

Case Study - Denver Center Theater Company for

Master of Arts

Arts and Culture Marketing

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- 1. What is the target segment for DCTC's Off-Center programming? Use the methodology from the Data-Driven Annual Fund Workbook to define DCTC's target market segment. You may use bullets or a table to organize.**

The Denver Center Theater Company noticed that their audience member was over the age of 55 even though millennials make up the largest age group in the overall Denver population (Syed 2018). DCTC's target segment for their Off-Center programming was millennials who live in or near Denver, Colorado. They define millennials as people born between 1981 and 1997. This target segment could be divided into more specific sub-segments, such as single millennials and millennials with families.

- 2. The theater's programming was initially guided by the aesthetic interests of younger staff members and a small advisory council. What were some of their initial assumptions or biases on the preferences of Millennial audiences? What did Denver Center learn about their initial target demographic of Millennials and the overall appeal of immersive programming? How did that challenge their ideas about programming?**

DCTC made quite a few assumptions about their targeted audience, of which many ended up being correct. They thought that millennials would be more interested in immersive experiences than the traditional theater setting. The video attached to this case study made the point that millennials feel that theater is only for older, richer audiences, meaning that they would not feel comfortable or represented in theater spaces. DCTC tried to combat this by

hosting their shows in irregular venues and adding audience participation opportunities. They learned that while millennials like light entertainment and a party atmosphere, they also crave the basic elements of storytelling.

It makes sense that most people want to see a strong narrative in theater because “scientists are discovering that chemicals like cortisol, dopamine, and oxytocin are released in the brain when we’re told a story” (Peterson, 2017). These chemicals assist in forming memories, regulating emotions, and building relationships, so storytelling is one of the best ways to connect with an audience and make a lasting impression.

3. What did Denver Center hope to discover through market research? Detail how Denver

Center’s approach to research evolved with each immersive performance:

a. The Jones Theater performances

When producing the shows at the Jones Theater, there did not seem to be much research done at all. Some shows went well, and others left the audiences confused, and Denver Center did not understand what made some productions more successful than others. This is when the Innovation Lab for Performing Arts recommended that DCTC start to study their audience and analyze data. From this, DCTC learned that they needed to work more closely with the performers in order to establish a clear balance between audience participation and a set storyline (Syed 2018).

b. Sweet and Lucky

Sweet and Lucky was a much bigger production than anything Off-Center had attempted before, and so they reached out to other groups for help. One of the most important things they did was involve the DCTC marketing team in the creative process, which was not their standard practice (Syed 2018). The marketing department already had data about the target audience, so they were able to help the creative team make informed decisions.

c. Travelers of a Lost Dimension

For *Travelers of a Lost Dimension*, they were able to survey a large number of audience members after the show to hear their reactions. Instead of waiting until the end of the show's run to analyze the data from these surveys, they started looking at the survey results as soon as they could. They found that children enjoyed this show more than millennials, even though millennials were their original target audience. Based on this early audience feedback, DCTC was able to change their marketing approach to target families with young children, which made the rest of the shows more successful (Syed 2018).

d. Wild Party

DCTC was able to take the feedback from their previous productions and bring new insights into *Wild Party*. Since it was clear that audiences wanted a clear story, DCTC took a pre-existing script and adapted it to an immersive experience. They found that this satisfied the need for a strong narrative, but because the script was not written with audience participation in mind, the production was not as immersive as they had hoped (Syed 2018).

4. Was the initiative successful? How did DCTC collect the data to evaluate success, and what did the data tell them?

DCTC used many KPIs to indicate success. The most obvious indicator is the financial return on investment. *Sweet and Lucky* did not sell enough tickets to cover even half of the costs of production, but *Travelers of a Lost Dimension* was much more financially successful (Syed 2018). However, the main goal of this initiative was to increase the number of audience members under the age of 35. There is no data table or results section of this case study, so the success of this goal is unclear. DCTC saw an increase in millennials during the run of *Sweet and Lucky*, but did not provide the percentages of audience members under the age of 35 for any of the other productions. Lastly, DCTC tracked the net promoter scores of all three productions. This KPI is also unreliable in this case because Syed reported two different scores for *Travelers of a Lost Dimension*, minus 23 and minus 7 (Syed 2018). The article is written in a way that makes it sound like the initiative was successful, but there is no solid data reported in this case study to prove that they met their goals.

5. Do you agree with the plan for continuation of the program outlined in the “Looking Ahead” section?

I think that their “Looking Ahead” section is very vague and does not seem to consider the data that they have collected. Of course experimentation is an important part of collecting data, but their plan sounds like random trial and error rather than something backed up with any sort of evidence. Despite that, I like the idea of trying to bring in a more racially diverse audience. However, just having a hip-hop themed show will not necessarily bring in people of

color. In order for this to be successful, I would suggest that the playwright be a person of color, and that the cast needs to be diverse in order to tell an authentic story that will interest racially diverse audiences.

References

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