“NEVER ENOUGH TIME OR RESOURCES”

BUILDING AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITIES OF MEDIA ARTS ORGANIZATIONS IN ONTARIO

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Contents

"NEVER ENOUGH TIME OR RESOURCES": BUILDING AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITIES OF MEDIA ARTS ORGANIZATION IN ONTARIO

Contextual and Historical Factors

"Media Arts" as a Category

Before we can move to a discussion of specific issues related to audience development for the media arts, we must begin by situating the media arts in a larger cultural and historical context. This discussion is very basic, and falls outside of a strictly research-based framework, but in the course of everyday discourse within any field fundamentals can easily be forgotten or overlooked, so it's start by indentifying these basic issues.

To begin with: The very term "media arts" is one whose meaning is probably obscure to the general public, even to many who routinely read literature or attend performances or art galleries. The idea of a coherent body of "media arts," as distinct from the commercial mass media on the one hand, and from traditional fine arts or performing arts on the other, is not one that is immediately apparent to everyone, *including*, for example, many critics who write about film, television or gallery-based art. In general, those educated in mass media or the fine arts are profoundly ignorant of the history and practice of media arts – though that situation is beginning to change with the emergence of a younger generation of curators, critics and administrators who have a broader knowledge base. (Media artists are undoubtedly not alone in this: in the literature, for example, writers on contemporary dance have written about their field as one that suffers from an "image problem," and complain that it is left out of history books, is absent from public schools and largely ignored by media and institutions of higher learning. [Levine, 36-38] One might expect poets, performance artists, sound artists, and those in other fields to feel similarly ignored.)

For this reason, I stress that we should begin any discussion of marketing and audience development for the media arts by acknowledging that *the term media arts itself has no currency with the general public, or even with segments of the public with an investment in the arts and/or mass media*. This is a situation distinct from the use of the terms "fine arts" or "performing arts," each of which is widely understood as an umbrella term covering a number of distinct disciplines such as painting, drawing and sculpture (fine arts) or dance, music and theatre (performing arts). There is, for example, no entry for the term "media art" in Wikipedia, though there is one for "new media art," which focuses exclusively on the use of recent digital tools and systems in artworks. Nor is there a published literature on marketing and audience development in the media arts: There are many publications and even regular journals devoted to these topics as they relate to the performing arts, museums and the movie business, but

apart from a couple of modest studies like this one, commissioned by arts councils, I have found *nothing* in print that addresses these issues in the context of what we would recognize as media arts.

The categorical status of media artworks as "neither fish nor fowl" is, in my view, one of the fundamental barriers to increasing public visibility for this work, and I will return to this point later. But I would suggest initially that we consider "media arts" a term to be used primarily in a *professional* context, among practitioners, administrators, funders and the like. To the extent that it is used in for the purposes of audience development and marketing, this must be done consciously, with the intention of educating the public on the meaning of the term and the specific disciplines that it encompasses. Often, medium- or discipline-specific terms describing specific types of work, such as film, video, installation, performance art or new media have greater descriptive value. This leaves open the question of how organizations whose practices cover a range of media and disciplines, and who do not wish simply to describe themselves as "film" or "arts" events/organizations, might describe themselves in general-purpose materials. The alternative, of course, is for organizations to commit to a consistent use of the term in most settings. Combined with a concerted effort toward public education this might make the term more comprehensible to a broader public over time (see Recommendations, below).

Historical Position of Media Arts

The media arts are, by definition, those created using such (relatively) *new media* as photography and film, video and audio recording and digital technologies (interactive systems, robotics, websites, etc.). The "early" mechanical new media, such as photography and film, were developed specifically as mechanical means of reproduction, and the capacity of the images they created to be reproduced many times over immediately separated them from traditional hand-worked representational media of drawing, painting, etc. (with multiple-copy media such as woodblock printing, engraving and movable type forming a transitional stage.) This change signified a break from the traditional understanding of what constituted "art," a break that was the inevitable result of the reproducibility and mechanical basis of the images produced by these media. (Benjamin, 217-251) The more recent electronic media, through their capacity for instantaneous transmission over large geographical areas, drastically accelerated and intensified this historical break in our relationship to representations and reproductions, and has nearly superseded the book-oriented culture that has been dominant in the west for many centuries. This shift from linear to what Vilém Flusser calls "imaginal" thought represents a historical crisis: "We have two alternatives before us. First, there is the possibility that imaginal thinking will not succeed in incorporating conceptual thinking. This could lead to a generalized depoliticization, deactivation, and alienation of mankind, to the victory of the consumer society, and to the totalitarianism of the mass media. Such a development would look very much like the present mass culture, but in a more exaggerated or gross form. The second possibility is that imaginal thinking will succeed in incorporating conceptual thinking." (Flusser, 34) These lines, written in 1973, suggest how crucially important the media arts are in historical terms.

The practical effects for artists and organizations specializing in these media are less well described than the general historical shifts they represent. From early in their history, there have been divergent approaches to these media in terms of their cultural status. Entire mass-media industries have grown up using them in terms of "entertainment," "journalism," "education" and related genres, while there have always been advocates for the possibility of their distinct use in the creation of works of art. This dynamic has played itself out repeatedly, in the media of photography, film, audio, video and digital media. Advocates for the media arts have had to make the case repeatedly that the artistic use of media is distinct from the commercial or industrial use of the same media, and that it is not merely an elitist function inappropriately applied. It is an argument that is never 100% won, despite the recognition awarded to specific artists, as media arts production is always seen in relation to its immensely larger and more influential commercial manifestations, a situation that does not obtain, say, for painting, ballet or theatre, none of which is automatically perceived in reference to a larger, more popular and socially powerful application of the same medium.

At the same time, the very ease of reproduction and distribution of these media, for many of their practitioners, form part of their democratic appeal. Precisely because they do *not* result in unique and valuable objects, but in reproductions that can be made widely available, these have been seen as media that can do what is recognizably the work of an artist, but can also be made accessible and available to a potentially wide audience. It is precisely this impulse, which moves simultaneously away from the audience conceived as a homogeneous mass of consumers, away from the audience conceived as a special cultured elite, and towards an idea of a form of art and communication that is at once personal (in the sense of being informed by the specific character of the artist), potentially oppositional (in social, political and aesthetic terms), *and* generally accessible. These media move the idea of the artist away from that of someone who makes rare and beautiful objects, and towards the idea of the artist as someone who creates reproducible audio-visual texts that have a special character. They bring the model of the artist closer to that of the author.

But the media artist is in a peculiar position, particularly within the cultural economy of a capitalist society. The media artist does not create a fine art object that is endowed with a Benjaminian "aura" derived from its uniqueness. Nor, however, does the media artist create a mass-media text intended to be consumed as a form of entertainment or communication by a mass audience, with the accompanying rewards of money and fame that success in the mass media may bring. In this sense, the failure of media art *as a commodity* virtually guarantees that it will be recognized neither as an art nor as a contribution to media in the context of a capitalist culture in which the reward of financial gain is seen as the evidence of success, regardless of the quality or character of the product itself. This also creates a double bind for the media artist, who one the one hand desires to reach a larger, more general audience – and thus does not want to be seen to criticize that potential audience – but on the other hand does not want to be restricted by the few socially, aesthetically and intellectually impoverished models offered by the corporate media. The organizations that serve the media arts share this double bind with the producers themselves.

The above discussion provides some sense of why the audience for what would be recognized as "media arts," by a body such as the Canada Council for the Arts, or by the members of MANO, is actually so very small compared to the mass audiences for television, commercial films, etc. For the purposes of this study I will focus on narrower issues related to audience development and marketing, but to begin with, in order to understand the context in which we are operating, I think it is important to look at this question more closely.

How and What Does the Audience See?

We live in a culture in which virtually everyone, from the earliest age, is constantly exposed to the various mass media whose technical and production substrates are shared by the media arts: television, radio, movies, and computer interfaces, including countless applications on the internet, from the viewing of videos on YouTube to research, banking and shopping. The employment of these media by corporate and state producers, oriented as they are towards the production of profits, the sale of commodities through the vehicle of advertising, and the control of the terms of social and political debate in the public sphere, tends to be severely restrictive in terms of overt content, implicit values and the conventions of production and representation alike. These general characteristics of mass media have been named by various critics using terms such as the "Institutional Mode of Representation," (Noël Burch) or "the Monoform" (Peter Watkins). They become so familiar to the mass of media consumers, and so ingrained in terms of the expectations of what we will see and hear – and therefore what we come to believe we *want* to see and hear – that productions created using these same media, but that do not conform to the ideological positions, representational conventions, "production values" and other norms of mass media may generally be seen as *failed attempts* to engage in mass media production rather than as part of a separate, frequently opposed, enterprise altogether.

Unfortunately, this situation is only exacerbated by existing programs, in the educational system, that encourage at least a minimal level of "media literacy" in young people. The admirable attempts made by educators to develop their students' critical capacities to analyze mass media products – usually focusing on important issues such as the manipulative techniques of advertising, representational issues such as body image, sexism and racism, and implicit political bias – are unfortunately seldom complemented by the presentation of works in the same media that are created consciously and specifically as works of art, or even as straightforward, discursive alternatives to mass media intended to address specific social or political issues. The pernicious messages and techniques of mass media are criticized, but students are not exposed to the wealth of alternatives. Thus, in one gesture the need for independently produced media art is invoked, but the existence of actual work in this category is denied. We cannot blame the educators: they are doing what they can with limited knowledge, training and resources, and within the strictures of well-meaning but dull curricula. And, needless to say, the widespread cutbacks to, or elimination of, arts education in the public schools ensures that the opportunities for young people to be exposed to media arts

productions by this route are almost non-existent. In short, the chances of a child having seen an experimental film or work of video art or new media art in school before graduating from secondary school are vanishingly small.

At the same time, the sheer proliferation of media productions and platforms makes it even more important to be able to distinguish between the conscious, artistic applications of media and the ubiquitous commercial and amateur productions found across the web and on sites such as YouTube. Even on the web, for example, it has become clear that producers wishing to be thought of as artists, and using the web as a professional exhibition platform, are gravitating towards sites like Vimeo rather than YouTube, which contains such a mass of undifferentiated material that it becomes difficult to distinguish between funny pet videos, advertisements or experimental videos.

The Crowded Marketplace

Another crucial contextual issue is that of audience time and attention. In larger centres, there are many, many arts and cultural exhibitions and events available to the cultural consumer, and it is understandably difficult for small organizations with minimal financial resources to make their presence known. Media arts organizations are competing for audience attention not only with large cultural institutions such as major museums and galleries, theatre, music and dance events and mainstream movies, but also with a vast wealth of cultural material available from broadcasters or on-line, much of it free and available at the convenience of the user. Those operating in smaller centres may find it somewhat easier to publicize their events, as there is less competition for media attention, but at the same time the lack of a larger context readily at hand can make it hard to develop sophisticated responses from media commentators and audiences alike.

New media have changed the habits of arts-goers. As one writer on marketing for the performing arts notes:

> People have also changed in the ways they prefer to do business. Many performing arts attenders want to choose specific programs to attend, not purchase a package of performances preselected by the organization. This trend is not limited to the younger generation who are especially unwilling to plan far in advance, but long-standing arts attenders are also becoming more spontaneous in their ticket purchasing behavior. Thanks to the advances in communications technology, especially the internet and e-mail, people have come to expect comprehensive information and the ultimate in convenience, literally at their fingertips. (Bernstein, xi)

Coming to the attention of audiences via coverage in mainstream media outlets is also challenging. Even where journalists show interest, editors tend to be extremely conservative, second-guessing their readership's interest in anything that doesn't come with a celebrity or clear-cut social issue attached. Many of our exhibition organizations have in fact been quite

successful in this regard, generally by working with professional publicists who also deal with more mainstream fare.

Proximal Contexts and Influences

While the discussion above describes a somewhat gloomy situation with regards to the position of the media arts in the culture as a whole, we also need to be aware of how our organizations and institutions are shaped by the positive reinforcement of funding systems, sponsorships, publicity and other factors that lie closer to the ground of everyday organizational practices. Canada's system of artist-run centres, which was partly initiated in Ontario, was developed mostly as a response to the lack of a Canadian art market large enough to provide artists with spaces to exhibit and sell work, and to the social and aesthetic conservatism of the market. Subsidization of arts organizations is founded in part on the recognition that the market does not always reward innovation, may not encourage the participation of minority or disadvantaged groups in cultural production, and does not provide equitable access to the tools of cultural production to those without the financial means to pay market rates. For this reason, a system of parallel art galleries, festivals, production centres and distributors has grown up with the support of arts councils at the federal, provincial and regional/municipal levels, with a lot of variation in funding levels and structures at the provincial and regional/municipal level. This funding system has allowed many organizations to come into being and to operate – in some cases for decades – with more or less financial and organizational stability.

What this funding system has *not* supported as well is significant growth. There are two main factors behind this. First: the media arts as a category are relatively new, and have less cultural authority than the fine arts and the performing arts, with their much longer traditions, older institutions and complementary support from the moneyed classes through individual and corporate sponsorships. The result is that the media arts are simply funded less than these other comparable cultural sectors. Second: institutional mandates to spread the money around, in terms of geography, artistic discipline, organizational sector and community, have created a situation in which there are a lot of organizations, each of which does its work with a small amount of money, small staff sizes and a very limited capacity for growth. Canada's moderate levels of investment in public arts funding (by world standards) are stretched thin, so that even high-performing organizations quickly reach their limits of growth even if they are fairly successful at generating revenue from other sources as well. In my experience – experience confirmed by the results of this survey – marketing, audience development and outreach activities are usually the ones that suffer most from this ongoing condition of structural underfunding. The situation is not uniform across all sectors: it's not surprising to find that exhibitors devote significantly larger resources to these activities than production or distribution centres. But even these larger expenditures are minuscule compared to the kinds of resources directed at the same activities by comparable commercial exhibitors or large public institutions.

In this situation it is only natural that the funding bodies come to function as a surrogate "market" for those organizations that are entirely dependent upon them for their continued existence. Arts council juries can come to be seen unconsciously as the primary "audience" for an organization's activities, rather than actual audiences, or potential audiences for artworks, exhibitions and events.

One response to this observation has been to insist that artist-run centres must become more entrepreneurial. During the year of arts funding cuts in Ontario under the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris, for example, the Ontario Arts Council's funding was cut by 50%. The Conservative model provided incentives for ARC's to replace lost funding by finding other sources of revenue, such as corporate sponsorship, which could often be matched through new public funding initiatives. For a handful of organizations this may have proved partly successful. But most artist-run centres, which were developed *specifically to provide an alternative to market-oriented culture*, have not proved able to generate significant levels of corporate sponsorship, especially in the form of cash contributions. (In-kind sponsorships are helpful, and easier to obtain, but do not directly support operating expenses such as rent, salaries, capital expenditures on equipment, and so on.) More than one organization has spent tens of thousands of dollars on Development positions financed through temporary funds, only to realize that in the long run the position was unable to pay for itself.

Most artist-run centres simply do not have enough to offer potential corporate sponsors to interest them in the organizations. Again, exhibitors, and particularly festivals, are better positioned to generate sponsorships owing to their greater public profile. And distributors routinely generate significant amounts of revenue from sales and rentals of artists' work; but as not-for-profit organizations mandated to return most of this revenue to the artists they represent, even highly effective distributors may not be able to realize organizational stability or growth primarily on the basis of self-generated revenues. And in neither case can the level of self-generated revenue reasonably be expected to permit the organization to compete as a player in the commercial marketplace. (In addition, we might observe that the conservative approach is contradictory: no private business would ever begin a plan for long-term growth by *cutting* the resources available to support the activities intended to create that growth. They would, rather, begin by deciding what *new* resources they would to invest in a specific plan for growth. When it comes imposing market discipline on the arts, however, the first step generally seems to involve cuts to available funding.)

None of this is intended to indicate that it would be a bad thing for ARC's to adopt more creative, aggressive and entrepreneurial approaches, particularly when it comes to marketing and audience development. Organizations' levels of activity can ebb and flow not only with changes in available funding, but also because of shifting levels of staff commitment, shifts in community interest in the particular field of activity, and so on; we are all aware that there are moribund or redundant organizations entrenched in the system. But we have also seen organizations on the brink of collapse return to become vital and indispensable again with a change in board and/or staff, and a change in general direction. In any case it is crucial to recognize that a change in approach and energy inputs alone cannot be expected to lead to any

dramatic change in fortune, but rather to a qualitative shift in levels of creativity and success that encourage incremental quantitative improvements in audience interest and financial support.

Summary

The media arts have proven difficult to assimilate to existing scales of cultural value, as they exist in a kind of netherworld between (and often opposed to) the practices of the fine or performing arts and the corporate operations of the mass media. In this environment it has been difficult for the media arts to develop a clear identity in the minds of audiences, critics and educators alike. The relative failure of media artworks as a commodity has meant that most media artists are poorly rewarded for their work, if they receive any compensation at all. And the media arts, despite their relative accessibility to audiences, are among the lowest-funded categories of all the arts in Canada, according to figures available from the various arts councils. Of the six disciplines listed in the Canada Council's Funding to artists and arts organizations 2009-10: National Overview, the media arts are the lowest funded category (apart from "Inter-Arts, which is not a discipline per se, but a program to enable collaborations between disciplines).

None of this should lead us to despair. The media arts *can* develop their audience. I have experienced this time and time again in my long involvement with exhibitors, production centres and distributors alike. There are many recent successes in our communities, and if one thing is clear, it is that a combination of strong, consistent programming, clear communications, savvy marketing and high standards of presentation do develop audiences.

Building Audience Development Capacities: Survey

Design and Methodology

A survey was developed with the intention of eliciting from MANO member organizations information that would allow us to understand how organizations are currently dealing with marketing and communications, audience development and community outreach. The survey consisted of 30 specific questions and three additional open-ended questions dealing with existing approaches in terms of staff structure, financial resources, use of independent contractors, success at reaching primary and secondary audiences, satisfaction with the results of advertising, publicity and quality of media coverage, and preferences about how new resources might be allocated. A draft version of the survey was circulated to the four lead organizations on the project, and feedback from this consultation informed a number of changes to the final version of the survey. The survey (see Appendix A) was distributed to all MANO member organizations in May 2010, and we were able to confirm that 23 received and intended to respond to it. Responses were collected between May and November 2010.

Although not all member organizations actually responded to the survey, the 13 responses (57%) represented each sector (production, distribution and exhibition) in sufficient numbers to provide a definite sense of how organizations are approaching these issues, and also represented a broad range in terms of staff size, amount of funding and so on.

In addition, I consulted with staff at a number of organizations that are not members of MANO but were deemed to be of interest because they occupied a space immediately contiguous to media arts practice, because of their success in audience development, or because some aspect of their operation was seen to be potentially useful in forming the recommendations for this report. Because these organizations ranged in size from much larger than any MANO member organization (e.g. TIFF, Canadian Opera Company) to somewhat larger (MOCCA), to comparable in size (Adventures In Sound Art), we did not survey them using the same tool, but with an open-ended set of questions focused on audience development methods and strategies. Ideas gleaned from these conversations are not accounted for in the survey summary that follows, but did inform the report recommendations.

Organizational Profile and Staffing

Questions 1 through 3 were intended simply to profile MANO organizations in terms of primary field of activity, membership structure and size of operating budget. Most organizations identified one primary field of activity, while two organizations identified both production and exhibition as primary fields of activity for their organizations. However, these organizations were initially founded as production centres and receive more of their funding through the production stream, so in analyzing the data I have categorized them as production centres. This

is done with the understanding that most, if not all, production centres also do public programming of various kinds, not restricted to technical workshops.

Most respondents (62%) have an active voting membership structure, but not all: Festivals respondents do not, and one distributor does not. Respondent organizations range in staff size from a single part-time position to several staff. The larger organizations have between five and nine staff positions, which in all cases include a combination of part- and full-time staff. Festivals also make extensive use of short-term contract staff.

The "usual annual operating budget" (Q.3) for respondent organizations ranged from less than $50,000 to between $500,001 and $750,000, with an average of $352,083 and a mean of $225,000. NOTE ABOUT CALCULATIONS. Notably, no organization spent more than 10% of its budget on combined marketing and audience development activities (excluding staff salaries). Exhibitors spent significantly more than production centres and distributors: On average, exhibitors spent about 8.5% of annual expenditures on marketing and audience development, almost twice the overall average for all organizations.

Table 1 (Question 4): Spending on marketing & audience development as a percentage of annual budgets and as an average amount, by sector and as an average of all organizations

Production (average)	Exhibition (average)	Distribution (average)	All organizations (average)
3.25%	8.5%	1%	4.4%
$2,250	$33,000	$5,125	$15,131

Question 11 asked: "Is there a paid position (or positions) in your organization dedicated *primarily* to marketing and communications, audience development and/or outreach?" The answer, in all but three cases, was *no*. In percentage terms, this means that only 23% of MANO organizations have such positions in place; all of these are festivals.

The organizations that answered "yes" to Q.11 *do* have dedicated communications/audience development/marketing positions, and they were asked to respond to Question 12. Others were directed to Question 13 (see below). Q.12 asked these three organizations to provide additional detail about these staff positions, and to identify their responsibilities from three possible categories: "Marketing & Communications"; "Audience Development"; and/or "Community Outreach."

Two of the three festivals that answered "yes" to Q.11 had a full-time dedicated staff position for this area: one covered all three areas of responsibility, while the other was focused on audience development and outreach. Of these two festivals, one also had a part-time position focused on audience development and outreach. The third festival had only a single part-time

position, a coordinator responsible for in-house marketing and communications efforts. The full-time positions were scheduled at 40 hours per week, and were paid an average of $44,000 per year. Part-time positions were scheduled at 18 and 21 hours per week. (Insufficient information on the part-time positions does not allow me to provide an income level for these.) Full-time positions had a broad range of responsibilities: each covered two or three of the areas of responsibility. Part-time positions, on the other hand, are more closely focused on either marketing and communications or audience development and community outreach.

More typically, organizations answered "no" to Q.11: most do *not* have staff positions dedicated primarily to these activities. Question 13 asked these organizations to outline which positions in their organizations do handle these tasks, and again asked them to specify whether they covered marketing and communications, audience development or community outreach activities. In most MANO organizations, these areas are the responsibilities of a range of part- and full-time staff positions, with titles ranging from Executive Director and Artistic or Programming Director to Technical Director, Coordinator or Operations Manager. One organization identified a single part-time coordinator as responsible for all three areas. At several organizations, multiple positions were identified as equally responsible for all three areas.

From questions 11 through 13, we can conclude that, although a few festivals have full- and part-time staff positions for which these types of activities are the primary responsibility of the job, the norm for MANO organizations is one in which marketing and communications, audience development and community outreach duties are rolled into jobs that include everything from administration to programming, operations and membership or technical services. To anyone who has every worked in a small, non-profit arts organization, this will come as no surprise: we are used to wearing many hats in almost any job we take. However, it does not promise the same level of results as might be achieved by organizations with dedicated staff positions and a more significant administrative and financial investment.
A supplementary question (Q.14) asked: "Do you work with an independent publicist or marketer?" And the follow-up question (Q.15) asked those organizations that answered "yes" to Q.14 how much they spent on independent publicist/marketer fees in an average year. Responses to these questions are summarized in table 2, below.

Table 2 (Questions 14 and 15): Percentage of organizations that work with independent publicist/marketer and average annual amount spent on independent publicist/marketer contracts

Production	Exhibition	Distribution	All organizations
25% use publicist/marketer	80% use publicist/marketer	50% use publicist/marketer	55% use publicist/marketer
$1,700 average annual expense	$9,125 average annual expense	$3,600 average annual expense	$6,900 average annual expense

Here, we again find that exhibitors as a group devote more resources to publicity and marketing than the other sectors. All of the festival respondents use publicists, spending an average of $9,125 per year on these contracts. (This average represents a range of annual spending from $6,000 to $15,000.) The only exhibitor that did not report using contractors for publicity was an exhibitor that presents occasional screenings throughout the year.

One production centre reported using an independent publicist "occasionally on a project basis," and spends an average of just $1,700. One of the two distributors works with independent publicists specifically to publicize its programming, as distinct from its distribution activities, and spends an average of $3,600 annually.

One final question addressing staffing and organization of labour (Q.20) asked whether, given additional resources, organizations would "prefer to conduct marketing and audience development activities through the services of an experienced professional independent publicist/marketer or through a permanent staff position." It also asked respondents to briefly explain the reasons for their preference.

Table 3 (Question 20): Preference for working with independent publicist/marketer or permanent staff position

Production	Exhibition	Distribution	All organizations
75% prefer staff position	60% prefer staff position	100% prefer staff position	72% prefer staff position

Respondents to Q.20 provided a range of telling comments to explain their preferences:

> *Someone entrenched in the organization has a better idea of what is working and what isn't and has a good grasp of the wants and needs of the organization.* (Production centre)

> *We see audience development and marketing as interrelated and needing to be supported by both a media publicist and a staff position dedicated to marketing/communications and outreach. Having a professional publicist who can strictly focus on publicity is totally necessary for an event-driven organization like ours, as they build buzz and expand our reach to new markets. The staff positions support audience development year-round…* (Festival)

> *At present, we employ independent publicists when we have major projects. Thus, we can expect highly focused work and outcome from those contractors. In addition, we put considerable effort in building up promotion through various social media. However, whenever budget permits we want to have a designated media officer.* (Festival)

> *It's a tough call. But for us, having someone external on our 'team' who has established relationships with the media is a huge advantage. Doing it in-house, while helpful with office labour and supporting a wider range of marketing/outreach activities would probably result in more moderate press coverage.* (Festival)

> *We work with a publicist and a well-known arts listserv to publicize our* public *programming, but what we would really prefer would be to have a staff position that could do this fairly simple publicity, as well as working on audience development and looking after general marketing (from Facebook to print ad's) for the organization as a whole.* (Distributor)

Question 30 asked: "Would your organization benefit from working with a marketing consultant to develop a marketing plan?" Every organization, without exception, answered "yes" to this question.

To summarize: MANO respondent organizations generally devote a small proportion of annual budgets to audience development and marketing; if staff salaries are excluded, that proportion is below 10% for all sectors, and below 5% for production and distribution centres. if staff salaries are included we can identify a few organizations that have made permanent investments in these activities full- and/or part-time staff positions. Those organizations are all exhibitors, a result that should surprise no one. In general, these activities are handled by a patchwork of staff positions, many of which may not be an obvious fit.

Slightly more than half of respondents use independent publicist/marketers to publicize programs, but the figure is much higher for exhibitors, at 80%. Given additional resources, 72% of respondents would devote those resources to a permanent staff position rather than directing it to an independent publicist, but many organizations mentioned the importance of support both in the office and from outside contractors. Exhibitors were more likely than distributors or production centres to prefer to direct such resources to an outside contractor.

It seems unlikely that many media arts organizations will make a great deal of headway with audience development until they are able to support permanent positions devoted primarily to it, and to direct greater financial resources to marketing, advertising and in-house audience development initiatives. As one production centre administrator stated in response to one of the open questions at the end of the survey:

> *Currently I spend a fair amount of time on communications and outreach-related activities. It would be great to increase this work and to have an online presence that served the needs beyond basic information and marketing and into a more educational capacity, but there's currently not enough time or resources… never enough time or resources.*

In short, there is a powerful awareness among media arts organizations of the gap between what they would like to do and what they are currently capable of doing with the time and resources available to them. This last, anguished comment thus provided the title for this report.

Satisfaction with Results of Marketing and Audience Development and Relations with Media

Several questions were designed to find levels of satisfaction within organizations regarding their ability to communicate with primary and secondary audiences, and satisfaction with the effectiveness of audience development, marketing, publicity and advertising activities. Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction in each area on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 meaning "highly satisfied," 4 meaning "fairly satisfied," 3 meaning "moderately satisfied," 2 meaning "somewhat dissatisfied," and 1 meaning "highly dissatisfied." These results are given below, in Table 4.

Table 4 (Questions 7, 8, 19, 22 and 24): Satisfaction with outreach capacity, expenditures on marketing/publicity, level & quality of media coverage, and level of education of members of media

Question	Production	Exhibition	Distribution	All org's (average)
7: Satisfaction w/capacity to reach primary audiences	3.25 (moderately satisfied)	3 (moderately satisfied)	2.5 (moderately satisfied to somewhat dissatisfied)	2.9 (moderately satisfied)
8: Satisfaction w/capacity to reach secondary audiences	3.5 (moderately to fairly satisfied)	2.5 (moderately satisfied to somewhat dissatisfied)	2 (somewhat dissatisfied)	2.8 (moderately satisfied)
19:Satisfaction w/expenditures on marketing/publicity	3 (moderately satisfied)	3 (moderately satisfied)	2.5 (moderately satisfied to somewhat dissatisfied)	2.9 (moderately satisfied)
22: Satisfaction with level/quality of media coverage	2.5 (moderately satisfied to somewhat dissatisfied)	3 (moderately satisfied)	2.5 (moderately satisfied to somewhat dissatisfied)	2.7 (moderately satisfied, but tending lower)
24: How well educated/informed are members of media about independent media arts in general?	3 (moderately well-informed)	2.5 (moderately well- to poorly informed)	2.5 (moderately well- to poorly informed)	2.7 (moderately well-informed, but tending lower)

The results of these questions indicate that organizations are neither entirely satisfied with the results of current arrangements nor completely dissatisfied. The overall average results for each question fell below the mid-point of 3, which indicates merely "moderate" satisfaction, with a rating of 2 indicating a "somewhat dissatisfied" response.

Some clear differences between sectors may be noted: For example, production centres were generally more satisfied with their ability to reach their self-identified primary and secondary audiences (Q.7 and 8). This is not a surprising result, since production centre activities (workshops, professional development seminars, etc.) are generally oriented to a smaller, more focused, identifiable community of professional artists and producers, many of whom may be members of the organization, rather than a more amorphous public. Where public programming such as screenings artists' talks is presented by production centres, it is often within a more focused professional context, for which marketing and audience development efforts may be simpler and more straightforward than they are for organizations where activities are intended for a broad general public or community. (This is not to discount production centres' desire to find a broader public for some of their activities, however.)

Exhibitors, who are clearly the most audience-oriented sector, showed a "moderate" level of satisfaction with their capacity to reach their self-identified primary audiences, but less satisfaction with their ability to reach secondary audiences. These results indicate that exhibitors do show results for their efforts, but see significant room for improvement, especially as the target shifts away from their acknowledged primary audiences.

The distributors express the lowest level of satisfaction in responses to all of these questions, including 7 and 8. This may be seen in part as the result of the fact that most distribution activities do not involve marketing directly to audiences, but working through clients to reach audiences. Distributors do present a certain amount of public programming, but perhaps not enough to develop a high degree of expertise in marketing and audience development. At the same time, distributors are highly goal-oriented in the sense of wanting to see year-by-year increases in revenues generated from rentals, sales and licenses for work by the artists they represent. They are also vulnerable to the fluctuations of their markets and the shifting interests of exhibitors, educators, broadcasters, etc., which renders them acutely aware of both their own level of success and the potential for growth.

Satisfaction with expenditures on marketing/publicity (Q.19) showed a similar pattern: while production centres and exhibitors were, on average, "moderately satisfied," distributors fell somewhere between "moderately satisfied" and "somewhat dissatisfied." Again, organizations have a sense that their investments in these areas are not wasted, but that they could see much better results. Distributors operate on a model that is in some respects closer to that of a more traditional business, and they may feel the sting of the old marketing adage, attributed to John Wanamaker: "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half."

All organizations indicated (Q.21) that they received some level of media coverage of their activities. Questions 22 and 24 asked organizations to rate their satisfaction with the "level and quality of media coverage" (Q.22) and how "well educated/informed" they found representatives of the media to be about media arts in general (Q.24). Here we find the lowest levels of overall satisfaction: the overall average for each question measured only 2.7, a position between "somewhat dissatisfied" and "moderately satisfied." Production centres and

distributors positioned themselves between “moderately satisfied” and “somewhat dissatisfied” with the level and quality of media coverage; exhibitors positioned themselves as “moderately satisfied” with same. Production centres found representatives of the media “moderately well-informed,” while exhibitors and distributors were, again, more critical, with an average measure of 2.5, between “poorly informed” and “moderately well-informed.”

One respondent provided a comment that highlighted the difference between *receiving* media coverage or advertising and being satisfied with the results of that coverage:

> *We get free print media ad exchanges with local papers and don’t find that it actually brings people in. It may raise awareness about the centre but it does not translate to participants in a specific activity.* (Production centre)

Media arts organizations, then, do not see media coverage as an end in itself. If it fails to assist in the goal of audience development, it may be a good thing in some general sense, but it is not accomplishing what the organization is most urgently concerned with: increasing and developing its audience.

The Context for Marketing and Audience Development

Unfortunately, there is no body of extant research on marketing and audience development specific to the field of the media arts. It is an area that demands study. However, there is a wealth of material available on the arts in general, or on museums and public galleries, or on the performing arts. The applicability of this material to the context of MANO organizations may be limited by a number of factors:

1. The assumption in much marketing literature is that the reader is working in the context of an institution of at least medium size, i.e. one with a staff of reasonable size and a significant, if restricted, amount to spend on marketing and audience development.

2. Similarly, there is an assumption that the reader has the resources to conduct rigourous audience and demographic surveys, etc.

3. There is little discussion in the literature of how to market material that is inherently "difficult," in the sense that it is challenging to the audience's expectations. Much advice is given on how to make marketing messages about artworks accessible – to overcome the idea of art as an elite activity for other people – on the assumption that the material itself will present no difficulty to the audience once they are confronted with the work. But, as I outlined in my introductory remarks, media art is frequently disorienting in relation to the codes of mainstream media to which in which we have all been trained.

4. All of the literature is directed towards organizations that at least practice within a generally recognized field of endeavour, such as dance, fine arts, publishing, etc. Research papers tend to position cultural activities as generally equivalent. Again, as outlined above, I do not believe that this holds true for the media arts.

Taking these caveats into account, however, there is a good deal to be learned from the published literature.

Understanding Audiences

Media arts organizations will need to spend some time with the literature on audiences and contemporary marketing if we are to build our capacity for audience development. Although I cannot go into great detail in the context of this report, some general contextual factors and ideas from those with experience in the field should be helpful in setting the stage for my recommendations.

What is at stake in developing the audience for the independent media arts? Hill Strategies Research Inc. has conducted research on spending on culture in Canada, broken down by

province (and also including figures for 15 metropolitan areas). According to this report, "Ontarians spent $10.2 billion on cultural goods and services in 2005, 41% of the Canadian total." (Hill Strategies Research Inc., *Consumer Spending on Culture in Canada*, 18) It would be difficult to determine where spending on media arts events and exhibitions would appear in these figures, but it would presumably be included among the $1.1 billion spent on "art works and events" and the $530 million spent on "movie theatre admissions." (*Consumer Spending…*, 8). Additionally, spending was found to have increased by a full 55% between 1997 and 2005, while Ottawa was found to rank first among Canadian cities in terms of residents' cultural spending, with Toronto ranking eleventh. (*Consumer Spending*, 19) The results of this study allowed the researchers to show that spending on cultural goods and services by individuals was more than three times greater than that spent on culture by all three levels of government combined in 2003-04. (*Consumer Spending*, 7)

This is certainly good news. It demonstrates that Canadians in general, and Ontarians in particular, are more than willing to spend money on arts and culture, broadly defined. Of course we may assume that most of the spending represented here is on either mass-media productions (pop music CDs or downloads, admission to mainstream movies or purchase on DVD, pop concerts) or on admission to performing arts events and major cultural institutions. But this research makes clear that if media arts organizations can make even small gains in visibility appeal to the general arts audience, it could transform the sector.

A 2008 report from Hill Strategies, entitled *Factors in Canadians' Cultural Activities*, supplies encouraging detail that supports this conclusion. By asking Canadians questions about their attendance and consumer habits with regard to a number of different arts and arts contexts, divided into the four main categories of book reading, live performing arts, art galleries and movie theatre attendance, the researchers were able to show that, in addition to age, sex and other factors, attendance at one type of cultural activity was highly predictive of interest in other kinds of cultural activities. For example, although the research showed that age was the strongest predictor for rates of movie-going, with attendance peaking between the ages of 15 and 24, participation in other kinds of other cultural activity were almost as strong: 79% of those who attended a festival also went to a movie during 2005; 79% of those who downloaded music also went to a movie; 79% of those who attended a performing arts event also attended a movie; 78% of those who went to a museum other than an art gallery also attended a movie; and so on. (Hill Strategies Research Inc., *Factors…*, 34-35). In short, those who are interested in cultural exhibitions and events tend to be generalists, and are likely to engage in multiple kinds of cultural activity, suggesting an opportunity for media arts organizations to bring an already engaged audience into the fold.

But how to go about it? As the passage from Joanne Scheff Bernstein (see p. 6, above) indicates, the audience has become a "moving target," with less loyalty to an entire organization's programming, and more of a tendency to pick and choose specific events or exhibitions. At the same time, it is easier than ever, using inexpensive internet-based tools, to reach people once they have participated in at least one event, as long as our information tracking capability is in place. Below, some suggestions.

Recommendations

1. Education: Audiences and Gatekeepers

As I suggested in my comments on context at the beginning of this report, one of the biggest problems facing media arts organizations in their quest for audience development is the lack of identity and visibility for the field as a whole. Based on the categorical ambiguity of the media arts, this lack of visibility needs to be addressed on many fronts. At one level, specific organizations want to increase, diversify and engage audiences better than they do now. At another level, this goal will only be served in the long term by increasing the visibility and legibility of the work produced by the field as a whole.

I would suggest three complementary actions that would assist in this effort:

1. Publication: Although there is a great deal of discipline-specific or thematic publishing on specific media arts practices and ideas (e.g. experimental film, video art, performance art, conceptual art, new media), there is really nothing available that talks about the media arts as an overall field of endeavour, with a specific history and cultural position. Scholars have begun to address this in a more academic form with books like Scott MacDonald's studies of Cinema 16 and Canyon Cinema. Closer to home, artists and administrators have reflected on the histories and cultures of artist-run centres in publications like *decentre: concerning artist-run culture* (YYZ Books, 2008), as well as more narrowly focused publications like *Place: 13 Essays, 13 Filmmakers, 1 City* (Winnipeg Film Group, 2009), which profiles 13 Winnipeg-based filmmakers, or *Expanded Standard Timeline: Artists and Electronic Media in Calgary* (Emmedia, 2010). It would be extremely valuable to have available a substantive publication amounting to a history of the media arts and the key practices encompassed by the term. The terms of reference could be international, but with an emphasis on Canadian examples and specifics. This publication could perhaps include a compilation containing key works, and be accompanied by a study guide for use in educational settings. It could be distributed free to educators, critics, scholars, curators and programmers, etc. A large-scale publication of this type could be financed using project funds, as a collaboration between a number of organizations.

2. The Educational System: Working together with teachers, media arts organizations need to investigate how independent media artworks could be integrated into public school curricula, which are standard across the province. MANO should develop a province-wide strategy for working with school boards to provide students with exposure to age-appropriate, carefully selected and contextualized works that are relevant to curricula, and that would open them up to the idea of a conscious, independent practice of media as *art*. Distributors could play a key role in this initiative. It might also be possible to work collaboratively with some of our larger cultural institutions, which already work closely with school boards to expose students to

various forms of art, and which in some cases already have significant collections of media artworks.

3. Routine Distribution of Materials: Media arts organizations should always keep in mind the continuing education of critics, curators and other gatekeepers. Exhibition and festival catalogues, copies of all books published by media arts organizations, and copies of media artworks available for sale to the public (e.g. DVD compilations) should as a matter of course be sent out to all relevant parties: art, film and television critics; curators at major galleries and museums; broadcasters who deal with the arts in general; and so on. This should be done *regardless of any potential for an immediate response or benefit to the producer of the material*, as part of a general and ongoing campaign for increased awareness and acknowledgement of the media arts. The development of a shared provincial and national list of key players who should be receiving such material could be done by mutual consultation without an enormous investment of time on the part of any one organization.

2. Marketing: Development of Organizational Identities & Collaborations

The problem of identity haunts the media arts. It has been difficult for media arts organizations to get across to audiences, the mass media and even many arts commentators what it is that we do. For many of us in the field, terms such as "branding" may make us queasy, failures of this kind of corporate identity, at the level of individual organizations and of the field as a whole, ensure that we will continue to make little headway in terms of audience development. If we look at recent successes, we can see that those organizations whose constituency and programming are clearest and easiest to communicate to audiences and media are the ones that have been developing their audiences most successfully.

Hot Docs, for example, was cited by many respondents as an example of an organization that has been enormously successful in changing from a primarily industry-oriented event to one with massive public appeal. This success is due to a number of factors, among them:

a clear, simple mandate: to show contemporary documentaries, primarily based on the interest of their subject matter;

a straightforward and accessible box-office system that also offers excellent value for special audience groups such as students and seniors, with benefits like free daytime screenings;

high quality, professional presentation;

relentless and ubiquitous marketing efforts; as one respondent noted: "Hot Docs is exemplary in terms of reaching a wide audience through ads, catalogues stuffed into

newspapers, postering, year-round reminder flyers and screenings that keep audiences plugged in, and monthly updates year-round."

Not all media arts organizations will be able to do what Hot Docs has done, at least to the same scale. It is a festival with close connections to much richer sources of corporate funding (e.g. broadcasters), which give it much more money to work with than any MANO member organization has, and it does not particularly focus on material that is challenging in formal terms or in terms of mode of representation. Nevertheless, there are lessons to be learned from its success, particularly in terms of year-round visibility, the reach of its marketing materials, and the clarity of its identity.

We have seen in recent years how organizations oriented towards specific audiences that share a specific cultural background can play upon images and stereotypes that have been imposed upon them by the larger culture, but can twist them in an intelligent and playful way to cement their identity. I include two examples, from Toronto's imagineNATIVE and Reel Asian festivals, below.

These images tell the audience a great deal: that the organization represents a specific community; that it "gets" that community's experience of racism and stereotyping and its shared points of reference, but that it is engaged in superseding these stereotypes and has the confidence to mock them; that the tone of the events will not be uniformly serious or

downbeat; and that events may be expected to be colourful and enjoyable. Both festivals have experienced significant growth in audiences over the past several years, in part due to these clever and appealing marketing materials.

Of course, not all organizations are oriented towards a specific, identifiable community. Others offer a particular kind of work: Hot Docs deals only in documentaries, mainly feature-length. The Images Festival covers a broad range of media arts practices in a number of kinds of venues. The Worldwide Short Film Festival has a mainstream orientation, but shows only short works. The distributors represent experimental works, but also dramas, community-oriented documentaries, activist works, and so on. Production centres' programming is primarily comprised of technical and professional workshops, but also includes public screenings and artists' talks.

Campaigns by less tightly focused organizations of this kind may be less than inspired, but can still be successful. The Worldwide Short Film Festival's ongoing campaign, year after year, is simply based on the fact that the films screened are short. It provides no sense of the quality of the programming or the cultural position of the material; the campaign is tonally "blank." It may not appeal to *me*, but has been successful, in conjunction with a high level of publicity, in increasing the festival's audience base. The Images Festival, on the other hand, has the most complex message, as it's a very complicated festival at which programming crosses many media, technical platforms and presentation venues. The festival's marketing materials have been consistently intriguing in their visual quality, but the marketing message may not necessarily be clear to someone unfamiliar with the festival.

Many organizations identified a "general public" as their main audience/clientele in response to Question 6, followed often by "professional media artists," the "movie-going public" and "gallery-going pubic" and "programmers/curators." The question of developing a clear identity as a "general-purpose" media arts presenter is one best worked out on a case-by-case basis in consultation with experts in marketing. But I think it is an unavoidable first step in getting better results from marketing efforts, and in beginning the long-term process of audience development.

I would also suggest that it might be advantageous for a group of media arts organizations and other artist-run centres, in regions where there is less density of competing programming, to consider working together with a professional publicist to increase the visibility of their activities. Two or three organizations, coordinating their activities so that they are not directly competing with one another, could potentially provide a more significant contract to a good publicist, thus ensuring them greater attention from a professional who otherwise might need to concentrate more on higher-paying commercial contracts.

3. Programming for Accessibility

Having worked as a professional media arts programmer, I have an instinctive horror of any suggestion that marketing concerns should intrude upon programming decisions. I don't think they should. But to prevent the marketing tail from wagging the programming dog is not to deny the importance of programming in a strategic and audience-friendly way *no matter how challenging the material being shown*. In my own experience, it is possible to organize, for example, a festival of experimental media arts in a highly accessible manner without compromising quality or integrity of programming. This involves making strategic decisions:

include "gateway" events in every festival or programming cycle; these might include works with more popular appeal owing to subject matter or profile of artist; events that appeal to a crossover audience because of the participation of established artists from other disciplines (e.g. music, poetry); or events connected to urgent issues in the larger culture;

organize schedules so that events with more potential popular appeal appear towards the beginning of the event or cycle of events, in order to encourage return visits;

value the single-ticket buyer; make sure that box office procedures, on-line information and ticketing, and the actual presentation of the event are consistent and professional. Make sure the new participant will *want* to come back!

work to secure well-known artists and "hot" events, but only if they are actually *good*! Reliance on celebrity names or undeservedly hyped hot properties will make the audience doubt your motives and undermine the image of the programming;

help, don't hinder, your publicist: try to make the structures and ideas behind the program clear and apparent to both audience members and potential media reviewers; your programming should have a logical structure and its themes should be readily apparent;

make sure marketing materials are accessible and written with a general audience in mind – avoid "artspeak" at all costs. This does not mean "dumbing down," but actually means smartening up. Artspeak is generally camouflage for work that has little to offer;

group programs of short work should be short! Otherwise you risk exhausting the audience and driving them away. Programs of short works that are longer than 70 minutes or so are generally too long.

From experience, I know that it is possible to develop audiences even for quite challenging programming. Programming decisions should be made primarily based on the quality of the material available. But the *organization and presentation* of that material is crucial to how it will be served in terms of audiences.

Summary

By studying how media arts organizations are currently approaching audience development and marketing activities, we can identify both the potential and the limitations facing these organizations as they try to increase their visibility and success, and build audiences for the future. The media arts have been consistently undervalued and underfunded in our public arts systems, but our organizations must move forward on two fronts:

> first, we must advocate for increased resources for the promotion of the public programming we are doing, as those currently available are frankly pitiful when one considers the costs involved in truly cutting through to potential audiences in the contemporary context;
>
> second, we must begin to engage in planned, deliberate changes in our approach to audience development within existing structures and resources, by changing the ways in which audience development and marketing are handled by our staff; by working collaboratively with other organizations for the advancement of the field as a whole; and by making use of short-term investments available through project or initiatives grants from the various funders we work with to develop materials supporting audience development for specific organizations or for the field as a whole.

Audience development begins with a plan. Where are we now? Where do we want to be after a certain period of time? How do we get there? Successful audience development depends entirely upon the commitment of organization staff, board members and immediate community (including its artists) to the goal of audience development. It would be better to maintain an unsatisfactory status quo than to embark on an audience development program without complete commitment to following through on plans made.

It is also crucial not to focus only on short-term results. In a field that with an unclear identity in the broader public sphere, it is as important to develop that visibility for the entire field as it is to develop audiences for any particular organization. The cumulative effects of the actions of a number of organizations, working both separately and in collaboration, over time can change the position of the media arts in the wider culture. In Ontario media arts organizations have shown a remarkable capacity to work together in order to maximize the effectiveness of the limited resources available to each organization.

At present, increases to our marketing development capacities are limited in part by scarce resources and staff structures poorly developed to serve these goals. But they are also limited by habit and the acceptance of our limitations. Creative use and reallocation of existing resources can move us some way in the direction of successful audience development. But ultimately we need to see a greater commitment to increasing media arts audiences on the part of funders to realize the changes we would all like to see.

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Appendix A:

Media Arts Network of Ontario Survey: Building Audience Development Capacities of Media Arts Organizations in Ontario