



Marketing vital when drawing playgoers

By Art Shulman

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You might not think that teaching marketing at Cal State Northridge and running a market research consulting business would interrelate with writing and producing plays.

But my careers dovetail easily.

Usually performed at smaller theaters, my plays are generally box office successes thanks to using a few simple marketing concepts which are also relevant for other small businesses.

Small theaters - like other small businesses - must reach prospective audiences relatively smartly and cost-effectively.

Most of the marketing dollars I spend are for a quality postcard mailing to a few thousand theatergoers. (Most of these, in addition to others, come from a list maintained by the Lonny Chapman Group Repertory Theatre, where I'm a company member).

Some producers will tell you that such mailings don't work. Perhaps this is because the content is not optimally positioned. Angelenos have many other activities available to them, so it's crucial that prospective theatergoers are intrigued

enough to want to see your play rather than do something else.

A tag or log line should tell what the play's about. The graphic should communicate or suggest a story.

Many fliers or postcards used to market plays don't have any people in the artwork. This is generally a mistake. Audiences come to plays because they are interested in stories about people. They aren't interested in a red wagon. They are interested in the person pulling the wagon, or riding the wagon.

All my fliers and postcards depict people in an involving situation.

A strong brand name is important. I try to make my play titles interesting. As examples, "Sex Is Good For You!" or "The \$4 Million Giveaway" (which earlier had the bland title, "Legacy").

Finally, it is important to establish a relationship with audiences.

"Relationship marketing" is important. I have a list of people who have attended my plays in the past, many bringing along large groups who then become theatergoers themselves. I make sure to notify them when I have a play coming up by snail mail, e-mail, and often personally by telephone, and I try my best to respond quickly and accommodate their requests.

Art Shulman is a marketing professor at California State University, Northridge, and has

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his own market research consulting company. He has a master's degree from The Bernard Baruch College of Business & Public Administration, and a doctorate from The City University of New York.

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