If you've got a great show and no one's around to see it, does it make a sound?: Graphic Design & Direct Mail Marketing

*Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia's March **Spark** Event of 2007*
April 9th @ Society Hill Playhouse, Red Room

Remember the second Monday of every month is a new Spark event hosted by the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia. Individual & Organizational members attend free; all others are charged $10 per person. (This money may be applied towards membership dues!)

Future Spark Event and Theatre Alliance Announcements:

- **Next Spark event: The Balancing Act: Accounting, Taxes, State and the Feds**
  Managing the finances of a not-for-profit theater company.
  If you've got a great show and no one's around to see it, does it make a sound?
  - This event will take place on **Monday, May 14, 2007 @ 7:00 PM at The Playground at The Adrienne, 2030 Sansom St., Philadelphia.** Check the website for details on speakers.
  - Reception following with food generously donated by Whole Foods Market, our Spark sponsor!
- **Real-time, online ticketing!**
  Due to the Tessitura ticketing software project at the Theatre Alliance, we will be able to begin offering real-time, online ticketing and a call center within the next year and a half to theatre companies with budgets under $800,000. In order to determine our rates and how to best serve you, Interim Executive Director Vincent Marini will be sending out an email survey on your current ticketing situation. Please respond and respond promptly so that we can create a program that will best benefit you, our members.
- **Spark Showcase Festival 2007**
  This year's 10-minute play festival will take place July 11-22, 2007 at the Painted Bride Arts Center. More details coming soon!

Special Guest Speakers

Bryan Clark – Managing Director, Theatre Exile
Patrick Doran – Freelance Graphic Designer, formerly with Amaryllis Theatre Company
Anthony Kopa – Print Representative, Image Graphics
Erin Reilly – Artistic Director, Theatre Horizon (event moderator)

Why should you do direct mail marketing (primarily postcards)?

- The Number one reason to do direct mail marketing is so that people come to your show.
  - When you send a postcard you have 3.5 seconds to please someone enough to turn the card over and get more information about your show.
  - Placing postcards in a coffee shop is like shooting a machine gun. Mailing postcards to a theatre-goer is like being a sniper. Mailing gets your message directly to the people that you want to see your show.
- Branding
  - When you create & mail postcards, even if they don't come see your show, you are able to get your name out there, they see your name, they get to know and recognize your name, and they can get an idea about what sort of work that you do.
  - Postcards give an overall impression of what your company is all about.
- Helps you learn about your audience
  - You can see who they are, and where they are or are not.

Tips for postcard creation:

- You should mail them out 4 to 6 weeks before the start of your event.

- You should aim to send out the 1, 2 punch. Send out your press release to the media and then have your postcard ready to hit right after that.
- Try to do all your postcard work done early; you can always distribute things later.
- If you have a small company, make your actors and volunteers do things to help you – label, stamp, distribute, etc.
- Correct postage on a postcard? If you don't have a bulk mail account (see later notes) a 4x6 postcard requires a postcard stamp (currently 24 cents), larger postcards require a standard stamp (currently 39 cents).
- Make sure that your volunteers have a very clear, detailed plan for exactly where to drop things off.

How do you get that great graphic?

- Don't wait for actors, costumes, sets or anything to do your graphic design/postcards. Find the image that will speak to the audience right away.
- Don't let images be precious. Be open to ideas.
- Don't layer too many things into your design. Try to keep it simple and clear.
- Bold colors are catchy
- Talk to your director as you're coming up with ideas. Find out what they want, what their vision for the show is – get very descriptive words and descriptions.
- When giving a summary of the show – make sure it's short and to the point. Two sentences is the ideal length.
- White space is okay – you don't want to be too cluttered.
- Every bit of information that someone needs to buy a ticket should be on that postcard. (Pat thinks it should be on the front of the card, though others don't necessarily agree).
- Put a calendar of performances on the card – SO HELPFUL!
- Small postcard vs. large postcard – pick your battles. A larger postcard may cost a little bit more, but they're becoming more the standard. If you are going to bulk mail it's probably best to go with the larger card. If you're only going to put them in coffee shops, the smaller card is good so people can take them home with them.
- Never use more than 2 fonts in your design. More than that is confusing, adds to a cluttered feeling. You may want to use one font that gives the style and the feeling of the show, and one font that is very readable for all your text.

When working with an outside designer, how can we help the designer get the job done?

- Have a big meeting to talk about everything, all the ideas. Then allow a week or so for the designer to think about it.
- Be very clear with your ideas. The more specific you can be with the tone and the feeling of the piece, the better ideas the graphic designer can have.

What if we're designing the postcards ourselves?

- You can use Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator. Illustrator is a bit more expensive and more advanced/complicated.
- Save the work as a high resolution PDF for your printer.
- Colors may come out differently between what you've designed and what the printer produces – again, pick your battles. You can get the *exact* color, but it may cost more.
- For images try looking on ISTOCKPHOTO.com. Lots of really cheap or even free images there.
    - Do not steal artwork!

So, I've designed my postcard. Now what?

- Make sure that your work is saved in an appropriate file. Consult a designer or someone. If the work is in word or something, you're only going to clog up your time frame.

- Image Graphics has a 48 hour turn around for those of you who can't get the work done very early as Bryan suggested.
- Image Graphics uses a 4 color press, which basically means that any color you want can be done.
- The standard at Image Graphics is a new UV coating, gives it a glossy look and helps the color and images to really jump off the page. Has a more finished, professional look to it.
- You can get postcards done without the UV coating, but doing it with the coating is actually quicker.
- Image Graphics is local, they are on 2nd Street – Time is everything!
- Image Graphics does work with a few of the local theatre companies, but it is a market that they are very interested in getting into even more.
- Mail houses are a great way to get your postcard in the mail with out you having to label and stamp yourself. They will deliver to the mail house to help you get your cards out quicker.

Before you can use a mail house, you have to have a mailing list!

- Reasons why you need a mailing list
    - Identifies your audience – who they are, where they live, demographics
    - Identifies your base – presumably they enjoy your work; they will return and buy tickets.
    - More visibility, exposure, and the ability to brand
- How do you get a mailing list?
    - Start with everyone that you know – friends and family
    - Everyone who works with you, helps you, likes you
    - Everyone related to everyone you know, works with you, helps you, and likes you.
    - Anyone who has ever attended any of your events
    - All the other people in the theatre community that you know
- How do I get even more names?
    - Surveys – in addition to getting some great demographic information, always include contact information on the surveys you have to do.
    - "Add me to your mailing list" sign-ups
    - Ticket purchasing – never sell a ticket without getting their contact information!
    - Give aways!
    - If you have any semblance of a mailing list you can see about trading mailing lists with other like-sized organizations. Spark companies should be happy to exchange with one another.
- Once you have a bigger list you can get into doing more targeted marketing.

What about email marketing?

- If you really, really can't afford postcards, you can find some inexpensive companies through which you can send fancy HTML emails.
- Two popular, well known companies are Constant Contact and Patron Mail. There are also others. With both of these companies you can send HTML emails and you also get reports on bounce backs, open rates, click throughs, etc. It also sends the emails out so that they don't look like bulk mail, meaning they are less likely to end up in spam or junk mail folders.
- They cost very little and it is easy to maintain a list online.
- If you still can't afford these services, you can always just send an email using something like Outlook, but you don't get the extra information, and you may get more bounce backs.

What about online printing companies?

- Generally they work by you uploading your files to their website, someone contacts you and then your images get printed and mailed to you.
- Image Graphics currently has a very basic form of this, but they are working on having specific log-ins so that you can access your account and get your own pricing.
- Contact Image Graphics for their pricing – they are on a tier system so the more you do the lower the price.

How do I know if my mailings were effective or not?

- Number one way is to find out through your box office process – ask how they heard about the show. You should always get as much information as you possibly can in your box office process.
- Can do special ticket promotions "mention this postcard"
- Include "buy by this date" discounts
- Tracking the success of your marketing does take some time and energy.

Any tips for working with a photographer on an image?

- Use a professional if at all possible. Their equipment is likely better, and will get better results.
- If you can't use a professional, you can find some stock photos on ISTOCKPHOTO.com.
- Make sure you know that the photo is going to correctly represent what you are going for.
- Don't walk into the room with the photographer without a very clear idea of what you want. If you don't have a clear idea, it increases the chance that you won't use any of those images at all.
- The more people that you involve in the process, the longer it will take. Coordination of schedules alone can take a lot of time.

Are there any other tips we should keep in mind?

- If the mail house doesn't print a bar code with the address, or you are not using a mail house, you will need to provide a ½ inch at the bottom of your postcards for the US Post Office's bar code. You can get charged extra for not leaving that space.
- Every area of the country has a designated postal design consultant who you can send your designs to and get advice back. Check the USPS website for more information.
- There is a lot of information on mailing procedures on the USPS website.
- When doing email marketing, be sure that people know they are being signed up for it in the first place, and always have an unsubscribe option.
- To get inexpensive Photoshop, Illustrator, and other software, check out TechSoup.com and GiftsInKind.org.
- Feel free to take advantage of all the tools that you have available to you at the time. If you know your cast very early or have sets or costumes really early, feel free to use them. Just don't get bogged down waiting for them and cause your postcards to be delayed.
- Be open to alternatives
- Anyone that calls in and mentions that they heard about them through Spark can get 20% off their first order at Image Graphics.

Notes prepared by Natalee Hill, Office Manager for the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia.