

Audience Data UK Briefing



4th February, 2008
Birmingham Hippodrome

Report

Introduction

Audience Data UK (ADUK) is a joint initiative between the Arts Councils of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It aims to help people in the arts to make use of data and information about audiences.

Kate Sanderson, freelance consultant and ADUK steering group member Chaired by Ruth Eastwood, Chief Executive, Curve, Leicester.

Ruth Eastwood welcomed everyone to the session, introducing Kate Sanderson who provided a briefing report about progress on the Audience Data UK initiative.

Audience Data

Kate began by saying that the room contained a number of people who had been involved in ADUK, either as representatives of groups or because they had areas of expertise valuable to the project's progress. A number of Chief Executive Officers from arts organisations were also present, which emphasised that ADUK was more than just an initiative for marketers.

The briefing would include

- An introduction to ADUK
- Update on the work that ADUK has done helping arts organisations to use data
- An overview of the pilot training by the Arts Marketing Association (AMA) for ADUK
- Information on how people can become involved and contribute to ADUK's future
- Next steps

ADUK began from a piece of research which showed there was a great deal of data around; on box office systems and as surveys and information from third party sources, but it was not being well used. Then, in 2006, Glasgow Grows Audiences undertook a survey which revealed a lack of confidence within arts organisations, whether CEOs, marketers or other staff, about their understanding of data and the way it could be turned into useful information.

The majority had not been trained in managing, interpreting and acting on data. Interestingly, the research also revealed a gulf between marketers who were more 'creative' in orientation and marketers more 'interested in data'.

Email research and questionnaires were then used to find out what CEOs and marketers thought were interesting pieces of data and the things they wanted to know. The answers were remarkably similar between both sets of people.

- **Financial/sales detail:** numbers of attenders/visitors, income, discount types, price band info, yield
- **Audience data:** profiling, frequency, geographic spread, retention, new customers
- **Marketing data:** response rates, e-marketing info
- **Bigger picture:** cross-over and comparisons with other organisations, economic impact (of more importance to CEOs)
- **Crystal ball:** future trends, forecasting - both short and long term

The research also revealed a need for help: how do we turn data into meaningful information, set performance indicators, make informed business decisions, see our organisations in the context of others and build this practice into our day-to-day work? Integral to these needs was the desire to make evidence-based decisions and for there to be a commitment to data from Board level and across all staff.

ADUK

ADUK is a joint initiative between the Arts Councils of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. ***It's about helping people who work in the arts to make use of data and information about audiences.*** It began in 2003 and will continue until at least 2009, managed by Network (the association of audience development agencies).

ADUK is about helping arts professionals to turn data into real, meaningful information about audiences and visitors so that it can inform their strategic planning. It acknowledges the lack of skills and confidence in the sector and the need to find ways of addressing this. It's also about improving the ways in which we collect, process and share data.

ADUK has produced reports, case studies and online resources to support this work. As of February, 2008 there were already 18 reports, available through the ADUK and AMA websites. These include a good range of practical useful material.

- Data ownership guidelines: for venues/host organisations to assist the sharing of data with visiting companies and artists, plus a set of case studies
- A guide to monitoring audience diversity with examples of sample questions
- Customer profiling and segmentation tools and how these may be used
- A guide to selecting ticketing and marketing systems
- A guide to commissioning market research
- A guide to desk research for audience and visitor data
- Learning more about catchment areas – a brief introduction to Area Profile Reports

ADUK is setting up pilot benchmarking groups with a number of different types of organisations, such as arts centres, concert halls, producing theatres, medium-scale galleries and disability arts. These pilots were set up in order to enable organisations to compare their processes and performance, share agreed data sets and then to use the information for business and marketing planning. These will run during the course of 2008 and arts organisations are welcome to put themselves forward to take part.

This will lead to a benchmarking 'toolkit' as well as online resources and case studies available through the ADUK website.

Training

In 2007, a pilot training programme was developed by the AMA in partnership with Network on behalf of ADUK. This aimed to provide guidance on comprehensive and up-to-date knowledge and best practice in collecting, analysing and using audience/visitor data. Entitled 'Dazzled by Data' it was a programme of five one-day workshops in the West Midlands and Scotland, with the intention that it will be repeated and 'rolled out' to further regions.

This five-stage programme (with a slight variance for the visual arts) aimed to take people on a 'data journey'. Some people took part in all stages and others just dipped into one or two.

The content varied from more basic elements such as 'why is it a good idea to collect data and what might we do with it once we have it?' through to profiling and analysing data; looking for hotspots and patterns within the data. The final stage examined the ways in which information could be used to support decision making, advocacy and strategic level organisational change.

Evaluation from the pilot project brought out key points from this pilot project. CEOs who had either attended or sent delegates highlighted a number of changes in their organisations.

In terms of **collecting data**, they had become aware that they didn't necessarily need to collect more data but the *right* data; why they were collecting it, how they might do it more effectively and the sort of data they needed. One of the touring companies which attended is now approaching venues to start discussions about a wish list of information they would like and why they need it.

There was a range of experience of people being able to **analyse data**. Some were already undertaking many of the main areas, whereas there were others for whom relatively basic practices were a complete revelation. Following the training, many had begun to develop key performance indicators and to compare their information with other organisations.

Again, in **using data** there were a range of levels of experience but many spoke of the way that the training had given them confidence to achieve new things; implementing a CRM strategy across a range of departments, improving segmentation of audiences, using website statistics more effectively or having more informed discussions with funders.

ADUK works from the assumption that sharing knowledge is a good thing, so it was encouraging to discover that greater sharing of audience data and benchmarking was taking place as a result of the training. CEOs had previously already been sharing information with other organisations, though on an informal basis. This training stimulated them to do this in a more structured way. However, concerns about benchmarking were expressed around difficulties of identifying the right peers (because there was no similar company within the region for example) and finding organisations of a similar scale. They also stated a desire to benchmark on a national level, partly because it was considered "too messy to do this with those we know in the region."

What next for participants?

Those involved in collecting audience data realised they needed to think more about why they were doing this and what the data would be used for:

- Ensuring data collection is goal orientated
- Identifying the burning questions re. audience data collection
- Redesigning current survey / questionnaires

Delegates also wanted to improve the profiling of their audiences and to use this information to improve their marketing communications by:

- Obtaining external information such as TGI reports and Area Profile Reports
- Profiling audiences and improving targeted communications
- Evaluating frequency and return on investment of mailings
- Assessing the effectiveness of current campaigns

There were several points made about involving and interesting members of staff to help inform organisation-wide discussion and planning. This might include staff consultation, tailoring reports of results to different department needs, reconsidering the role of the box office and talking to the board about what the organisation is doing.

Delegates had been keen to take things on a stage, by incorporating data analysis into business planning tools such as SWOT, TOWS and Ansoff models.

Overall, the training had encouraged delegates to think about how they used data, provided them with skills and tools to do this more effectively and increased aspirations and expectations.

Further information and next steps

- Reports, case studies and tools can be viewed, linked to and downloaded from the ADUK (www.aduk.org) and AMA websites (www.a-m-a.co.uk).
- ADUK is recruiting organisations to take part in the benchmarking exercise. To find out more contact kate@katesanderson.co.uk (performing arts) or miranda_jacobs@hotmail.com (visual and disability arts).
- Future ADUK training can be found on the ADUK website.
- AMA Conference 2008 this year focuses on understanding the complexities of audience behaviour and on the implications for arts organisations
- A new Theatrical Management Association (TMA) Strategic Marketing five day residential course has been set up, which includes elements of data analysis. See TMA website (www.tmauk.org) or contact Kate Sanderson.

Questions and Discussion

Vishalakshi Roy, Audiences Central

Since the training sessions we've had many more enquiries for our research services, area profile reports etc which seem to point to their impact. They were obviously thinking and discussing these things when they had returned to their venues. Many also went back to the information they had been collecting for years and analysed it more intelligently.

KS: It reminds me of the big box file of audience surveys I had by my desk at the West Yorkshire Playhouse for a number of years and never did anything with. If we can encourage people either to do something useful with this information or stop collecting useless information we will have performed a useful service.

RE: Our service level and funding agreements with stakeholders now require quite challenging information, particularly in Leicester, around ethnicity for example. How you find out this information without being rude or intrusive is an area of work which is difficult for our staff and so this should help us.

Jonathan Goodacre, Gusto Arts Management

Has anything been done within ADUK on collecting information within participatory arts projects? It's an area which has a range of protocols, legal and practical issues, especially when working with young people.

KS: I'm not aware that we have done anything in that area and it is an interesting one.

Phil Cave, Arts Council England

We are interested in quality of experience. How do we integrate that into this work?

Claire Cooper, Missions Models Money

One of the interesting documents I've come across recently is the WolfBrown report [research project based in USA] which aims to assess the intrinsic impact of the arts. Whilst we get obsessed with demand-led data this looks at it from a different point of view and is an interesting read.

Julie Aldridge, Arts Marketing Association

A representative of WolfBrown is speaking at the AMA conference this year about segmenting an audience according to the benefit of *why* someone might participate, so that we then communicate with them in the relevant way. So if the participant/audience member is interested in intellectual benefits for example, we communicate around this.

Dick Penny, Watershed Media Centre

We are behind the game about quality of experience. There are more conversations now about interculturalism, bringing different groups within society together rather than focusing on specific divisions of ethnicity. Last year we did a big piece of market research with loads of face-to-face interviews and there were a large number of people who didn't describe themselves under any ethnic label. Ultimately, diversity is the big untapped potential in this country and this is where the new ideas are going to come from. So finding how we bring this empowerment together with quality of engagement and experience is where we need to look.

CC: If we moved into that we would get more of our trustees and boards involved, because they are there for the mission.

RE: It's also our own funders who are behind the times – or just pushed by the government to answer difficult questions

DP: We need to get on the front foot and we can do this by getting confident with the data and need to know we are attracting people from across a community, but this needs to be about the quality of experience they are getting and not just a tick box exercise.

Caroline Griffin, Audiences Central

You mentioned there were some differentiations between performing arts and visual arts. Could you highlight the ways in which ADUK is helping the visual arts, which tend not to see data in the same way or have the same sort of data?

JA: There were two sessions about collecting data. The one for visual arts organisations looked at creating good practice within visitor survey techniques. Beth Aplin, who led that session, came up with a really interesting model about the depth of information which visual arts organisations have access to, compared with performing arts

organisations which can get obsessed with quite narrow information about who is coming and what they are coming to; the performing arts organisations therefore had something to learn from the visual arts. BA has also produced an interesting report about producing visitor surveys, partly based on work in Australia.

KS: We also have pilot projects around benchmarking in galleries so it's a case of testing to see whether this works and what works in different sorts of organisations. The idea then will be that this can be taken on without having to start from scratch. It will be interesting to see what common threads are discovered across a mid-scale gallery, producing theatre, arts centre - in terms of scale rather than artform.

JA: We were talking earlier about recruitment processes, recruiting marketing staff with knowledge of these sorts of things. Do people find that sort of thing challenging or do people know what sort of questions to ask?

KS: There's an interesting trend at the marketing officer sort of level in performing arts organisations in which they are tending to employ information data specialists, maybe as acknowledgement that this set of skills is required within a marketing team.

Kevin Isaacs, Fierce Earth

That seems to be something happening more in larger organisations. It's harder in smaller ones to do this. You may have one person, or half a person responsible for the whole marketing operation, so it's partly about resources.

KS: Hopefully, that will be where the audience development agencies come in, so that the specific areas of expertise can be drawn on.

RE: There are many new things coming on line. Our new venue has point of sale information at all of the tills, mobile units for selling merchandise etc, however, it will be the joining together of these things to make sense of it all which will be the challenge. The 'marketing box' will have to get bigger.

KS: That also more closely resembles the audience experience of the organisation too. They are having an entire experience.

KI: Audience development and market intelligence is a much longer journey than we are often allowed to embark on, so we are talking about something which might take a decade. Often within a funding structure, it's very hard to implement programmes and take people on a journey that takes ten years. So if you are an organisation that is going through change or wants to change and has an audience that is changing you need to be able to have the ability to plan long term. There needs to be scope to move beyond the finite projects to look to the long term.

Julie Eaglen, Arts Council England, West Midlands

As a member of the steering group, we had a long session this morning looking at sustainability because we are keen that these things are firmly embedded in what we are doing as a lead group and throughout the industry.

RE closed the discussion by encouraging everyone to refer to the resources in the pack and that which is available on the ADUK website (www.aduk.org)