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REGIONAL THEATRE PATRONAGE: THE EFFICACY OF INTEGRATED
MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON THE 18-24 AGE COHORT

by
Katherine A. Chronister

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by _____
Advisor

Date Approved July 22, 2007

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ABSTRACT

Katherine A. Chronister
REGIONAL THEATRE PATRONAGE: THE EFFICACY OF INTEGRATED
MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON THE 18-24 AGE COHORT

2006/07

Dr. Suzanne Sparks FitzGerald
Master of Arts in Public Relations

The purpose of this investigation was to determine if an integrated marketing communication plan coupled with additional theatre education programs would increase patron growth and increase ticket sales in regional professional theatres and if the younger age cohort (18-24) will support regional professional theatre if supplemental programming meets their needs. This information was ascertained by conducting in-depth interviews over the phone with marketing/communication professionals at four separate regional theatres in each region of the United States. Fifty intercept surveys were also administered at two universities in the tri-state area to the 18-24 age group to see what motivated them to attend and support theatre. The interviews were transcribed and then examined for recurrent frequencies. The surveys were tabulated to look for frequencies and percentages from the subjects' responses. The most significant findings were that the 18-24 age cohort is attending theatre more frequently than expected and that half of the theatre professionals interviewed did not see the changing theatre-goer (18-24 yr olds) as an emerging threat for the theatre industry's continued well-being. Half of the theatres interviewed also did not see supplemental programming as a viable marketing tool to bring the 18-24 age cohort into the theatre.

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Special thanks to the following individuals:

Darla, this whole process would have been much harder without you by my side.

Hussein, my champion and supporter, thank you for your constant encouragement, love and confidence in my abilities.

Mom, for always telling me you were so proud and that I could do anything.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Background

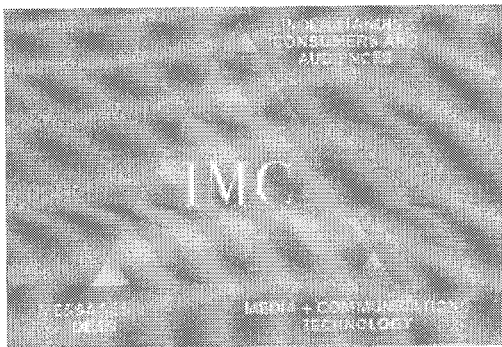
Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is the integrated management of all communications to build positive and lasting relationships with customers and other stakeholders. It is a customer-centric, data-driven approach to marketing and branding that stresses communicating to consumers through multiple forms of media and technology. The concept of IMC was originated by Professor Don Schultz at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

The IMC Triad/IMC's Strategic Framework

IMC develops strategic messages based on an understanding of consumers and other audiences and the media technologies they use to interact with organizations.

Figure 1: IMC Triad Model



(Northwestern University's Medill Integrated Marketing Communication Website - <http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/medill/imc/#>, 2006)

Understanding Consumers and Audiences

IMC begins with an understanding of consumers and markets and the development of strategic communications based on consumer insight.

Messages and Ideas

Brand communications consist of the messages and ideas that embody consumer understanding and drive organizational objectives.

Media and Communications Technology

The infrastructure for brand communications consists of the mass, direct and personal media technologies through which people interact with organizations

Four Degrees (or Stages) of IMC Development

1. Tactical Coordination of Marketing Communication:
2. Redefining the Scope of Marketing Communication:
3. Application of Information Technology:
4. Financial and Strategic Integration: (McGoon, 1999)

IMC begins with consumer insight, a deep understanding of consumer motivations and desires, which provides the foundation of strategic communications. The centerpiece of IMC is strategic brand communications, where all aspects of the customer experience are managed around a core brand strategy. IMC utilizes customer databases to measure and evaluate customer purchase behavior to identify target markets for communication strategy; it uses market research and statistical analysis to understand and

measure consumers, markets and competitors. Unlike traditional approaches that address only one audience, IMC integrates communications across multiple stakeholders including: customers, employees, investors, distributors, business partners and the news media. Finally, IMC features measurement and the evaluation of the return on investment (ROI) of communication tactics to demonstrate the financial returns.

With increasing pressure from alternative entertainment options, many regional theatres have begun to employ similar tactics and methods seen in IMC. With small departments for marketing and/or communication, IMC is often the most efficient option for regional theatres especially the smaller sized theatres.

Regional Professional Theatres

Regional theatres (also called *resident theatres*) in the United States are professional theatre companies outside of New York City that produce their own seasons. The term *regional theatre* is most often used to refer to members of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT). LORT theatres are non-profit organizations and agree to use special contracts made in agreement with the Actors' Equity Association, the professional organization and labor union for actors working in the United States (<http://www.lort.org/newmembership.htm>). Joni Maya Cherbo (1998) notes that resident theatres are different from commercial theater because commercial theater is geared toward making a profit for its investors and that is not the primary goal of resident theatres. Commercial theater shows are more concerned with the bottom line, while not-for-profit producers are more mission driven, (Cherbo, 1998).

There are more than 80 LORT theatres located in cities throughout the United States. Regional theatres often produce new plays and recent revivals from Broadway, Off-Broadway, and London's West End. Seasons are often rounded out with selections from classic dramas, popular comedies, and musicals. While most LORT theatres focus on producing "straight plays," it is not uncommon for a regional theatre's season to include one or two musicals.

Many resident theatres operate two stages: a main stage for shows requiring larger sets or cast, and a second stage (often a studio theatre or black box theater) for more experimental, avant-garde or children's theatre productions. Regional theatres rely on donations from patrons and businesses, season ticket subscriptions, and grants from organizations, in addition to ticket sales. Some have criticized regional theatres for being conservative in their selection of shows as theatre staff must consider the demographics of their subscribers and donors. Because of audience feedback, artistic staff, and a theatre's history, each theatre may develop its own reputation both in its city and nationally.

Some regional theatres make a commitment to developing new works and premiering new plays, (A Nationwide Boom: The Not-for-profit Musical Factory, 2006). Theatres that develop new work, like La Jolla Playhouse and Manhattan Theatre Club, often work to move their productions to professional venues in New York. Educational outreach programs and cooperative programs with nearby university theatre programs and the local community are also common programs found at regional theatres.

In recognition of the importance of regional theatres in America, the American Theatre Wing gives a Regional Theatre Tony Award to one regional theatre each year during the Tony Awards, (www.tonyawards.com, 2006).

The first report in a series of three detailing the current status of American theatre was *The Artistic Home*, by Todd London published in 1988. The report's findings, even today, continue to reverberate through the theatre community. A think tank conducted in the mid-90s elaborated on the report's findings and touched upon theatre in the context of global, cultural, social, political, economic and technological changes in today's ever changing world and was documented in the article, *The Field and Its Challenges*, in the January 2000 issue of American Theatre, (Langworthy, 1995). Most recently in the July/August 2006 issue of American Theatre, a special report entitled *Where Are We Now?* by Ben Pesner documented the meeting of theatre professionals to discuss the current condition of the American not-for-profit theatre.

Audience Issues

According to Langworthy (1995), today more than ever before, theatres must rely on their audience for the revenue generated by ticket sales. Government and corporate funded monies are in great demand by all non-profit organizations, not just theatres. The reliance on the audience puts theatres almost at their mercy sometimes deterring them from taking risks artistically, (Bernstein & Kotler, 2006). The constantly-changing demographics of audiences and local communities are hard to respond to. Audiences are often polarized over social and racial issues with middle-to-upper-class audiences still predominating as the main theatre-goers. Theatres everywhere are struggling to figure out how to attract the younger audiences. In fact, theatre audiences in general have been

diminishing over the years making the relationship theatres have with their audiences even more important, (Langworthy, 1995). Public interest in the stage seems to be dwindling, (Brustein, 2005).

Economics

Theatres everywhere are struggling economically. Generating income has become extremely difficult forcing theatres to come up with even more new ideas that will be able to keep the theatre afloat. Many theatres especially large ones have been forced to downsize, both in staffing and in budget allocations. What was once the job of two or three professionals is often now the responsibility of one individual. Budgets for design and sets and even the amount of actors hired for productions are decreasing too. Artistic directors often complain that so much time worrying about the budget or where money is going to come from that they begin to slack on the actual challenges of improving each season artistically, (Langworthy, 1995).

The current trends related to IMC are that the consumer has become king even in the theatre market. Consumers have more choices than ever before of different venues to entertain themselves with. The “atomization” of mass media is not helping theatres with little funds to invest in advertising. Deciding which medium to spend what little money they have becomes an extremely difficult and risky decision. This then relates to the recent fixation on ROI and measurement of any marketing initiatives being taken by the theatre from stakeholders. Paulette Barrett, senior VP-managing director of Hill & Knowlton, says, “IMC can fill niches in terms of time, reach and audience segments that other, broad-reach communications tools miss. It delivers with small budgets, within a total plan,” (Hume, 1990). IMC then is perhaps a great option for regional theatres.

Delimitations

The researcher will not include performing arts centers or local community theatres in this analysis. The researcher will not analyze every regional theatre in the country.

Importance of the Problem

The problem of diminished patron growth and ticket sales in regional professional theatres encompasses mostly younger potential patrons. This is an extremely important problem in the theatre community because continued loss of audiences could eventually close theatres leading to a loss of art in communities around the United States. This problem is a major issue for communication professionals working in the theatre field that must constantly come up with creative ways to increase patron growth and ticket sales at their theatres through their communication and marketing initiatives. Often public relations professionals working in non-profit professional theatres are forced to wear many hats in regards to the concept of integrated marketing communication due to the lack of adequate staff in each department. It is the hope of this researcher that the findings of this study will aid these professionals in making good decisions about what types of marketing and public relations they should engage. One key question to be answered is what keeps people from attending regional professional theatre or what motivates them to attend regional professional theatre.

Purpose

Because of experience working at a regional professional theatre and seeing the issues surrounding the theatre, this researcher felt compelled to look into these issues and

hopefully help others in the field to create better IMC plans that will lead to successful, productive and sustainable theatres. This researcher's hypothesis is that an IMC plan coupled with supplemental programming at regional theatres will facilitate patron growth and increased revenue from increased ticket sales. The researcher assumes that the theatre professionals in the study answer truthfully about their theatres without any bias.

H1: It is expected that an IMC plan with additional theatre education programs will facilitate patron growth and increased ticket sales in regional professional theatres.

In a study conducted in 1996 by Louis Bergonzi and Julia Smith on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts entitled, *Effects of Arts Education on Participation in the Arts*, findings concluded that, "For almost every type of arts participation, the more one received of both school- and community-based arts education, the more one participated in the arts as an adult, either through consumption or creation."

H2: It is expected that the younger age cohort (18-24) will support regional theatre if supplemental programming meets their needs.

According to Sean Daniels, a theatre consultant and associate artistic director at California Shakespeare Theater, by featuring programming in addition to your regular theatre season, you will bring in the younger crowd to your theatre. Dad's Garage Theatre Company in Atlanta, Ga., the theatre Daniels co-founded and headed from 1996 to 2004 programmed for the younger generation, and their efforts worked as the average theatergoer at their theatre is a 27-year-old single male. Daniels says of their new programming initiatives, "...Puppet slams, a live midnight talk show, improv soap

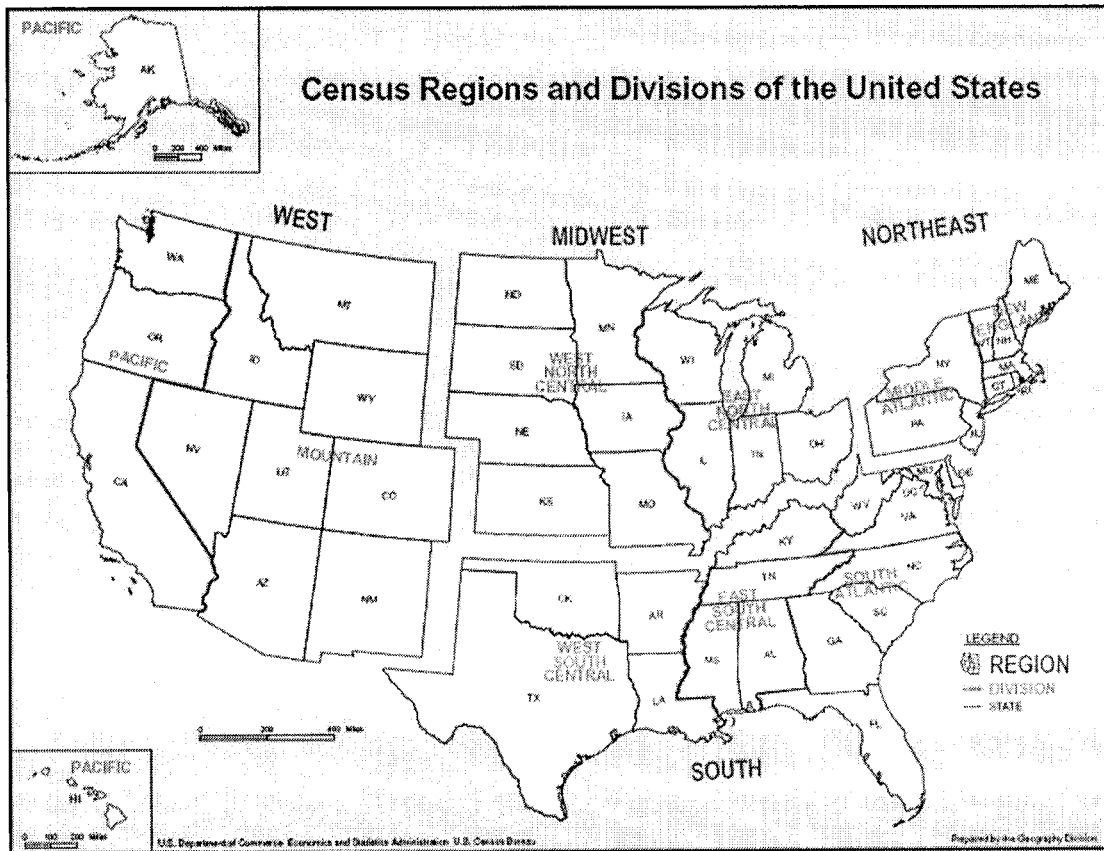
operas, monthly political town hall meetings, improvised cartoons and even an improvised wrestling show starring actual professional wrestlers. And the young people? They come.”

Procedure

This researcher will begin with four in-depth interviews with marketing or communication directors at regional professional theatres across the United States. The four theatres will be selected from each of the regional divisions used by the United States Census Bureau (<http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2006) with Region 1 – Northeast comprised of New England and Middle Atlantic; Region 2 – Midwest comprised of East North Central and West North Central; Region 3 – South comprised of South Atlantic, East South Central and West South Central; and Region 4 – West comprised of Mountain and Pacific divisions.

The researcher will also conduct intercept surveys at two universities in the tri-state region.

Figure 2: Regions of the United States



(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions_of_the_United_States)

Summary

This researcher will delve deeper into the regional professional theatre scene by seeing if an IMC plan coupled with educational programs increases ticket sales and patron growth. This researcher will do this by conducting in-depth interviews with marketing/communication professionals at four separate theatres across the country and then compare their results. This researcher will also investigate why younger audiences are not attending regional professional theatre and what marketing/communication

professionals working in the non-profit theatre sector can do to get these potential patrons to their theatres.

Chapter two will detail how this researcher will go about analyzing the IMC plans of various regional theatres as well as interview communication/marketing professionals at these organizations.

Terminology

IMC – The integrated management of all communications to build positive and lasting relationships with customers and other stakeholders.

Integration – A strategic planning approach to present a coherent brand positioning through advertising, promotion, public relations, direct marketing and e-commerce marketing.

Regional Theatres or Resident Theatres - Professional theatre companies outside of New York City that produce their own seasons.

Return On Investment (ROI) or just Return – A calculation used to determine whether a proposed investment is wise, and how well it will repay the investor. It is calculated as the ratio of the amount gained (taken as positive), or lost (taken as negative), relative to the basis.

Stakeholders – An individual or group with an interest in the success of a group or an organization in delivering intended results and maintaining the viability of the group or organization's product and/or service.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Integrated Marketing Communication

The official definition of integrated marketing communication as noted by Cliff McGoan (1999) is, "...a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated and measurable persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences." Marketing communication tools include: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, packaging and personal selling (Wells, 2000). An IMC plan is even more complex than a traditional advertising plan because it considers more message sources, more communication tools and more audiences.

This method may just be what theatres need to get audiences to once again fill their seats. Paulette Barrett, senior VP-managing director of Hill & Knowlton notes, "IMC can fill niches in terms of time, reach and audience segments that other, broad-reach communications tools miss. It delivers with small budgets, within a total plan," (Hume, 1990). Actually today, some of the best integrated communications comes from non-profit organizations (Henley, 2001). In today's tight, competitive economic climate, nonprofits are just as concerned, and often as savvy, as their for-profit counterparts (Gallager & Weinberg, 1991).

Non-profits usually have multiple non-financial objectives, which can often be difficult to measure. In addition, the potentially conflicting needs of multiple

constituencies, including clients, board members and donors must be balanced. Nonprofit organizations must achieve their objectives while confined by limited resources, which provides a particular challenge to be creative while striving for cost-efficiency. Increasing media outlets and ever-upgraded technology, while providing new opportunities, can strain the resources of any nonprofit organization (Henley, 2001).

Today more businesses take a multidisciplinary approach to communication planning, (Rose, 1994). Rose (1994), an associate professor of advertising and public relations at Florida International University, says issues influencing this trend are:

1. Agency mega-mergers combined with emphasis on niche marketing have reduced the need for clients to turn to multiple specialty firms (ad agencies, public relations agencies, direct response agencies, sales promotion agencies, etc.);
2. An increased emphasis on bottom-line profits has spurred agencies to add functions;
3. The proliferation of small, multipurpose agencies in smaller markets and
4. A perceived need on the part of clients to integrate communications.

She goes on to note that, "A general belief is emerging: The integration of public relations activities with the total communication program not only saves time and money but also improves the firm's or organization's ability to protect integrity of the product." The Report of the Task Force on Integrated Communications by T. Duncan, C. Caywood and D. Newsom (1993) echoes these findings. "It would seem that those individuals and agencies who are best-prepared to work within an IMC atmosphere are the most likely to survive and prosper," (Rose, 1994).

Regional Theatre

Regional theatre's rise began in the 1950s with the founding of theatres like Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.; Milwaukee Repertory Theatre; The Alley Theatre,

Houston, TX; Cleveland Playhouse, etc. Monies from both the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the arts allowed these theatres to grow and by 1977 it is estimated that half of professional theatre activity in the United States was nonprofit, (Cherbo, 1998). Cherbo (1998) notes that by the 1980s and 1990s these theatres began to focus on stabilization.

Cherbo (1998) notes that the not-for-profit theatre movement's catalyst was a desire to move theatre beyond Broadway. Specific goals of the movement were:

1. Replace the unrealized subsidized national theatre in America
2. Present classic, esoteric and socially critical pieces in communities around the country
3. Broaden audiences
4. Maintain responsible ticket prices.

Cherbo (1998) says,

Resident theatres provide a range of services in their respective communities, such as lecture series on their productions, performances in schools, hospitals and prisons; and programs for the elderly and disadvantaged. They sometimes have main stages and second stages, the latter often used as research and development laboratories for new works. The theatres serve as places where directors, playwrights, choreographers and others can learn their craft and experiment. Of course, mission-driver resident theatres are not averse to producing something that may have commercial value.

The League of Resident Theatres (LORT) has approximately 75 affiliated theatres that provide artists with a support system for developing new works as well as reviving classics and audience favorites. LORT is another reason why so many people now can have the opportunity to experience professional theatre right in their own communities, (Cherbo, 1998).

Reasons for Regional Theatre's Decline

During the 1970s nonprofit theatre movement, a subscription to a theatre was a signal that as a middle class citizen you had a commitment to the community and that you had "finally arrived" as a member of a more elite society, (Subscribe Now: And Then, 2002). Since that time and with the economy with the way it has been during the past 15 years, these same middle-class citizens have been feeling the pinch in their pockets often leaving regional professional theatre to look for patronage elsewhere. "Theatre Facts 2001 indicated that over the last five years the subscription base has dropped substantially, while single-ticket buyers are gaining," (Subscribe Now: And Then, 2002).

Dean Gladden, managing director of Ohio's Cleveland Play House cites the general change in today's culture as the culprit saying, "People are unwilling to commit to packages and prefer to pick and choose. They're willing to pay the higher price of a single ticket." Jacques Lamarre, director of marketing and public relations at Connecticut's Hartford Stage Company agrees saying, "People's lives are such that they are commitment phobic. In most urban areas there are a lot of choices for entertainment. With such a proliferation of choices, there's less loyalty to an institution." To combat this new generation of theatre-goers behavior, theatres are becoming much more flexible with their subscription plans and ticketing options, (Subscribe Now: And Then, 2002).

Theatres are combating the change in lifestyle and culture by doing a number of other things to upgrade their marketing techniques. With the onset of declining viewership, some theatres like Hartford Stage are advertising elsewhere in the hopes of

drawing audiences from other cities and towns, (Subscribe Now: And Then, 2002). Also they have been increasing their level of service to their subscribers. Lamarre notes, “The level of service has had to increase for people to feel okay about making the investment...If they have one bad experience, they’ll say, ‘Fine, I’ll go somewhere else.’”

Theatre now embraces technology realizing that there are more opportunities to make ticket sales online. Donna Walker-Kuhne, director of community affairs at New York’s Public Theater says, “We expanded the use of the internet as a marketing tool...We realized that many of the potential audience members were heavy internet users and we collaborated with our graphics department to create several visual pieces we could email to targeted lists.” She also used the theatre’s website to offer ticketing discounts only available online, (Subscribe Now: And Then, 2002).

Unfortunately, catering to the single-ticket buyer can be a costlier marketing technique and not allow for as much creative freedom and the ability to take risks with show selection. Gladden says, “Basically, you’re forced to take fewer risks. Without the subscription base, there’s no safety net for riskier plays. You’re forced to have programming that’s more conservative.”

In addition to the change in theatre-goers, the commercial arena has also stepped into the regional professional theatre’s turf bringing big blockbuster touring Broadway shows like *The Phantom of the Opera* to smaller areas which end up engulfing the whole community’s revenue usually reserved for regional theatres, (Subscribe Now: And Then, 2002).

Theatre Education Programs

Findings from a study conducted in 1996 by Louis Bergonzi and Julia Smith on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts entitled, *Effects of Arts Education on Participation in the Arts*, offered many findings regarding the effects of Arts Education on Americans' participation in the arts. The findings were:

- People with busier lifestyles attended the arts less.
- Those who had more arts education were more likely to attend arts performances.
- Arts education predicted the listening of arts and arts access better than any other arts participation.
- The more someone received arts education, the more they continued in the arts as an adult both in participation and in consumption.

Theatre and Age Cohorts

The recent national 360 Youth/Harris Interactive College Explorer Study conducted in 2002 found that one of the most powerful markets today is the U.S. college market, which spends nearly \$200 billion dollars a year. The study measured spending among college students (18-30-year-olds) during the Spring 2002 semester and included all types of students (full-time, part-time, 2-year, 4-year and graduate). Most important to this research was the students' buying habits related to the entertainment area. According to Derek White, Executive Vice President, 360 Youth, Inc.,

College students are faced with a whole range of life decisions, including a lot of first-time purchase decisions. It's an important time for marketers to connect with this demographic group, reaching them as they establish life-long buying patterns and loyalties.

According to the study, college students spend an average of \$287 a month on discretionary items not including tuition, room/board, rent/mortgage, books/school fees. Including weekend days, college students average 11 hours per day of unscheduled time (when they're not sleeping, working, studying or attending class). Not surprising then that a major area of discretionary spending goes towards leisure activities and entertainment. Sadly, attending live theatre did not make the list of top areas for college student spending, but the number one area with 91% of students participating in the past year and a projected yearly amount of \$887 million dollars being spent to go to the movies.

Technology also played a central role in the lives of these students with 93% accessing the Internet. In fact, college students are the most connected segment of the population. John Geraci, Vice President of Youth Research at Harris Interactive, reiterates the importance of the college market by saying,

The college consumer is easily overlooked since most information sources that marketers rely on for tracking consumer behavior tend to under-represent college students. However, it is a consumer group that marketers should recognize as offering substantial opportunity. Connecting with the consumer during the college years can pay great dividends, both now and well into the future.

And of course, the major question for theatres today is, how do we get the younger people to come to the theatre? At a time where the average theatergoer is a 46-year-old married woman and with consumer choices at an all-time high, the younger generation has so many options that they can go to an event or activity right in their backyard or to something millions of miles away in the global community which is now readily available due to continuing technological advancements, (Daniels, 2004). Theatre seems to be the last thing on their minds.

Sean Daniels (2004), a theatre consultant, confirms this by saying, Audiences under 30 aren't going to see theatre this weekend, not because they saw five productions last year and were unhappy with the set design or the directing – they aren't going because they just don't go. It isn't part of their culture.

The greatest challenge facing theatres today is just getting this younger demographic in the door and then trying to figure out how to keep them there.

Everything is different about this new generation down to their buying patterns (normally last-minute and using online technology) making theatre professionals go crazy trying to accurately predict ticket sales and what shows to produce that will be well-attended, (Daniels, 2004).

The theatre industry aware of the changing times launched the New Generations Program in 2000 with the support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and run by the Theatre Communications Group, (Sato, 2005). The two objectives of the program are the development of future leaders and future audiences, (Sato, 2005). Recent reports based on the program's work discusses strategies being used by theatres in the program to build a younger (under 30) and/or culturally specific audience, (Sato, 2005). Specifically there is an audience development component of the New Generations Program whose objective is "to strengthen and deepen innovative existing programs, to reward what is already working and to allow theatres that have been succeeding to do even better (Sato, 2005)." Recurring themes in the New Generations Program are:

Treating the Audience as a Participant

Traditional audience development focuses on maximizing audience attendance while most of New Generations work focuses on deepening the audience's experience at

the theatre, (Sato, 2005). Suzanne Sato (2005) says, “The ultimate goal is to value the audience for what they bring to the theatre experience, rather than confining them to a market niche.”

Leading with the Art

“Adapting to or building on who’s in the audience is so tied to what you’re putting on the stage,” noted artistic director Bill Rauch of Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles, (Sato, 2005). “I believe very strongly that if the work speaks to the audience you get a higher percentage attendance,” confirmed Meena Natarajan of Minneapolis-based Pangea World Theater, (Sato, 2005). Sato (2005) says, “The theatres agree that it is the work on the stage – or in the case of educational programs, the process of creating work – that ultimately speaks to the audience.”

Cultivating Multiple Audiences with Multiple Strategies

Instead of using audience-building strategies that focus on making back the money used on marketing, many New Generations projects are now using strategies that focus on using different marketing techniques for different groups in different audiences, (Sato, 2005). Ellen Gavin, executive artistic director of Brava Theater Center in San Francisco, says, “The more and more specifically we target each audience, the broader our base expands (Sato, 2005).” Jack Reuler, artistic director at Mixed Blood Theatre Company in Minneapolis concurs saying, “We have thrown in the toilet the notion of getting bigger numbers; target marketing is hand-to-hand combat, and we are looking more at who’s coming than how many (Sato, 2005).”

Investing in People so they Invest in Theatre

Just like the mass media, influentials play a big role in what people choose to do or think as they try to emulate their idols or important figures in the news or society. The same holds true for theatre. According to a study conducted by the Washington Post.com and RoperASW in May 2003,

Influentials are the 10% of the population who shape the attitudes and behaviors of the other 90%. They are the people that friends, family and acquaintances turn to for information about what to buy, what to read, how to invest, and how to vote. They are the conduits who, by word of mouth, are spreading information and influencing everyone else.

Marketing through “influencers” – individuals who in turn influence others to buy is another technique being used by marketing directors at theatres, (Sato, 2005). Creating and maintaining relationships are important if the theatre is to survive and thrive. Grace Grillet, managing director of People’s Light, says, “Relationships are built with individuals, but to the extent that many individuals represent larger groups, the number of audience members with whom we have a relationship increases greatly. The attitude of the theatre is one of sustaining relationships (Sato, 2005).”

Promotional Strategies for Regional Theatre

The following section is an array of promotional strategies that are being used in theatres across the country to get patrons to their productions.

Melanie Joseph, artistic director and marketing strategist at New York’s Foundry Theatre, notes that marketing theatre should never be business as usual because shows are never business as usual. “Each one is like the circus coming to town (Wren, 2000).”

Joseph prides herself on making sure the theatre always has eye-catching promotions for upcoming shows, (Wren, 2000). She says, “What I’m interested in doing is starting the play before the audience gets there.” She sees the marketing of a show as a way to involve the audience in the meaning of the entire experience (Wren, 2000). One of her most buzz-worthy and successful promotions was for the theatre’s first production, W. David Hancock’s Obie-winning *Convention of Cartography*, where she had 50,000 matchbooks custom-made to help focus attention on the play’s central figure and then asked local deli owners to distribute them when customers purchased cigarettes (Wren, 2000). Since the cover of the matchbooks had the phrase, “Have you seen this man?” with a picture of the play’s central figure, and posters had been hung around the city with the same phrase, it wasn’t long before New Yorkers were contacting the theatre fearing that a criminal was on the loose (Wren, 2006). Joseph says in conclusion, “I never do theatre that needs a cursory glance. Everything I do requires you to pay attention (Wren, 2000).” Joseph’s theory according to Sean Daniels may just be what the younger generation is looking for in theatre.

Sean Daniels (2004), theatre consultant and co-founder of Dad’s Garage Theatre Company in Atlanta, Ga., says that offering “a la carte programming” actually seduces the younger audiences into attending something and coming back for something they may not have initially been interested in. His theatre has featured puppet slams, a live midnight talk show, improve soap operas, monthly political town hall meetings, improvised cartoons and even an improvised wrestling show starring actual professional wrestlers all of which have been met with much success.

Daniels (2004) marketing strategy focuses on promoting their players and not its teams (similar to the NBA). Younger people care more about artists, individuals and personalities than they do about institutional loyalty and history, which is clearly evident from today's MTV and entertainment personalities-obsessed generation.

Theatre professionals worry that the theatre's current level of quality and sophistication will be ruined by marketing to young audiences. But Daniels (2004) counters by saying that popular movies today such as Memento have complicated plot structures, intelligent dialogue and in-depth characters – all of which signal an audience with brains that would appreciate good theatre.

The California Shakespeare Theater is experimenting with programming for traditional and young audiences alike. Daniels (2004) runs through what they will be trying in the 2004-2005 season starting with a second branding campaign for both the theater and the shows that is specifically aimed at young audiences. "This will allow us to go after young audiences without watering down the institutional marketing that we use to attract our loyal and dedicated subscribers," says Daniels (2004).

They will also be working to change the demographics of their board to more evenly match the audience make-up they are looking for. By bringing in board members under the age of 35 who can make the same financial and time commitment as the older board members, they are hoping there will be an end result of institutional buy-in to the theatre, (Daniels, 2004). New ways of selling tickets will also be tested with single ticket sales instead of subscriptions being the main focus of the campaign, (Daniels, 2004).

Finally, the main component of new youth initiative will be an ambassador program. Daniels (2004) says about the ambassador program,

The mission of the program is to mobilize, inspire and empower an energetic group of college kids and young professionals to help develop Cal Shakes -- to go out into the community as ambassadors on behalf of the theatre: college students doing interviews on college radio stations, young professionals leading special events, and so on.

Daniels (2004) explains this by saying that to get young people to listen to your message you need to communicate in their way and the communication must be done by people they will actually listen to -- other young people.

Theatre professionals are aware of the challenges facing the regional professional theatre in the 21st century. By combining both marketing and communication their outreach to potential patrons becomes stronger and hopefully adds to their patron base. In chapter 3, this researcher will explain in-depth the research and data collection methods used to test the two hypotheses.

CHAPTER III Methodology

Data Needed/ Data Collection

This researcher will need to obtain the ticket sales figures from before and after any plans the theatres have used. This researcher will also need to discover which programs or promotions have been most successful for the theatre and what motivates people from the 18-24 age cohort to attend regional professional theatre. These items will be obtained through in-depth personal interviews with regional theatre marketing/communication professionals and intercept surveys given to potential theatre-goers in the 18-24 age range.

Research Methods

The hypotheses will be tested using qualitative research in the form of interviews with four communication/marketing specialists at regional professional theatres in each of the four regions (Region 1 – Northeast comprised of New England and Middle Atlantic; Region 2 – Midwest comprised of East North Central and West North Central; Region 3 – South comprised of South Atlantic, East South Central and West South Central; and Region 4 – West comprised of Mountain and Pacific divisions) of the United States.

This researcher will use an informal method to select the sample. Using the list of League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and by asking for references from theatre professionals, this researcher will contact various theatres in each of the four geographic regions to see which theatres would participate in the study.

Once this researcher finds willing participants in each of the four regions, this researcher will design a specific set of questions to be ask of each communication/marketing professional during a telephone interview. The telephone interview will be used in place of a face-to-face interview because of the distance between the researcher and interview subjects. Questions will not be given to the interviewees ahead of time so they will not be able to prepare “canned” responses. These interviews will take place starting in February and ending in April of 2007. Examples of questions during the interview will include:

- Do you have a marketing plan?
- Does your marketing plan incorporate both advertising and public relations?
- What types of programming do you have in addition to your regular mainstage season?
- Have there been any significant changes in the ticket sales or the subscription base since the installation of these programs?
- What is the average age/demographic of a patron at your theatre?
- Do you think the average patron has changed at all since you began any of the extra programming?
- Are you doing anything specifically to get these people to the theatre (18-24) specifically in the way of marketing initiatives?
- Do you feel it is important to address this age cohort (18-24) and get them to the theatre?

Finally, to learn of what motivates the 18-24 age group to attend and support theatre, 50 intercept surveys will be administered at two universities in the tri-state area. The first school, Rowan University, is more rurally located and the other, The University of Pennsylvania, is privately-funded and located in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.

Data from the intercept surveys will be collected during the month of March 2007.

Questions asked during the intercept survey will be:

- Are you between the ages of 18-24?
- Are you male or female?
- How often do you attend the theatre?
 - How many times per year would you say you attend?
- Do your friends attend the theatre?
- How often do your friends attend the theatre?
 - How many times per year would you say your friends attend?
- Why would you not attend the theatre?
- What would motivate you to attend a play?

Data Analysis

Data from recorded in-depth interviews will be transcribed and then the four interview transcriptions will be compared for recurrent frequencies. Using SPSS, the intercept surveys will be tabulated to run frequencies and percentages.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This researcher conducted two research techniques to test two hypotheses. The first method was in-depth interviews with four communication/marketing professionals working in regional professional theatres in the four regions (Northeast, Midwest, South and West) of the United States. The second method was intercept surveys given to members of the 18-24 age cohort at two universities in the tri-state area. The population was any 18-24 year old at either university and the sample n=50 divided equally with 25 respondents from each school. This researcher will now present each hypothesis and findings and its findings.

H1: It is expected that an IMC plan with additional theatre education programs will facilitate patron growth and increased ticket sales in regional professional theatres.

- The Northeast respondent said his theatre had a marketing plan that to an extent incorporated both advertising and public relations, but that the main focus was on subscription renewal and sales. He did not think that there had been any significant changes in ticket sales or the subscription base since the installation of their Theatre for Young Audiences program, their touring company that performs in local schools or an Academy that provides acting classes for grades 1-12. "Ticket sales tend to be more mainstage driven or outside-economic-factor-driven like 9-11."

- The Midwest respondent said, “We do everything through the marketing department. We do the traditional marketing approach plus a lot of online marketing we never used to do...There has not been a major increase (ticket sales or the subscription base), but audience development has helped and increased revenue for the theatre. Education programs that we offer sometimes bring the children’s parents to the theatre as a result (of what they’ve seen at school), and it helps with our recognition in the community...”
- The South respondent said they really have not used an IMC plan in the past. “Our marketing and development departments just merged and are just starting to work with an arts marketing consultant, but we have always used public relations as an important part of the mix and will continue to do so.” The theatre does offer education programming in the form of workshops, summer camp, productions, a statewide educational tour and free Shakespeare in the Park performances. The respondent noted, “Each type of programming attracts its own audience with some crossover. Significant growth has occurred recently in educational programming.”
- The West respondent said that his theatre uses an IMC plan, but they have no additional programming. “We do not believe in theatre outreach programs. Instead, we want to get young people into the actual theatre to see the full production.” Due to his statement, there was no information regarding whether their IMC plan coupled with educational programming had increased ticket sales.

H1- Not Supported

Based on the data collected for the first hypothesis, it was not supported. Of the four in-depth interviews conducted, all respondents said they had a marketing plan. Of the four respondents, three said their plan incorporated both public relations and advertising. Three of the four theatres had programming in addition to their regular mainstage season. There were not any major increases in ticket sales or their subscription base following the installation of these programs.

H2: It is expected that the younger age cohort (18-24) will support regional theatre if supplemental programming meets their needs.

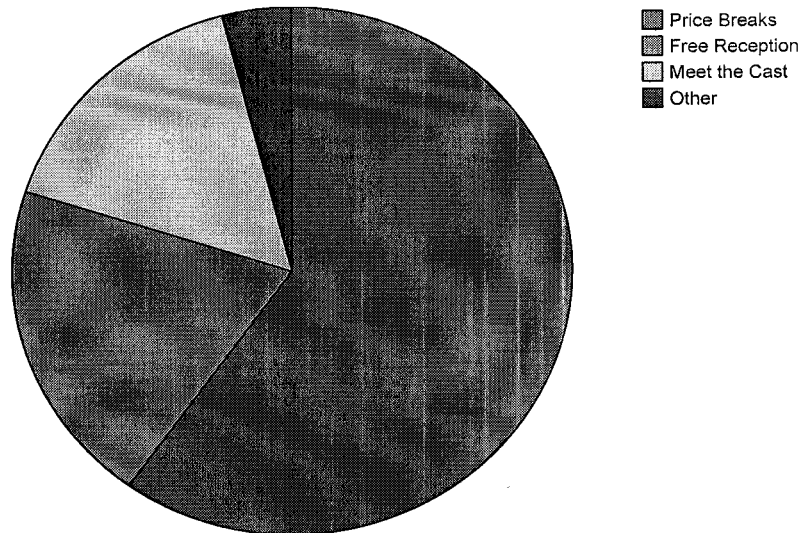
- The Northeast respondent said, “Gearing programming to that group in this (less metropolitan) area is not sustainable. I would rather gear my programming to the 45-60 age group...” He continued by saying that his theatre’s educational programming or additional programming is not meant to drive mainstage ticket sales.
- The Midwest respondent said that it is not in the 18-24 age cohort’s culture to support the theatre. Her theatre is using diversity on stage to reflect their community and produce new and contemporary work to get the young people in the door and hopefully keep them there for their other programming too. She did not have any conclusive evidence to support that the programming was increasing the amount of 18-24 year olds attending her theatre.
- The South respondent said that their theatre’s overall demographic has not changed since the installation of their supplemental programming, but that they

have sponsored special events that have been a great success in attracting younger audiences to the theatre.

- The West respondent said his theatre has a Rush Program for college students and also a Wednesday Matinee Program for K-12 students. He did not have any specific results to share about the success of these programs changing the demographics of his theatre.

Respondents of the intercept surveys listed price breaks as the most important motivator to attend theatre (60%), as shown in Figure 3, followed by a free reception (20%) with food and drinks and an opportunity to meet the cast of the show (16%).

Figure 3: Motivation to Attend Theatre



As shown in Table 1, cost was the major constraint (46%) indicated for not attending theatre. Only 16% of respondents said they had no interest in attending theatre.

Table 1: Theatre Attendance Impediments

Reasons for Not Attending Theatre				
Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Cost	23.0	46.0	46.0	46.0
Time	14.0	28.0	28.0	74.0
No Interest	8.0	16.0	16.0	90.0
Other	5.0	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	50.0	100.0	100.0	

H2- Not Supported

Three of the four theatres had programming in addition to their regular mainstage season, but most of the programming was not directed specifically at the 18-24 age cohort. The average age of patrons at all theatres was 50+ with the average age of patrons also remaining the same following the installation of the additional programming. Rather than supplemental programming, the intercept survey results showed that price breaks and a free reception with food and drinks enticed the 18-24 age cohort the most to attend theatre. The major reason the 18-24 age cohort was not attending theatre was the cost associated with purchasing tickets, not their lack of interest or care for theatre itself.

General Findings

In-depth Interviews

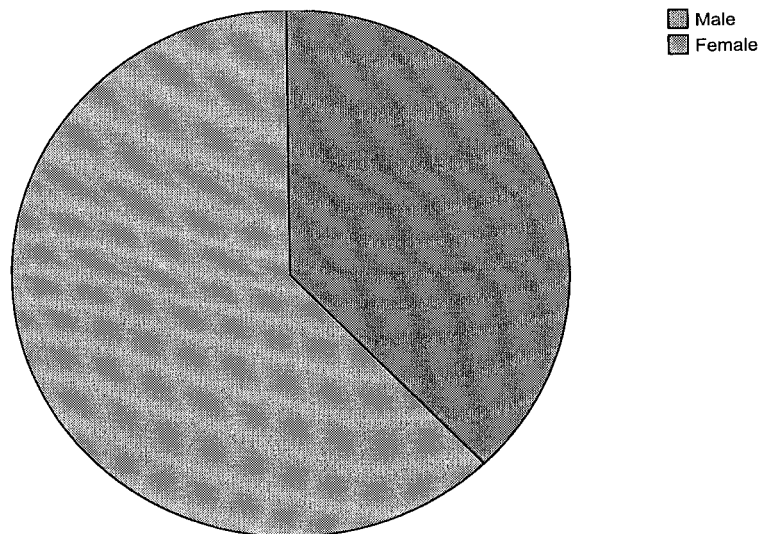
Two theatres did not feel it was important to try to address the 18-24 age cohort while two felt it was an emerging issue for the theatre community. Only three of the four theatres had a viable IMC plan in place. Half of the theatres did not see supplemental programming as a beneficial and effective marketing tool to bring the 18-24 age cohort into the theatre.

Intercept Surveys

Eighty-six percent of respondents said they attend theatre frequently or occasionally. When asked about their friends' attendance rates, they estimated that 39% of their friends attend frequently or occasionally.

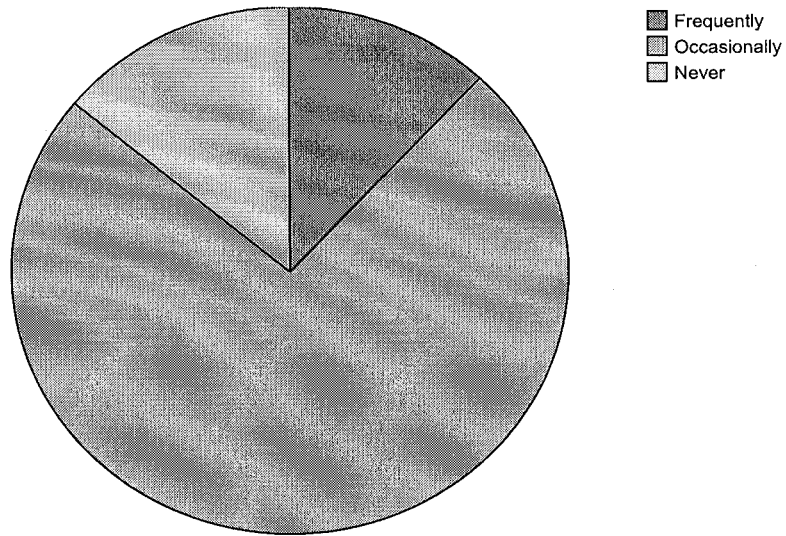
Of the 50 intercept surveys collected, all of the respondents were between the ages of 18-24 with 38% male and 62% female as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Gender



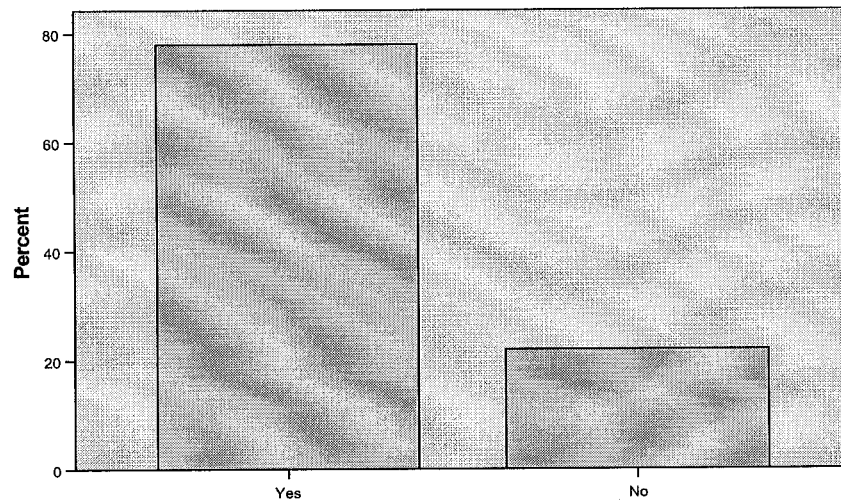
Although only 12% of the respondents report attending the theatre frequently, 74% report attending occasionally as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Theatre Attendance Frequency



Similarly, in Figure 6, 78% say their friends attend theatre. Only twenty-two percent reported that their friends never attend the theatre.

Figure 6: Theatre Attendance of Friends



Of the 78% of their friends who attend theatre, more than 68% of them attend “occasionally” or more often as seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Theatre Attendance Frequency of Friends

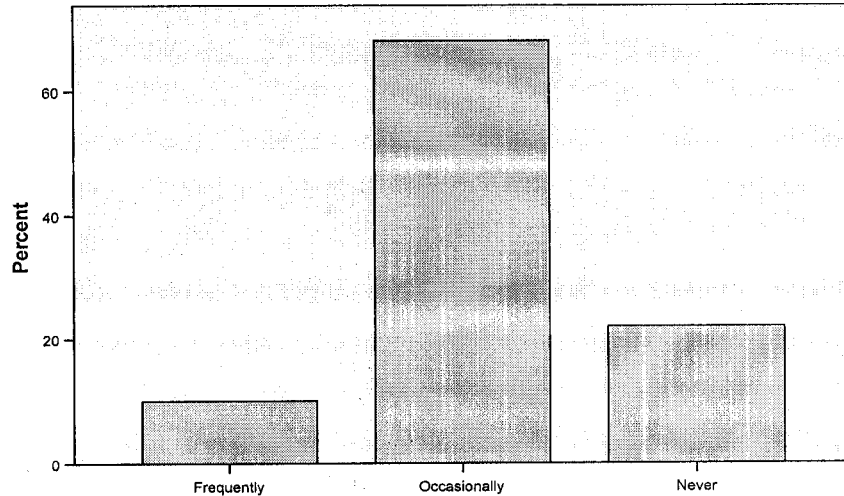


Table 2 shows the breakdown for respondents answering “frequently” and “occasionally” as their theatre attendance rates. Respondents defined their response of “frequently” or “occasionally” with their own annual rate of attendance as shown in Table 2. Sixty percent of the respondents said they attended between one and five performances per year.

Table 2: Personal Theatre Attendance

Personal Theatre Attendance					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 per yr	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	1-2 per yr	3	6.0	6.0	16.0
	2 per yr	1	2.0	2.0	18.0
	2-3 per yr	4	8.0	8.0	26.0
	3 per yr	1	2.0	2.0	28.0

3-4 per yr	4	8.0	8.0	36.0
4 per yr	4	8.0	8.0	44.0
4-5 per yr	5	10.0	10.0	54.0
5 per yr	3	6.0	6.0	60.0
6 per yr	4	8.0	8.0	68.0
7+ per yr	9	18.0	18.0	86.0
Never	7	14.0	14.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows respondents' thoughts on the annual attendance rates to theatre performances of their friends. Respondents were also asked to define their responses of "frequently" or "occasionally" with an annual rate of attendance to theatre for their friends. Table 3 shows that respondents said 58% of their friends attended between 1-5 performances per year.

Table 3: Friends Theatre Attendance

Annual Theatre Attendance of Friends					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 per yr	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	2 per yr	1	2.0	2.0	8.0
	1-2 per yr	1	2.0	2.0	10.0
	2-3 per yr	3	6.0	6.0	16.0
	3 per year	5	10.0	10.0	26.0
	3-4 per yr	4	8.0	8.0	34.0
	4 per yr	2	4.0	4.0	38.0
	4-5 per yr	5	10.0	10.0	48.0
	5 per yr	4	8.0	8.0	56.0
	5-6 per yr	1	2.0	2.0	58.0
	6 per yr	3	6.0	6.0	64.0
	7+ per yr	7	14.0	14.0	78.0
	Never	11	22.0	22.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

In the next chapter, this researcher will draw conclusions based upon the results and provide future recommendations.

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions & Recommendations

Hypotheses

H1: It is expected that an IMC plan with additional theatre education programs will facilitate patron growth and increased ticket sales in regional professional theatres.

Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Based on information gathered from the in-depth interviews, theatre education programming as used as a marketing tool (the most widely used form of additional programming in the theatres this researcher interviewed) was never really meant to increase ticket sales or to change the age demographic of the audience to swing younger. Instead some theatres suggested it was more a tool to be seen as a positive force in the theatre's community.

This researcher suspects that the theatres interviewed are relying on the research that states if children experience the arts from a young age, they will come back and support the arts once they have families of their own. This theory was valid prior to this generation, but may not continue to work in the next 10-20 years with the members from the Millennial generation and their changing tastes and habits.

H2: It is expected that the younger age cohort (18-24) will support regional theatre if supplemental programming meets their needs.

There was no conclusive evidence to support hypothesis 2. Instead, this researcher learned that the 18-24 age cohort is attending theatre, but not necessarily due to

supplemental programming. Marketing/communication professionals working in the theatres all stressed the point that young people today “cherry pick” what they want to go see and spend their money on, so unless your entire season is geared to their preferences, they will not be constant, dedicated supporters of the theatre.

Instead of supplemental programming, it seemed that price breaks in ticket prices, a free reception with food and drinks or opportunities to meet and mingle with the cast of the show were more attractive ways of getting this age cohort to the theatre. Perhaps a generation raised in a culture of “getting more for your money” or the “best experience for the most bang for your buck” wants the same thing when it comes to their consumption of fine arts. If they pay \$40 or \$50 for a ticket, they want more than a show on stage to be contented and happy; they want an overall experience from start to finish.

General Findings

The two most surprising aspects gained from this research were that the 18-24 age cohort is attending theatre more than expected and that half of the marketing/communication professionals that this researcher spoke with did not see an impending crisis for the theatre community. When looking at the views of the theatre professionals who think that theatres will carry on in the next 20-30 years without any problems, perhaps they are right if the number of 18-24 year olds attending theatre is as high as the results indicate. This researcher, like the theatre professionals that were concerned about the future of regional theatre, tends to think that the ever-changing culture of the Millennial generation will not include theatre in its mix of important priorities or civic duties.

If looking at the MTV Generation, Generation Y or the Millennials (depending on which scholar you talk to) the influx in the amount of technology at this generation's disposal is completely disproportionate to previous generations. In the book, *Connecting to the Net. Generation: What higher education professionals need to know about today's college students*, Reynol Junco and Jeanna Mastrodicasa (2007) found that in a survey of 7,705 college students:

- 97% own a computer
- 94% own a cell phone
- 56% own an mp3 player
- 76% use Instant Messaging.
- 15% of IM users are logged on 24 hours a day/7 days a week
- 34% use websites as their primary source of news
- 28% own a blog and 44% read blogs
- 49% download music using peer-to-peer file sharing
- 69% of students have a Facebook account

With these figures in mind, it is no wonder that the Millennial generation continues to lack interpersonal and social skills when dealing with others. So many of the current technologies that the Millennials have grown up with are solitary endeavors which this researcher also believes keeps them from the theatre, a venue that is inherently social and experienced as a group. It was the Millennial generation that first experienced on a regular basis:

- The Internet
- PCs
- Sophisticated computer graphics in many video games, animated movies and TV shows
- Digital cable
- Cell phones
- Instant messaging
- MP3 players
- TiVo
- Broadband internet

- Digital cameras
- Robotic & digital pets
- Camera phones
- Text messaging
- Social networking
- GPS
- Online gaming
- Touchscreens in mainstream usage
- Satellite radio
- Domestic robots like the Roomba that clean for you

Unfortunately, with the rise of the Information Age has come the decline of being socially involved and engaging in “age-old social norms.” With the rise of computers and technology, there is no longer a need to come together to meet with friends personally or to engage in discussions about current events. Everything that used to be done over a cup of coffee is now transmitted through wires and a screen, eliminating the middle men – conversation, interaction and discourse.

This researcher does not think that this new generation will only affect regional theatre. Questions have already been raised about political elections and the future of our country with such an apathetic voter base barely turning out during the 2004 election. Even with so much information at their fingertips, the Millennials have an attitude of general apathy when it comes to most issues. Unlike their parents, champions of equal rights for all during the Vietnam Era, many young people today could care less about social issues and more about what Paris Hilton did at last weekend’s Hollywood party. One student this researcher talked to during the intercept surveys stands out. She listed distance as a reason why she didn’t attend theatre more often. This was shocking since her university was situated right in the middle of a city with theatre venues surrounding

her. When asked about her answer, she really didn't have any good reason that made sense.

Future Research

If continuing with this study, this researcher would delve deeper into why students do or do not attend theatre, what their background with the arts was while growing up and what theatres can do to market to this age cohort. Other suggestions would be to increase the number of marketing/communication professionals in theatre interviewed and also increase the number of intercept surveys to include the 18-24 age cohort in more geographic regions across the country. Recommendations for theatres include coming up with new ways to incorporate the mainstage season shows into more all-inclusive events providing more of a "total experience" for today's younger theatre-goers, providing better knowledge and promotion of discounts for students and young adults most likely through the use of additional electronic media, and adding some programming or mainstage season shows that would be geared more toward the 18-24 age cohort.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

18-24 Age Cohort Intercept Survey

1. Are you between the ages of 18-24? Y / N

If so, would you answer four short questions?

2. How often do you attend the theatre (plays, musicals)?

Frequently Occasionally Never

3. How many times per year would you say you attend the theatre?

4. Do your friends attend the theatre?

Frequently Occasionally Never

5. How many times per year would you say your friends attend the theatre?

6. Why would you not attend the theatre?

a. Cost

b. Time

c. No Interest

d. Other _____

7. What if anything would motivate you to attend a play or a musical?

a. Price Breaks

b. Free Reception (food & drinks)

c. Meet the Cast

d. Other _____

APPENDIX B

In-depth Interview Questions

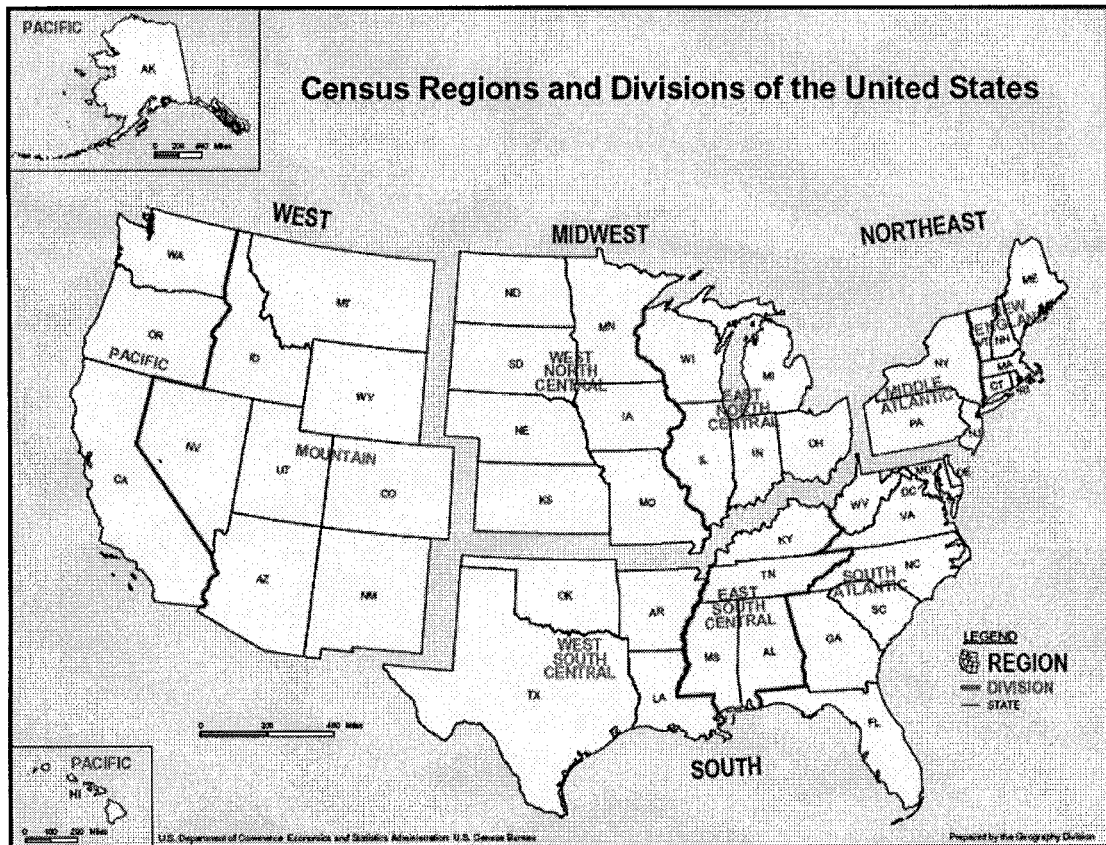
1. Do you have a marketing plan?
2. Does your marketing plan incorporate both advertising and public relations?
3. What types of programming do you have in addition to your regular mainstage season?
4. Have there been any significant changes in the ticket sales or the subscription base since the installation of these programs?
5. What is the average age/demographic of a patron at your theatre?
6. Do you think the average patron has changed at all since you began any of the extra programming?
7. Are you doing anything specifically to get these people to the theatre (18-24) specifically in the way of marketing initiatives?
8. Do you feel it is important to address this age cohort (18-24) and get them to the theatre?

APPENDIX C

Additional References

Figure 1: IMC Triad Model Northwestern University's Medill Integrated Marketing Communication Website - <http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/medill/imc/#>, 2006

Figure 2: Regions of the United States Retrieved on May 21, 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Census_Regions_and_Divisions.PNG



LORT Website www.lort.org/newmembership.htm, 2006

Tony Awards Website www.tonyawards.com, 2006

