

Arts Club Theatre Company

Direct mail campaign generates over 500% ROI



The cast of the 2015 Arts Club production of *Les Misérables*. Photo by Ross den Otter

The Arts Club Theatre Company relies on ticket sales from holiday performances to generate revenue for the entire year. Here's how they keep the house full.

Setting the stage for success

Opened in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians and actors, the Arts Club Theatre Company (ACTC) is today the largest not-for-profit theatre company in western Canada. It helped launch the careers of international performers (like Michael J. Fox and Michael Bubl ) and put Canada's playwrights in the spotlight.

Every year, a quarter of a million people watch ACTC productions, which include close to 15 shows at three venues in Vancouver. The lineup includes familiar blockbusters, like *Mary Poppins* and *Matilda*, and premieres of new productions, "brand-new shows no one has heard of," says Jaime Fletcher, Marketing Manager at ACTC.

Ticket sales are vital to ACTC, and the holiday season, from November to January, is make-or-break time. "If we don't hit our revenue targets for that period, it puts us in a tough place for the entire year," says Fletcher.

ACTC put on three shows during the 2018-19 holiday season. Besides the modern classic of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Blind Date*, a piece of interactive theatre that relies on audience participation, also took to the stage. "There were a lot of really diverse shows that year," says Fletcher. The curtain went up more than 75 times on each show, and ACTC's goal was to fill the house at every performance. Digital campaigns and traditional advertising were, as always, part of reaching that goal. "We also supplemented those campaigns with a piece of direct mail that cut through the noise of other competing holiday options," says Fletcher.

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Case study

Direct mail cues prospects to buy more tickets

ACTC sent out 30,000 pieces of Personalized Mail™ in the weeks before the holiday season opened, hoping to convince last-minute ticket buyers to reserve seats. The organization created a list with names from its own database. "It's easier to sell to people who expressed interest in theatre before than to reach out to new people," says Fletcher.

The 2.26% response rate was "higher than average" according to Fletcher and all the more impressive because it was generated without an offer. "This campaign didn't have a discount, and that's where we often see lift," adds Fletcher. "So that was nice, since it means the average ticket price was higher." Ultimately, the campaign generated a ROI of more than 500%.

"Frankly, we've done a lot of testing with direct mail," admits Fletcher. "We always want proof this is working, or why are we doing it?" That's a fair question. To answer, ACTC regularly tests direct mail against email campaigns, notifying its internal database of customers about upcoming performances. Fletcher finds direct mail enhances email. "When one segment doesn't receive direct mail, that segment tends to not perform as well – they buy fewer tickets," she says.

"Data is respected in this industry," declares Fletcher. "People don't assume that about the arts. But because our budgets are rigid and small, we have to be careful about how we're spending money, and we have to optimize for a high return. Direct mail is a very successful medium for us."



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Marketing Manager, Arts Club Theatre Company

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