

21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts Conference 2008– Keynote takeaways

# Top 10 takeaways from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts Conference

Written by Christine Young, marketing communications consultant

Arts organisations worldwide share the dilemma: finding and attracting audiences. At the inaugural [21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts Conference](#), organised by Creative New Zealand, and held in Auckland on 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2008, arts managers from a wide range of arts organisations enjoyed presentations from [Diane Ragsdale](#), from the [Andrew W Mellon Foundation](#) in the US, Andrew McIntyre from [Morris Hargreaves McIntyre](#) in the UK, Roger Tomlinson from [ACT Consultant Services](#) in the UK, Tim Baker and Debbie Richards from [Baker Richards Consulting](#) and Vicki Allpress Hill from [THE EDGE](#). Workshops and panel discussions provided insights into shared problems – and solutions to solve them.

1. Arts organisations need to be aware of the [social and cultural changes](#) in their communities. If arts organisations do not adjust in line with such changes, they risk becoming irrelevant. Arts organisations that respond to social and cultural shifts, by engaging with and understanding their audiences are more likely to succeed.
2. Adopting an audience focus does not mean forfeiting artistic excellence or vision. In fact artistic excellence is at the heart of successfully engaging with audiences.
3. Consumption of the arts exists in a social and cultural context. Arts organisations create value for society and deliver “product” with emotional and social impact. More important than the number of people who attend or purchase is impact, and the extent to which the arts elicit emotions and connections. Arts managers need to break into people’s hearts and minds; ticket sales and a loyal audience will follow.
4. To focus on delivering high impact arts experiences to their audiences, arts organisations need strategic leadership, and an organisation-wide commitment to refocus on their vision and on the audience.
5. Much attendance at arts events is socially driven. Foster personal connections and small group, socially-driven participation. Integrate performance and social interaction, and provide opportunities and reasons for people to invite their friends. Recognise the social context by offering information about local restaurants, bars, parking, and configure venues (lobbies) to facilitate social interaction.

6. Arts organisations need to demystify their art form for new attendees: create opportunities for audiences to experience their art through mediated and live performance, use clear language that speaks to the audience (provide multiple versions for different audiences) and provide opportunities for engagement with artists and your organisation. Enlightened arts organisations offer access to the arts in new ways, for example:
  - o interactive and online engagement;
  - o dialogue with patrons through online forums, blogs, or inviting reviews. These engage the audience, offers insights into what patrons are thinking and provide an alternative view to art critics;
  - o invitations to open rehearsals;
  - o hosting and welcoming audiences – the Maori concept of manaakitanga – invite them in rather than performing at them;
  - o become arts concierges. Help people find the show they are most likely to attend; the alternative is that they might buy nothing, or choose one they don't like and never return. Collect customer information at every touch-point and make effective use of databases and customer information to make relevant offers. Stop treating audiences as 'bums on seats', and treat them as people.
7. Finding the resources to undertake new initiatives is a perpetual challenge. To survive, you can't afford not to: reprioritise, forego one production and divert the funds to strategic audience initiatives, or vary marketing spend according to the relative difficulty of attracting an audience.
8. The [Seven Pillars of Audience Focus](#) model provides a blueprint for strategic assessment and development as an artistically-led but audience focused entity. Its greatest power is when all layers in an organisation, from board to artists and administration, work together to share the concepts and develop a way forward on each of the seven parameters.
9. [Price](#) is closely linked with value perceptions – and can be a powerful tool in increasing audiences and revenue.
10. Your website is a critical communications tool. Ensure it offers the information and content your audience needs – in the way they want to find it. [Vicki Allpress Hill's presentation](#) was packed with useful strategies and data.

### About the author:

Christine Young is a marketing communications consultant, specialising in arts marketing. She works with a number of arts organisations advising on marketing, business and audience development, and was previously the marketing manager of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra. She was editor of *NZ Marketing Magazine* for several years, as well as having a reputation as an accomplished feature writer.

