

Oregon Contemporary Theater
Marketing Strategy

Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea

Marketing, Media & Communication
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Strategy: Word of Mouth
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The Oregon Contemporary Theater has great potential for growth: a large untapped audience with a growing arts interest, and a unique, high quality product that is rooted in important contemporary issues. OCT is uniquely situated to confront social themes and issues, and can potentially provide an outlet for theatrical exploration of these ideas. They are trying to do so much with a limited budget, which means that in order to reach wider audiences and to serve this vibrant role in the Eugene community, OCT must consistently implement creative and strategic yet financially sensitive marketing strategies.

Section I: Objectives

After analyzing OCT attendance reports from the first three productions of the last two seasons, we did not see any consistent patterns. Because of the inconsistency in attendance (varying from 42% to 111% capacity) and because we expect attendance to be higher at the final weeks of *Dontréll*, with flex-pass holders using their tickets before season-end, we focused on ensuring higher attendance at the beginning to increase consistency throughout the following weeks. Early attendance should also encourage earlier reviews which should then reinforce earlier word of mouth activity. Based on the data, the total average attendance per show is 110 people or 84% capacity. The objective is to increase this by 15% (20 people) per show during the first two weeks, specifically focusing on younger audiences. We intend to stimulate a more “immeasurable” result, creating energy and excitement around the play and greater visibility of the brand.

Section II: Strategies

The subject of the play could potentially attract audiences diverse in both ethnicity and age, and because of its contemporary nature and unique themes, it is relevant to ideas and issues concerning race, identity and heritage. The play possesses a consistent lyrical quality easily related to poetry and hip-hop. OCT has the opportunity to capitalize on these connections to attract new audiences and expand the narrative beyond the play through related events and marketing.

To increase word of mouth activity, earlier attendance and earlier reviews, we propose a strategy centered around a special event to broaden the impact of the standalone play. With select partners, OCT would host an evening event in the lobby during the first week of the production. The event would focus on diversity and heritage, specifically African American heritage, combining themes of the play with the four elements of hip-hop. The event would feature performances and artwork by hip-hop artists, local MCs and DJs, freestyle dance, street artists, and the UO Slam Poet team. OCT would encourage artists to “remix” and “reinterpret” the script (ideas central to hip-hop culture). The performances would reinforce the themes and lyrical quality of the play while bringing in younger audiences and creating energy and excitement. Many artists already have a strong following at the university and have worked closely with UO student, campus radio DJ and hip-hop artist Desmond Harvey. Desmond is very connected to the Eugene hip-hop community and has organized several similar events on campus. He has already expressed interest in helping organize an OCT event. He is also connected to the UO FIG (Freshman Interest Group) Program, providing an opportunity to connect the play to a younger demographic. The event would encourage people to attend the play and leave reviews. QR codes would be utilized to conveniently lead participants to the review sites, and should be displayed in the lobby and on printed programs.

A short preview video for the productions would engage younger audiences while also generating word of mouth activity through web, email and social media sharing. The video might combine behind-the-scenes interviews with cast, rehearsal segments, and performances and music by various featured artists. Social media would be an important outlet to carry the excitement and energy surrounding the event into the digital sphere to keep the conversation going, engage a wider audience, and encourage sharing and dialogue around the themes of the play, while connecting OCT with sponsors and related outside organizations and events.

Section III: Implementation

The event would be hosted during the first or second week of the production, when attendance is expected to be lowest. The greatest challenges for OCT would be budget and staff time, but with effective partnerships these roadblocks could be easily alleviated. Because the budget for OCT receptions is usually less than \$200, it would be important for them to partner with local businesses for greater impact and support. The theater could provide wine, and sponsors such as Safeway, Trader Joes, Sam Bonds, Ninkasi, Falling Sky, Oakshire or Growler Underground could help provide hors d'oeuvres and beer.. OCT staff would need to spend time securing a planning committee to ease staff responsibility, securing sponsors, partners and artists, coordinating event logistics, and any additional marketing to promote the event, which could also potentially be alleviated by effective partnerships. Planning would need to begin immediately, with partners secured no later than April 15th and promotion beginning no later than May 1st.

Preparation for the video preview would begin at the end of March, with work by a student or local videographer starting April 1st and completed by April 30th. Leading cast members would need to be available for brief interviews at least one month in advance of the opening. OCT could potentially maintain a low budget by negotiating a trade for tickets or a subscription.

The event and its related promotion would provide an opportunity for OCT to take on the role of the DJ, partnering up with other organizations and artists, and remixing different artistic mediums to tell a vibrant and relevant story of heritage and diversity. By hosting such a unique interpretive event, OCT can cultivate word of mouth energy among a broader and younger audience. The event and its corresponding promotion would create a larger narrative outside of the play, while bringing together a wide spectrum of art forms around the story, and encouraging viewers to consider the themes of the play, and the OCT brand, in a more dynamic way.