

Erin Empey  
Instructor: Kau  
Case Study Analysis  
MM&C  
December 10, 2013

## Case Study Analysis of Repertory Dance Theatre

(taken from rdtutah.org)

### *Mission:*

*Repertory Dance Theatre is dedicated to the creation, performance, perpetuation, and appreciation of modern dance.*

### *Past:*

*Utah's Repertory Dance Theatre was founded in 1966 as a fully-professional modern dance company through a cooperative effort involving the Salt Lake City community, the University of Utah and a major grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. This partnership was created to establish a company, which would keep alive that unique, artistic achievement which is American Modern Dance.*

### *Present:*

*In the early 1990's, RDT played a pivotal role in helping to revitalize downtown by embarking on a project to build a new performing arts center in the heart of Salt Lake City. The Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center, RDT's home, enables the company to expand its potential and better serve the community. RDT is committed to increasing the public's awareness and deepen their understanding of the arts through a variety of activities, free lectures, informal performances and open rehearsals bringing alive an area of cultural and social activity.*

### *Future:*

*Repertory Dance Theatre's future, like its past, will be rich with community involvement and education as well as artistic growth, preservation and innovation. It is committed to developing activities and partnerships in order to serve audiences of all ages. It continues to build bridges of understanding as it attempts to demystify the art of dance, making it a meaningful and vital part of the culture of the great state of Utah.*

Interviewed Stephanie Perkins; Marketing and Public Relations:

## *Environmental Scan*

### **Economic Scan:**

Repertory Dance Theatre (RDT) is currently regaining it's strength economically after the recession. The "Zoo, Arts and Parks" financial analysis that is conducted every year to organizations that the grants assist, failed RDT for the last two years in a row. RDT now has to submit plans to address the issues of concern and to make a strong effort in contributing money to the debt of the organization. Through prudent budgeting, RDT is actively working on putting money towards their increasing debt. Despite what ZAP has declared for the past two years, the organization is actually doing better. They were in dire straights for a couple of years through the recession, as many arts organizations were, and are now being able to strategically navigate out of that financial space.

RDT's goal is to have a even balance between the three areas of income; contributed, earned, and government. They currently are weighted in the government income, and are sitting at about 51% funded from government contributions. They would like to create an even split between the three as they gain greater financial grounding.

## **Demographic Scan:**

RDT is currently trying to figure out this very question. They believe the general demographics for the audiences of RDT is a slightly older, probably over 40, mostly female, crowd. They have found that the older audiences tend to be male and female in concentration, but the younger audiences tend to be more female. They recently conducted an audience survey that asked the age and classification questions, but only 36 people responded to the survey. The responses mostly came

from the over 40 audience. What they don't know how to do with this information is interpret the data. Is it just that the over 40 crowd are the ones that would take a moment to conduct their survey, or is it the age demographic well represented, and the over 40 crowd is really who is attending their performances? The question remains unanswered for now. Currently, RDT is trying to adjust their appeal to a wider audience.

The cultural elements and social values of Salt Lake City, Utah, play a large part in the make-up of the audiences for RDT. The organization does have a college-aged audience interest, do in large part to the Salt Lake City location of a leading University in Dance, but they trying to create ways to better reach this particular demographic. RDT generally brings an educated, more liberal audience to its performances. Because dance is part of the primary and secondary school curriculum, RDT has a chance to captivate young audiences and grow them into older patrons as the organization continues to grow. Through technology, they are currently focusing on creating methods to bring these young students and families to more performances. RDT is trying to use methods like Social Media in order to reach the younger audience, but they are also aware that they cannot lose their current audience in this concentration.

RDT is not aware of the national trends for audiences, but states that they believe the other Salt Lake City dance companies are seeing the same trends, in terms of audience demographics, as their own organization.

## **Cultural Scan:**

The general culture of the board of directors is an interesting one. The board has grown a lot in the past year, and they are working on more. They have a wide-range of ages on the board, from 20's to retirees. About half of the board has an extreme interest in dance, and the other half does not. This creates a diverse and healthy board. The second half of the board who doesn't have much knowledge about dance has a large interest in nonprofit work, and are just now learning the ins and outs of the dance world.

The Cultural elements that encourage participation is the very location of the company within Salt Lake City. SLC is very artistically inclined and has even more of a specific interest and investment in dance. Young people are very encouraged to participate in the arts in Utah, and therefore, the state itself holds a lot of developed talent. Whether people continue to participate as artists themselves as they continue in adulthood or not, the early focus on the arts creates a wonderful audience participatory culture for the state and the city.

RDT's touring audience is usually comprised of university students and dance audiences. The dancers teach master classes and repertory to local dancers when on tour and sometimes include the local dancers in performance.

In terms of pop culture, RDT stated that shows like "So You Think You Can Dance" and "Dancing With The Stars" haven't made much of a difference to the overall audience interest or attendance, because of the nature of modern dance. The styles are so different than what they see on TV, that it would almost be detrimental for audiences to compare the two or attend a performance with certain expectations

and then be disappointed. However, RDT's current fundraiser, Charette, brings in a different audience than their other events because of the cultural dynamics of the event. The idea is based on the pop culture appeal of judges, and bidding for the best dance. This fundraiser is very successful and highlights several dance artists throughout the community, therefore integrating new audiences and supporters into the fundraising campaign.

Culturally, the responses that RDT has been experiencing with technology and audience has not been great so far. The audiences are not engaging in the technology material that RDT is making available. Perhaps the audiences are seeing it, but they are not engaging in it. This includes media like Facebook, twitter, blogging, etc. All of the media platforms are present, but they are serving more as reminder to audiences about upcoming events than they are instigating conversation. Current strategies are being worked on for greater interaction between the technology culture and the organization.

There has been some cultural/political action that has brought attention to the organization. RDT has an environmental focus for some of their material. Local politicians have not been in support of the funding they received from environmental organizations and grants, and have made public statements describing their lack of support. RDT has received mixed reviews on their environmental programming. Some audiences loved the integration, and some are very resistant and don't believe that dance and environment belong together.

# *SWOC Analysis*

## **Cultural Product:**

*Strength:* RDT's efforts to bring dance to the community in terms of the product itself. The company's commitment to history, and the effort to keep historical dance works alive. They are a "museum" for dance and represent over 100 years of dance that is portrayed through visiting artists and video. They also present new work to keep the company relevant.

*Weakness:* RDT believes they need to do a better job of telling THEIR story. Salt Lake City knows RDT, but there are a lot of people that don't know the mission of the company, what they do, and what they're about.

*Opportunities:* RDT adds culture to Salt Lake City. Through their 48 years of historical dance that has been recorded, they want to provide a library for access of these materials. Their archives are some of the only material that exists for some of the historical dances, and they have the opportunity to provide the resources to a greater community, nationally and internationally. They are working on transitioning some of the recordings to more current media in order to begin this archiving process.

*Challenges:* There is another Modern Dance company in town who ends up providing a lot of competition. Several times audience members come to a show and don't know what company they're seeing. There is a greater distinction nationally then in the city itself in terms of who the two

companies are individually. RDT needs to meet the needs of their community and distinguish who they are.

### **Pricing:**

*Strength:* RDT's ticketing is one of their strengths. Their standard full price ticket is \$30. This is pretty equal to pricing for similar organizations in Salt Lake City.

*Weakness:* The organization debates the question of the loss in value of the ticket and experience if they lower the price. Does it lessen the worth? Do they then lose the potential ballet-price donors because the patrons don't believe the organization is worth their donation, all based on the pricing scale?

*Opportunities:* The company tried something new with their most recent concert. They priced all tickets at \$10. It is a family-friendly show and the \$10 price tier spanned all ages. They were hoping to draw new audiences with this pricing scale and allow an opportunity for new audiences to try something new that would ultimately be low-risk to their budget.

*Challenges:* They have been encouraged to increase prices so that they are similar to the ballet pricing. However, RDT does not want to alienate any of their audience, especially since they have a large student crowd. Another

significant challenge is the number of arts venues in SLC that are constantly scheduled. There are many competing calendar of events.

### **Place (Access):**

*Strength:* One strength is that everyone in the company, from dancers to administrators use and include technology and media in their approach to the public. Another strength in terms of access is the fact the dancers teach within the community. They are then able to represent the company and increase exposure to new audience members.

*Weakness:* RDT acknowledges their weak online presence in terms of their own digital representation. They are lacking the staff to update the website. They want to focus more on video efforts and post footage, but do not have the manpower to correct this weakness. They recognize that there is a plethora of info that is helpful on the website, but that they are not displaying it appropriately and promoting themselves as well as they could be.

*Opportunities:* The same weakness that RDT possesses, they see as a wonderful opportunity. The opportunity presents itself to have an incredible database of knowledge, videos, pictures, and communication on their website that would help tell their story. They have the material, and that was the hard part. Now if they can find the right people to enhance their digital communication, they will hopefully begin to benefit from the modern, social media world in building audiences.



*Challenges:* RDT runs programming for a community school that is focused on dancing for adults. This community effort is a wonderful way to build patronage for not only the community classes, but for audience members for performances. However, many people that are taking the community classes are unaware that they are linked into the larger umbrella of RDT as a dance company. The challenge then is connecting school to company and marketing to these already devoted –to-dance individuals.

### **Promotional Efforts:**

*Strength:* RDT has a large presence in the newspaper and other print sources. Overall, there is a positive and connected message for all of the arts venues in the city.

*Weakness:* RDT did not speak much to its own individual promotion, which probably says a lot. Perhaps if their own promotion was enhanced, their audiences would enhance too. It seems that there is a gratefulness to those that promote RDT willingly, but perhaps they should be more aggressive singly.

*Opportunities:* The company is making an effort to enhance their video presence. They said that pictures don't do dance justice. Dance is a physical art form that moves, and pictures are stagnant representations. They want to expand their website to include a more interactive, movement approach.

*Challenges:* At the same time they have large print media coverage, there is the drawback that less and less people are reading the printed materials. Also, RDT's budget for advertising is incredibly low so they face many challenges in this area.

## *Audience Analysis*

Salt Lake City has built an incredible patronage to the Arts. The city not only holds many talented individuals, but as a whole, the community emphasizes the importance of the arts to knowledge, experience and culture. The University of Utah is in the top five Universities for Dance in the nation. There is a hot bed of both new and old dancers within Salt Lake City. RDT is supported by this dance-centric community, but there is always room for growth. As mentioned, one of the most challenging elements for the company is the telling of their story. RDT is a dance company that is unique in its purpose and is one of the only companies who have the historical piece as part of their mission. They desperately need to find a new way to market this piece. The historical uniqueness is often incomparable to other companies, yet at the same time, that uniqueness can be used against the popularity of the company as well. Our rapidly changing world, and one that usually only focuses on the present and the future, is not fostering the incredible resource that RDT holds in its historical works and the relevance of the history associated with them. Many audience members find the historical representation boring and uninteresting, and only want to attend contemporary works. And truthfully, if

they're seeing contemporary modern dance, many people opt to see the other companies that are doing similar work, over attending RDT.

The 48 years of solid foundation that RDT has built sometimes works against itself. 48 years of presence means that audiences are accustomed to the model that RDT has created and therefore often want to try something new. Therefore, the emphasis that RDT now wants to place on THEIR story will most likely increase interest as people in the community have a chance to reexamine the cultural relevance of the company, as well as how they are moving into the future.

RDT has the opportunity to recapture some of its lost audience as they move their legacy into a new chapter with a new focus on their artistic staff. Their outreach and community efforts are extensive. Perhaps they can focus the same kind of energy on increasing their audiences for performances. RDT needs to focus their attention and concentrate on the younger, college-aged population, as well as the diversity in the gender demographic. As they stated, much of their audience makeup is older, and generally women. Focusing on a younger crowd will hopefully create audience members for life and focusing on bringing men to the performances will most likely strengthen numbers as a whole. RDT is creating the material for engagement, but now they need to create a more thorough method on how to engage in that material, technically, physically, and emotionally. They have a loyal following, but they need to create more followers.