete list of participating cities beginning June 2008
 - Individual theatres have complete control through this national website to check reservation lists, add/subtract tickets, send follow-up emails. It also allows theatres to create their own page on this site to promote their theatre/show and include restaurant/hotel information.
 - The site emails a confirmation when the order is made. The day before the performance a reminder email is also sent.

D. Updates on other participating cities

1. San Francisco is possibly the most successful participating city.
2. Seattle's City Council used Free Night to kick-off to a larger set of theater awareness events.
3. Baltimore, a new partner, was able to plug Free Night into pre-existing program, the Free Fall Baltimore managed by Arts Council.
4. Dallas, also a new partner, will be managed by their City Council.
5. New York has a coalition of service organizations helping to organize the Free Night of Theater even, including TDF (ticketing) and League of Off-Broadway Theatres, etc.

E. Phil shares Shugoll program research findings in Philadelphia

1. 93% thought program was excellent. 63% had been to a new theatre. 69% were satisfied at ease of reservation, with the national average was in high 80 percentile. Only 46% of people were able to see first choice.
2. One out of three people who attend Free Night come back to buy a ticket. 84% go to more theatre in general in their area.
3. Ask: What is Philadelphia Theatre? What makes Philadelphia different?

III. Why participate? What's in it for me?

A. What has worked for you? What hasn't?

1. Success
 - Website is very easy to use. Reminder letter is easy to send and as a result, did not have many no-shows.
2. Problems
 - People who take advantage of Free Night program are people who are already involved with theatre (ticket buyers, usher, performer).
 - Key into marketing director's heads to give Theatre Alliance the idea.
 - Free Night participants do not come back as ticket buyers or subscribers.
 - Customer service issues: Ticket buyers line up at theatre's box office and do not go to website.
 - What is biggest push back about not wanting to participate?
 - a. Felt it was a waste of time.
 - b. Lower quality of patrons, looking for free/cheap opportunities, but not much long term.
 - c. No one knows about it. Needs to introduce us to new, vibrant, diverse communities.

B. Other points of discussion

1. Awareness in the community is not vibrant. Lack of buzz surrounding the event.
 - Cities with more success, like San Francisco, do so through press awareness and media partnerships.
 - Oct. 16 and following weeks are event but Free Night tools of general awareness should be happening all year round.
 - Push general awareness campaign across all age levels.
 - TCG is close to getting a few national sponsors, hotels (Starwood), grocery stores (Trader Joes, Safeway). Throw a party after Free Night to create bigger event for patrons and a ripple effect in community.
2. How does the Theatre Alliance currently advertise Free Night?
 - Theatre Alliance sends a press release with Barrymore Awards information because it is convenient date-wise.
 - Place a banner ad on website with link to www.freenightoftheater.net
 - Currently, there is no money/time at Theatre Alliance to advertise it because internal resources are low due to the Barrymore Awards.
3. Who is influential to get other theatres involved? LORT theatres
 - Create a small team of people to approach more theatres to participate and form more of a game plan. TCG can leverage members to participate.
 - Discuss creating a new or folding into an existing committee (Marketing Roundtable).
4. Goal #1 Sign on from theatres. Agreement is ready to be sent out. Recommend to send out to Managing Directors, who can delegate to the right person.
 - TCG is creating an informational one-sheet for all participating companies.
 - Ben Cameron speaking tomorrow night at Drexel. Tap into this opportunity because this was his baby.

C. Brainstorm ideas for making this year more successful.

1. Send information to people on Arts and Business Council contact lists.
 - Young professionals, lawyers who should be networking, attending arts events but don't know how/where to begin.
2. Write a separate press release for Free Night of Theatre Program from Barrymores.
3. More targeted marketing toward nontraditional audiences. Ex. Postcards with number needed to register for tickets.
4. Promote Free Night as an evening of getting *new* audience members into participating theatres. "See something you have never seen before!"
5. Utilize online marketing opportunities like Myspace, Facebook.
6. Reach out to college newspapers and alumni associations at local universities.
7. Connect with the appeal of and strive to be on same level with Restaurant Week.
8. Target up and coming communities like Roxborough, Manayunk.
9. If newer theatres are listed with more established theatres, that will encourage people to go to new companies.
10. Look at other patrons of Arts/Culture institutions, not just theatre. Use GPCA for their info and tools to reach to other.
11. Creative partnerships.
 - Get more organizations involved – service organizations, arts councils, participating theaters.
 - Participating companies create partnerships in promoting the event. Swap lists and promote other companies to your regular patrons.
 - Offer discount to continue patronage at new theatre companies.
 - Discuss partnering with GPCA, Center City District.
12. Tap into Howard Shapiro's curiosity in preview articles and use to grow awareness around Free Night.
13. Build buzz and buy-in. Get more people in theatre community excited about it. The Theatre Alliance needs the support of theatres to administer and promote program.