

Case Study Analysis

*for*



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AAD 610  
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Fall 2015

### Organization's Background

For the rebranding and case study, I have chosen the New American Shakespeare Tavern and the Atlanta Shakespeare Company. They describe themselves as “a bright and talented group of professionals who interpret, direct, produce and perform the works of William Shakespeare.” The Atlanta Shakespeare Company was founded in 1984 with a production of *As You Like It* at Manuel's Tavern, a pub in Atlanta. From there the company's work garnered national attention and began growing into the popular attraction that they are today. They moved into their current location on Peachtree Street in 1990 and then became known as the Shakespeare Tavern. They were the first American company to ever perform in London on the Globe's stage in 1995.

Identifying as an Original Practice Playhouse, they offer a unique theatre/pub combo and a variety of works from Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as well as Shakespeare-related plays. They define Original practice as “a modern audience experiencing the play in a manner consistent with its creator's original intent.” In application, this means that the Tavern does its best to maintain the energy and style of Elizabethan performance. All of their performances are dinner theatre, offering a full menu to their audiences before the show and during intermission. The actors directly engage with the patrons and the stage is designed as a low thrust into the audience. This means that at anytime an audience member may become part of the performance, say if their phone rings or they have a noticeable reaction that an actor decides to respond to. This does not always play out as intensely as the company would like, as modern audiences are trained to be quiet and not interfere with performances. This case study will go into greater detail about the pros and cons of dedicating the company to Original Practice later as part of the SWOC analysis.

The Shakespeare Tavern is a member of the Actor's Equity Association (AEA), and the Shakespeare Theatre Association (STA), and Atlanta Art Lives Here. Both AEA and STA are major national organizations with a wide array of professional theatre companies in their networks. Atlanta Art Lives Here is a local initiative and not specific to performance. This illustrates how the Tavern tries to balance a local flavor with a broader, more professional appeal. The double name is also an example of maintaining this balance. Their duality is pervasive throughout the organization and will also be discussed more in depth in the SWOC Analysis.

## Environmental Scan

### **Economic Scan**

The Shakespeare Tavern's 501c3 is registered in the state of Georgia as the Atlanta Shakespeare Company. The 501c3 status both encourages individual donors and makes the organization eligible for a variety of grants. They also have different levels of corporate sponsorship ranging from \$1,500 (a One Week Program Sponsorship) to \$50,000 (a Season Title Sponsorship). All of the levels are explained in detail on their website. They also have detailed information on their Annual Fund and there is a link to the Donate page on the masthead.

Externally, the organization's economic situation is varied. Being located in a major city, there are many large organizations and individual philanthropists to support the organization. There are also a variety of foundations and trusts offering grant opportunities. There are also state and local funding resources such as the Georgia Council for the Arts and the NEA.

Their current sponsors are Target, Bank of America, the Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund, the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, Fulton County Arts Council, Jones Day Law Firm, McKenna Long and Aldridge Law Firm, and Midtown Cleaners and Laundry. Target is specifically funding their education tours, Bank of America is specifically funding their Romance Repertory, Jones Day specifically sponsored a previous production of Macbeth, and Midtown Cleaners and Laundry acts as their costuming sponsor. They may have other sponsors that are not listed on their website.

Looking at the Tavern's tax forms on Guidestar, they are in very good fiscal shape. The organization shows over \$1.9 million in assets. There was approximately a \$20,000 loss last year, however, there was a \$100,000 increase in their total revenue for a total of \$1.6 million. This speaks to the stability of the organization and support for their work in the Atlanta community.

### **Demographic Scan**

The Shakespeare Tavern does not have a discernable target audience. Because of their education programs and a strong subscriber program, a lot of their audience consists of families and older couples. Their marketing tends to be consistent but general, playing on the universality

of Shakespeare and the approachability of the organization. A significant part of Atlanta's population is between the ages of 18 and 30 due to having three major universities in the city- Georgia Tech, Georgia State, and Emory University. These schools are in addition to several smaller liberal arts and community colleges. Additionally, the city attracts many young people due to a wealth of employment opportunities and low cost of living compare to almost every other large city. According to the 2013 American Community Survey, approximately 20.5% of the population is between the ages of 20 and 34.

Being in a major city is a significant advantage for the Shakespeare Tavern, as the culture is weighted in favor of the arts and they have direct access to a large pool of resources and artistic talent. The fact that they are a pub is also a good hook for being in an urban setting. This also means that the Tavern's market has above average diversity. The majority population in Atlanta, according to the 2010 Census, is African American at 54%. This is an important consideration in planning their programming. Unfortunately, their staff and acting company do not reflect Atlanta's diversity. This is a common struggle faced by arts organizations with no easy solution.

### **Cultural Scan**

The atmosphere at the Tavern is casual, both amongst the patrons and the staff. For performances, patrons can order drinks and food before the show and during intermission. It is restaurant-style seating with a buffet line in the back of the theater. This quirkiness is also pervasive in the organizational culture. A major emphasis of the organization is making Shakespeare approachable and fun. They even have a "Bardometer" telling prospective audiences how difficult the play is to grasp. Their shows are also consistently very high energy and they tend to focus on comedic works, though have chosen more dramatic pieces this season.

Shakespeare Tavern depends very heavily on volunteers, especially during performances. In addition to ushering, volunteers help sell the food and souvenirs. There is a core management group as well as the acting company. The acting company is usually in charge of the education programs with supervision from the management. It is a very close-knit working environment and the theatre is known for re-casting a lot of the same people every season.

Atlanta is the largest city in the Southeast, making it a true cultural epicenter. People travel to the city from all over the world for many different reasons. It is also a very transient city, with many people moving away after a few years. Most importantly, the suburban community is very connected to Atlanta. Most people brave Interstate 75's notorious traffic for work, social engagements, cultural events, and errands. This means that long drives are part of Atlanta's cultural framework, expanding the Shakespeare Tavern's audience.

### **Other Environmental Elements**

In addition to the Tavern's local framework, they are working within the larger national context. American Theatre just released the results of their 2014 Theatre Facts Survey. American Theatre is part of the Theatre Communications Group and this survey is of TCG member theatres. In the press release for the report, they offer a very optimistic summary at the US moves out of the recession. The report noted increased funding opportunities and a decrease in theatres running a deficit between 2010 and 2013.

Specifically regarding Atlanta, there is a lot to take into account regarding the politics of the city. Because of the diversity, there is a lot of concern in the city about issues of race and socioeconomics. The city also has legitimate issues surrounding race that tend to spark tension in the oddest places. From my personal experience attending the Tavern, their audiences tend to not reflect the city's diversity as well. This could most likely be resolved in diversifying their staff and acting company. Additionally, the African American community is still faced with the same socioeconomic and cultural challenges as the rest of the nation so they are less likely to engage with the arts.

### Media Inventory

In addition to their website, the Shakespeare Tavern has profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. They also have a blog (<http://shakesparetavern.blogspot.com/>). Of these, Facebook is updated the most often with the most recent post being from just two days ago. This is followed by Twitter, which was updated about a month ago. The blog has not been updated in a couple of months. The company is also featured on Yelp and Wikipedia. There are also a

variety of tourism websites recommending the Tavern. They also use email lists, sell tickets online, and use a Paypal donation button. From all of this, it is evident that they are aware of the major media sources available to them. They are not maximizing on these opportunities, however, and they may not be as familiar with how to best use some of these sources.

For example, the material on the Tavern's blog is actually quite engaging. However, it is not updated regularly nor prominently advertised on their website. The blog therefore mostly goes unnoticed. Additionally, Twitter is a very fast-paced media outlet so not having made a post in the past month means they are most likely not catching anybody's attention. Since theatre is a visual art form, Twitter has a less of a purpose than Facebook and the blog. In general, Shakespeare Tavern is making use of a very limited scope of what marketing tools are available.

### SWOC Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges)

#### **Cultural Product**

**S:** The Shakespeare Tavern produces consistent work with consistently solid production value. Their venue was modeled after the original Globe Theatre in London, so the stage is very stylized but also adaptable to most productions. This combined with the casual comforts of dinner theatre is a unique experience and the organization, while not the only dinner theatre in Atlanta, is truly unique. They have an established following and a good reputation throughout the Atlanta theatre community. Keeping their productions simple and true to Elizabethan form also makes their work appealing to a wide array of audiences, including and especially those averse to more modern theatrical endeavors.

**W:** While consistency is a good thing to some, the experience offered at the Tavern can eventually feel repetitive and patrons can lose interest easily. Regarding the Shakespearian canon, the company sticks with traditional Elizabethan presentations. While always enjoyable, this does restrict opportunities to be creative and challenge their audiences.

**O:** Given the organization's impressive history and fiscal stability, there is a lot of creative and business potential for the organization. This is also the only company of its kind in the United States. The theatre is also located in the heart of a major city with many other cultural and tourist attractions. With a more streamlined brand, the organization could easily become one of the larger known Shakespeare companies in the country.

**C:** Suddenly offering new interpretations of Shakespeare's work after years of providing their audience with traditional presentations would be problematic. Most of the Tavern's audience comes in expecting clean and simple Shakespeare. Additionally, the company would have to bring the new ideas into their classic Elizabethan space while avoiding any serious serious clashes with the design.

Moving away from Original Practice would also mean reevaluating the organization's mission. In being dedicated to Original Practice, the Tavern loses a lot of opportunities to attract new audiences. Growing the organization to include new creative opportunities could cause a lot of issues amongst the artistic staff and their subscribers. There is really no good way to balance of bringing in some fresh ideas and not confusing the audience and staff with a new mission.

### **Product Access**

**S:** Located on Peachtree Street, a main thoroughfare in downtown Atlanta, the Shakespeare Tavern is easily accessible by walking, car, and public transportation. There are a few paid parking lots close by that patrons can choose from as well as their own parking. Along Peachtree are numerous shops and restaurants that can act as potential partners and help to attract potential patrons. Financially, the company offers offers preview nights for a discount and a variety of group offers. There is also a chair lift to help patrons down the flight of stairs to the lobby and theatre.

**W:** Many of the parking lots by the organization charge, especially on weekends. As such, this parking may not be accessible to all guests. Outside of these parking lots, there

are not a lot of options. Parking is important since Atlantans are heavily dependent on their cars. Also, being located on a major thoroughfare has its drawbacks. While the venue's Globe-inspired design extends to the face of the building, certainly drawing attention. However, there is no easy way of pulling directly up to the building. For those who are unfamiliar with the area, this can pose a problem. Physically, the space is a three story building and you walk into a landing on a staircase. You can either go upstairs to the rehearsal halls or downstairs to the theatre. There is no elevator, which poses serious issues for persons with disabilities.

**O:** Downtown Atlanta is one of the only places in Georgia with efficient public transportation and pedestrian friendly areas. Providing this information to their patrons and potentially offering incentives to those using public transportation to get to the theatre would diversify their audiences and help modernize their image. There is also a wide array of grants for renovating a space to be more accessible for persons with disabilities, so it would be prudent to invest some research into those opportunities.

**C:** There is really nothing that can be done about the parking situation at the Shakespeare Tavern with the exception of partnering with some of the paid lots close by or expanding their own small parking lot. Also, renovating the building to meet ADA standards would be costly and mostly likely leave the theatre dark for too long.

Being located in Atlanta, Shakespeare Tavern is one option in a very large arts and entertainment. The competition for audience, resources, and artists is thus exceptionally intense. They are also fairly small in comparison to other theatres in town such as the Alliance and the Fox. They are also one of many Shakespeare-specific companies and dinner theatres in the US. While they are unique amongst these companies, it is important for the organization to promote that they are the only theatre of their kind.

### **Promotional Efforts**

**S:** Their website is very elaborate and holds a lot of valuable information. They also have Additionally, their Facebook page being active is a great help. Additionally, being

featured on major websites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor boosts the organization's visibility. They also receive funding from some major corporations and are fiscally stable, which is encouraging to granting organizations and prospective donors.

**W:** Promoting the Atlanta Shakespeare Company separately from the Shakespeare Tavern is a major issue for the organization. While the Tavern hosts events for other groups, it is important to not isolate the resident company. Additionally, of all the information on their website about their sponsors are restricted to a set of logos towards the bottom of the page.

**O:** Many theatres have begun making use of Instagram since it is standard to document live performances via photographs. People attend live performances for the visuals, so this really is the ideal social media platform for a theatre. The app has also gained an immense following since its beginnings. There is also a lot of potential on the theatre's blog if they were to gather more material and promote the page more prominently. Additionally, people referring to the organization as the Atlanta Shakespeare Tavern is an opportunity to resolve the separate names.

**C:** Their audience tends to not know the difference between the resident company and the Tavern. People often use a blend of the names and refer to the organization as the Atlanta Shakespeare Tavern. Thus when something is marketed as happening at the Tavern or as an Atlanta Shakespeare Company production, there may be confusion to some who is producing the show. Fully merging the resident company with the Tavern itself would mean a lot of paperwork and a lot of confusion for patrons and staff. It would also be an expensive process to refile the legal paperwork and undergo a total rebranding.

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