

The 9 P's of Marketing Contemporary Dance

CIRCUITWEST

PRESENTER RESOURCE

Introduction

This resource was created to help presenters with the challenges presenters face promoting various types of performing arts.

The plan is the result of experiences shared by those who have had success promoting dance across the industry

No one can do everything in this plan, but it provides many ideas for presenters to consider in their planning.

Three lessons repeated many times in the research for this resource are worth highlighting – accumulate all the visual content you can muster, create a story for those new to the idea of dance, and think beyond dance schools.

Most importantly, if the marketing kit has a single promotional video and one or two images, this may not be enough to bring in new audiences. When you are planning, it is important that you consider, as much as you can, immersing your target in the beauty, striking visual power, sound and emotion that is dance.

If you have one thing in your favour it is this. Most people have danced in their lives in some way. Dance transcends culture, age and gender. This is a connection that theatre and classical forms of music does not have. Try and connect with the people who loved dance at some point in their lives and you will grow your audiences.



1. *Ponder*

Take a minute to ponder as you programme the performance.

What do you think, in your own words, is good about it? Describe it to your team and get an indication of what other people might think.

Think about the long-term picture, not just marketing the current work but how you can build your dance audience and make programming and marketing easier for the future.

Don't do! Just at the point of booking the work, a long time before any marketing, think about the bigger picture of dance and ponder the possibilities with the team before the pressure is on to fill seats with a month to go.



2. *Persuade*

There is a belief in performing arts that contemporary dance is a challenge for marketers. The fact of the matter is all performing arts provides a bigger marketing challenge than football. This means arts marketers must be more creative, more flexible and think further outside the box. Before you take the challenge keep these statistics in mind to remind your team there is a market.

- Last year, Connecting Australians showed 53% of Australians has attended theatre or dance in the last year (Australian Council for the Arts)
- In 2015, AusPlay showed an adult and child participation in dance of around 700,000 of 3% of the population – roughly the same as Cricket and Australian Football (Australian Sports Commission)
- In its last research in 2012, the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed dance as the top participation sport in Australia for females under 14 – and every dancer grows up with their memories of dance.
- The ABS showed 13% of the population has some history in dance which is bigger than soccer.
- Australians spent \$60 million on tickets to dance and ballet last year and more than 800,000 attended a ticketed event, 100,000 of these were in WA.
- In the last decade expenditure on dance event tickets has doubled
- There is a meteoric rise of awareness of dance in the digital world between YouTube's 26,000,000 modern dance listings and televised dance shows like So You Think You Can Dance
- Dance is in the top 20 physical activities for adults and the top 7 for those under 18 years old.

If you are seeking first time audiences, consider simplifying descriptions of the work in specific dance language, written for experienced dance lovers. (One such example of specific dance language for a performance taken for this paper: a pluralistic aesthetic resonates with the grounded authenticity of a regional dialect). Use the KISS principal of writing marketing – Keep It Simple Stupid.

New audiences require compelling reasons to attend dance – What is contemporary dance and why would I see it? There are some very fine sources of reasons from dance marketers across the world the such as *6 Reasons Why You Should Appreciate Contemporary Dancing* from The Odyssey and ThoughtCo's *What Is Modern Dance?* Marketers need to provide persuasive reasons to break down barriers about attending dance.

Persuasion will sometimes mean thinking beyond the boundaries of the approved artwork and copy for the work if you feel it does not say enough for your target markets. Imagine your market as a school class that has never been to dance and create the copy that provides a big, persuasive picture, one bite at a time. Start with how this performance will make the audience feel.

In your persuasion remember contemporary dance was created in dance circles to rebel against the structures of tradition like ballet. The dance form often includes very current topics, modern and original music and many different styles. It tends towards radical, and rule breaking styles exploring the human body and making powerful and emotional statements about a subject.

And keep in mind some persuasive words from those who changed the dance world (Martha Graham – one of the founders of modern dance) –

“Nothing is as revealing as modern dance.”



3. *Prepare*

Start with three fundamental check lists:

1. **Identify your audience**

Identify the audiences for contemporary dance and how to reach them. This research will be the starting point. For venues without any dance audience in their database there are six targets that you will want to consider – not all are appropriate in all regions.

- Audiences attending previous dance performances;
- Dance schools – often partnerships are forged by providing access to participate in a workshop or as a professional development opportunity for teachers;
- School dance programmes - specialist performing arts teachers at local schools;
- Mothers (dance mums) of those in dance programmes;
- Female professionals between 30 and 60;
- People who have attended contemporary theatre take advantage of the cross over between these markets;
- New markets – the unknown x factor market who will experiment with new experiences. For example, some millennial markets are very open to new experiences and are the most accessible for digital strategies.

Do any analysis possible of your market place – learn as much as possible about any market you think will take an interest in this dance in areas such as gender, age, family status, occupation. Estimate, how many people is that?

Calculate how many people are your core market who either came to previous dance, are engaged in dance, or attended other arts performances in other genres. How many people is that?

2. Producer Marketing Check List

Create a checklist of the marketing material you will require from the producers.

Create a template you can use as the basis of needs from producers for marketing and promotion of all future touring productions. See below in **Product** for what you can ask for on your checklist.

3. Marketing Plan

Create a tour marketing plan including the resources, preferred channels and budget.

Whilst every marketplace is different, the best channels of communication for dance are:

- Face to face communication with stakeholders
- Publishing/sharing of powerful dance imagery and video
- Direct and promoted social media
- Mainstream media – especially tv and press

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Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and this is should always be delivered back to the people. –Alvin Ailey

”



4. *People*

Engaging key stakeholders is a key to success for direct sales of tickets and to help you promote work. Build your relationships for the future.

Where possible, open the door with local dance stakeholders to talk with you about touring dance in the venue:

- School drama and dance leaders;
- Dance school owners and teachers (keeping in mind not all schools engage with contemporary dance);
- Those who book your venue for community dance events;
- Previous and loyal audience- consider rewards to help you market - bring a guest for free; exclusive meet and greet with visiting artists; watch a warm up;
- Beauty industry, that often shares the same markets – offer free tickets;
- Local arts councils;
- Local council e.g. Community/Recreation Officer, Library;
- Visitor Information Centre;
- Hotels, motels and other accommodation providers where visitors to the area can be targeted.

When you have identified your dance schools and school dance teachers consider these strategies:

- Preview the performance - invite those most influential dance stakeholders to see footage and preview performance information before you release anything publicly;
- Complimentary invitations;
- Dancer/choreographer meets for the teachers.

“

I see dance being used as communication between body and soul, to express what it too deep to find for words. –Ruth St Denis

”

5. *Product*

What can/will the producer do to assist the marketing campaign? Use their ideas that have worked in the past.

Create a checklist of the information you will require from the producers. as the basis for communications between the presenter and the producer from the outset.

The Toolkit

About the work

- What is the work about?
- What happens on stage?
- How will the performance make the audience feel?
- Develop a story of the performance – initial concepts, development, working with creative to bring the full show to the stage. This is the document that can be used where word limits and space are not restrictive.
- Multiple images and videos - with clear explanations – Are they promotional images? Or production images? What is the story that the image is telling?
- Reviews of previous performances, social media commentary.

About the artists and the company

- Is there anyone in the touring party who has a connection to the community?
- Artist biographies and portrait images – including creatives;
- Develop a template for a Q&A to be sent to artists to complete for blog posts;
- Information about the company: who are they? What do they do that makes them so good?
- Other dimensions of the performance: set, lighting, costume design, AV, sound design, music. What are the stories behind these elements of the production? Are there drawings that can be shared?
- Who is available for media interviews and photography? Determine the communication lines to set up media interviews and contacts.

Developing a rounded dance offering

- Consider pre/interval/post show discussions and question and answer sessions. Research has shown that when audiences have time to come together about the show after, they can process what they have seen more easily, building future audiences.

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Dance is the only art of which we ourselves are the stuff of which it is made.

—Ted Shawn

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6. *Pricing*

Some ideas for pricing options

- Do something special for people who have attended dance before, i.e. 'bring a friend' ticket pricing or meet and greet opportunities. Make your loyal customers your marketers;
- The mothers of dance students are often a strong audience – pitch directly to them – create mother-daughter pricing;
- Seeing dance is proven to be as much about the social occasions as the performance - create 'night out' pricing packages like well-known beer and ballet, daiquiris and dance promotions that have been so successful in the past;
- Make dancers a focus - introduce 'dancer pricing' below main pricing;
- Recognise dancers and dance watchers and involve them in selling to their networks with 'bring a non-dancer' pricing;
- Develop group package offers - especially for dance schools;
- Look to family/mum friendly offers like pre-schoolers free;
- Package ticket pricing with VIP offers - meet the dancers, watch a rehearsal, join the warm up;
- Consider a package of performance with a workshop;
- Develop a boarding school package to meet weekend exclusion needs;
- Ensure affordable seniors concession pricing;
- Consider buying pattern of regular audiences. For contemporary dance performances, consider dynamic marketing strategies: set ticket prices to increase as demand increases to encourage early bookings (and create a bit of motivation to attend).

7. *Place*

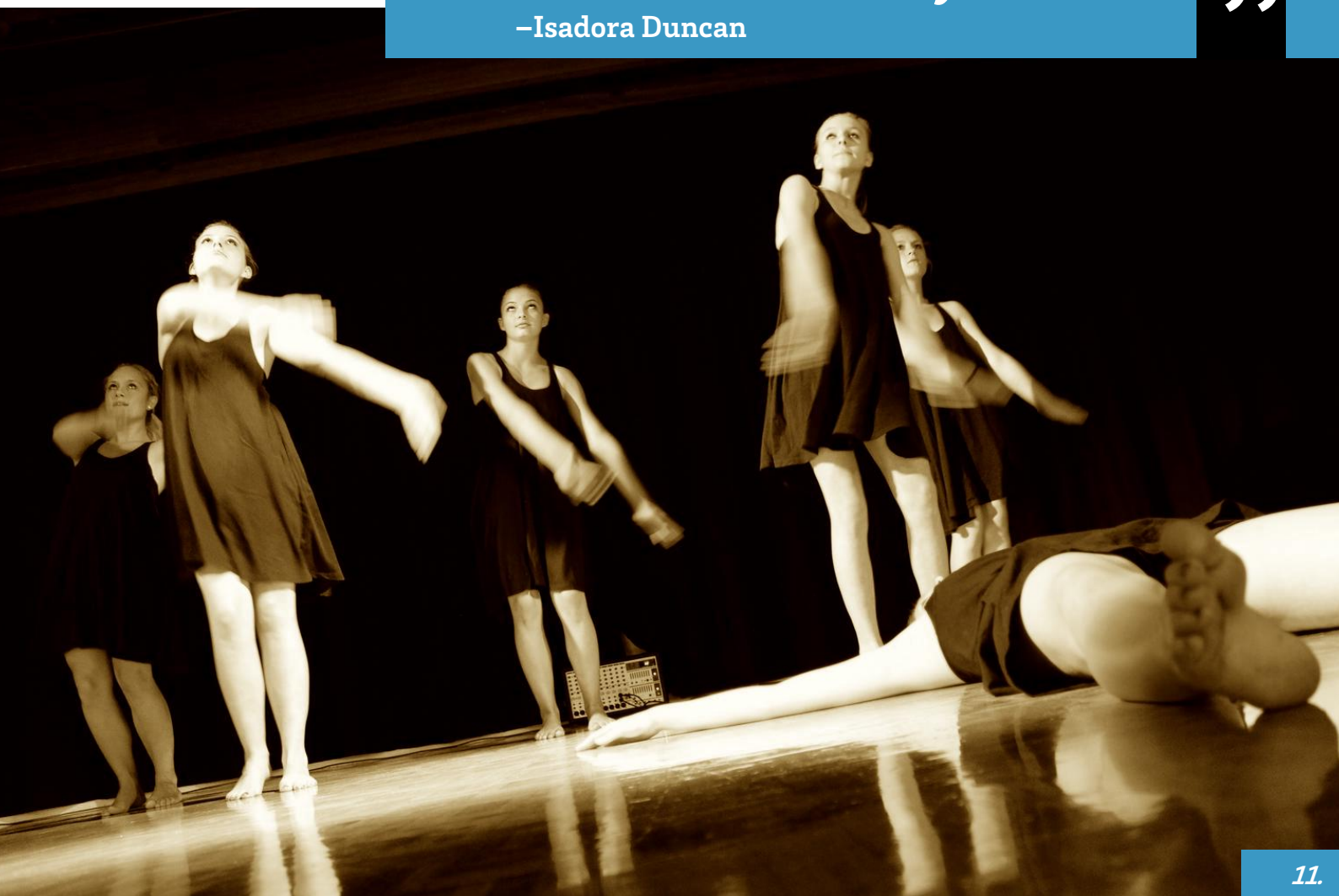
- Activate the venue with imagery, video and dancers;
- Performance days – consider foyer performances or curtain raisers by local dancers as community engagement;
- Look into getting your performers to public places – can they do warm ups in region centre like a shopping centre, or a dance school. Can they teach locals how to warm up?
- Theatres are sometimes considered stuffy by young audiences – consider warehouse or other venues which have more credibility with young audiences when considering programming.

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*You were once wild here.
Don't let them tame you.*

–Isadora Duncan

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8. *Promotion*

There are a lot of strategies that have worked for dance in many locations:

- Don't reinvent the marketing wheel, seek collaborators and have a consortium approach. Find the marketing successes of previous presenters and repeat them. Share each venue's piece of the marketing puzzle that has worked - social media, ads, community engagement concepts, in venue promotion, emails;
- Imagery and video are a key to success – dance is beautiful, moving, sensual, scary, alluring, challenging and so many other things. It also debunks many myths about dance accessibility – web galleries, social media posts, boosted social media and screens in the venue should be the first tactics, and the key is volume and diversity;
- Expand your promotion of visuals beyond the current performance, to other previous work by the dancers and the company;
- Share content and 'like' touring companies across all digital platforms;
- Develop two to three marketing letters;
- Create marketing content – Tell the whole story of the dance one piece at a time: Who is dance company? What is this dance performance? How will it make audiences feel? How many dancers are there and who are they? Describe salient points on sound, staging, costumer or lighting. Has the performance been seen by many people? Is it Australian?
- Public stunts with dancers generate positive buzz and media coverage. Look to getting your dancers to public places, can they do warm ups in region centre like a shopping centre or school oval?
- Share any positive media reviews of previous performances;
- If the performance deals with a current societal issue, write a letter to the editor of the local paper about why this issue, that the show deals with, matters to your community;

- Supercharge your public facing marketing – budget permitting, a powerful, full size images of the performance makes for controversial promotional talking points for pin up boards, foyers, libraries, bus stands, bill boards, or foyer displays in the venue. A \$100 poster can perform better and for longer than a \$1,000 press ad, if placed well;
- Engage your region’s dancers on social media – create a call out for people to align with dance – ticket competitions, selfies;
- Provide tickets to local radio and press to give away;
- Play it forward – if the performance has a soundtrack you can obtain – play it loud at the venue (and open the doors!);
- Distribution – if there is a performance flyer find volunteers to letterbox drop as many as you can;
- Run video on loop in your foyer;
- Invite local media to warmups/rehearsals and connect them to dance;
- Invite special groups (such as regular customers) with a back stage pass;
- Ask the dance company to send a messaging recorded in video for your region, i.e. *“Hi Kununurra! We are buzz dance and we look forward to seeing you in August...”* The more personalised and individual message you have, the better your reach;
- Facebook remains a powerful dance marketing tool, and the younger target markets require Instagram and/or Snapchat;
- Identify dance advocates – venue members, friends, dance enthusiasts. Ask them to share social media content.

9. *Post Event*

- Continue the conversation after the performance;
- Request dancers be available for post-show 'selfies' – leave a legacy;
- Ask for feedback via surveys – there are plenty of ways to get this information;
- Update your audience checklist based on the feedback – keep this information current for the next show.

