

Oregon Contemporary Theatre Marketing Strategy & SWOC Analysis

Marketing, Media & Communication

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The Oregon Contemporary Theatre benefits from great potential and opportunity present in the unique content that they offer and a large available audience. A detailed SWOC analysis of the organization reveals weaknesses and challenges restricted by location, budget, and other aspects but also important strengths that, when combined, provide for many growth opportunities. After analyzing the organization and considering the goal they have in mind to increase attendance at earlier shows in the season, we determined that strengthening their word of mouth marketing would be beneficial to increasing attendance not only for *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea*, but long term as well. The play will be performed at the OCT during the second half of May through the first weekend in June. Our goal is to cultivate word of mouth marketing in order to increase attendance by 15% within the first two weeks of the play. We project that this early attendance will continue to foster word of mouth marketing throughout the season.

Both OCT and the play *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea*, possess many positive aspects and opportunities. The theatre has the potential to reach a large Eugene audience interested in the arts and that provides strong support for theater. *Dontrell*, the subject of the play, is a young African American man in search of a connection with his past and to his ancestors. This subject could potentially attract audiences in diversity of both ethnicity and ages. Because of its contemporary nature and unique themes, it is quite relevant, and could pair well with discussion around current racial tensions, diversity and identity or heritage. The play possesses a lyrical tone that could be connected to poetry, hip-hop, or other music or dance. Related to both dance and free styling, this unique aspect could serve as an opportunity to bring in a much different audience. The play is a high quality, unique, new work that may benefit from the growing interest in contemporary art. OCT is able to offer affordable prices and convenient purchasing methods. Lastly, OCT has the opportunity to expand their marketing in order to reach much broader audiences.

The Oregon Contemporary Theatre and this specific production are confronted with both internal weaknesses and external challenges. OCT faces such weaknesses as a small organizational budget not sufficient to develop appropriate marketing strategies, limited interest due to the fact that this specific play is an unknown, contemporary work by a new artist, and the more simplified, conceptual nature of such contemporary works which may be a difficult sell. *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea* is focused on the experiences of an African American man, and the play is performed by a cast of six black people, in Eugene, a city which with very little diversity.

The theater is a small venue located far from the campus district in an area that is not very inviting to visitors. The administration has expressed difficulty in reaching younger audiences, specifically within the university, and this remote location makes that objective difficult to achieve. Another major challenge is that OCT must constantly compete for market share with many other theatre companies.

A strong but inexpensive marketing campaign designed to increase word of mouth communication around OCT and *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea* could potentially increase audience attendance, to the first 7 performances, from the current 60% average attendance per performance to a 75% average attendance. In order to accomplish this goal, we have developed three specific marketing strategies to increase word of mouth communication around the production in order to increase attendance at the beginning of the play's season.

- Read/perform an excerpt of the script in a central location
- Develop a video “preview” for web and social media
- Coordinate direct promotion and related events within the theatre lobby

The first strategy recommends a segmented performance of the play in the lobby of the theater during the last week of the previous production. This preview could also be performed on campus and other central locations, allowing students and others who may be new to OCT and even new to theatre to actually experience the performance in some capacity. Possible campus locations might be lecture halls within the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (JSMA), the UO campus theatre and at the outdoor theatre near the EMU, a central hub on campus that would encourage walk-through traffic to stop and engage with the performance. Possible partnerships might include the JSMA Student Advocacy Council, UO Slam Poets or local hip-hop or dance groups. Combing the lyrical script reading with slam poetry or hip-hop music and dance would connect with students as well as provide an interesting re-interpretation of the play, and would surely draw a crowd. All the events should take place approximately a week before the opening of the production, providing a prime opportunity to engage viewers with the play and encourage them to attend. In order to stimulate word of mouth communication and social media sharing, mobile video and pictures would be encouraged, in tandem with the use of a hashtag specific to the play. These events will be supplemented by materials promoting the play, such as posters,

banners, and sandwich boards if outdoors. Finally, actors and staff should engage the public, encouraging viewers and participants to attend the upcoming productions.

A preview or promotional video for *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea* would be a good way to engage younger audiences while also increasing word of mouth communication through web, email and social media sharing. The video might combine discussion with the cast, segments of a rehearsal, or footage of public readings and performances as a visual way to promote the upcoming show. The content might also feature a connection to current issues that give the play relevancy. It should be no longer than two to three minutes and should be presented in all OCT digital marketing and social media platforms, specifically Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, email and the website.

The third strategy would take place during the first week of performances, when the cast and staff will be engaging with audiences and trying to bring more people to the play. In order to create incentive for viewers to come earlier, OCT would organize a reception for guests after the first two performances in the lobby of the theater. OCT could partner with local businesses to provide food and beer tastings, while also providing related events in the lobby or outside the theatre featuring local hip-hop musicians, dancers, artwork and performances by UO Slam Poets. This would encourage attendees to talk about the play with friends and acquaintances during the reception, in the hopes of creating a unique experience that they might share with others. A computer station could be setup to encourage attendees to submit reviews of the play online after the show or staff could simply encourage this activity upon closing, as well as directing people to the website and OCT social media to stay abreast of upcoming events and offers. The biggest challenges that this strategy presents are costs associated with staff time and possibly acquiring food, drink and entertainment if partnerships and sponsorships cannot be obtained. The OCT budget may not be large enough to achieve desired promotional efforts and to cover all amenities, which is why it would be necessary to generate mutually beneficial partnerships.

Overall, there is great opportunity for the Oregon Contemporary Theatre to attract broader audiences, expand their marketing activities and grow as an organization, but there are also many obstacles that they must overcome. Beginning to develop a strategy to increase word of mouth marketing would help to expand their reach and allow them to begin building a greater network of support within Eugene.