



Blockbusters!

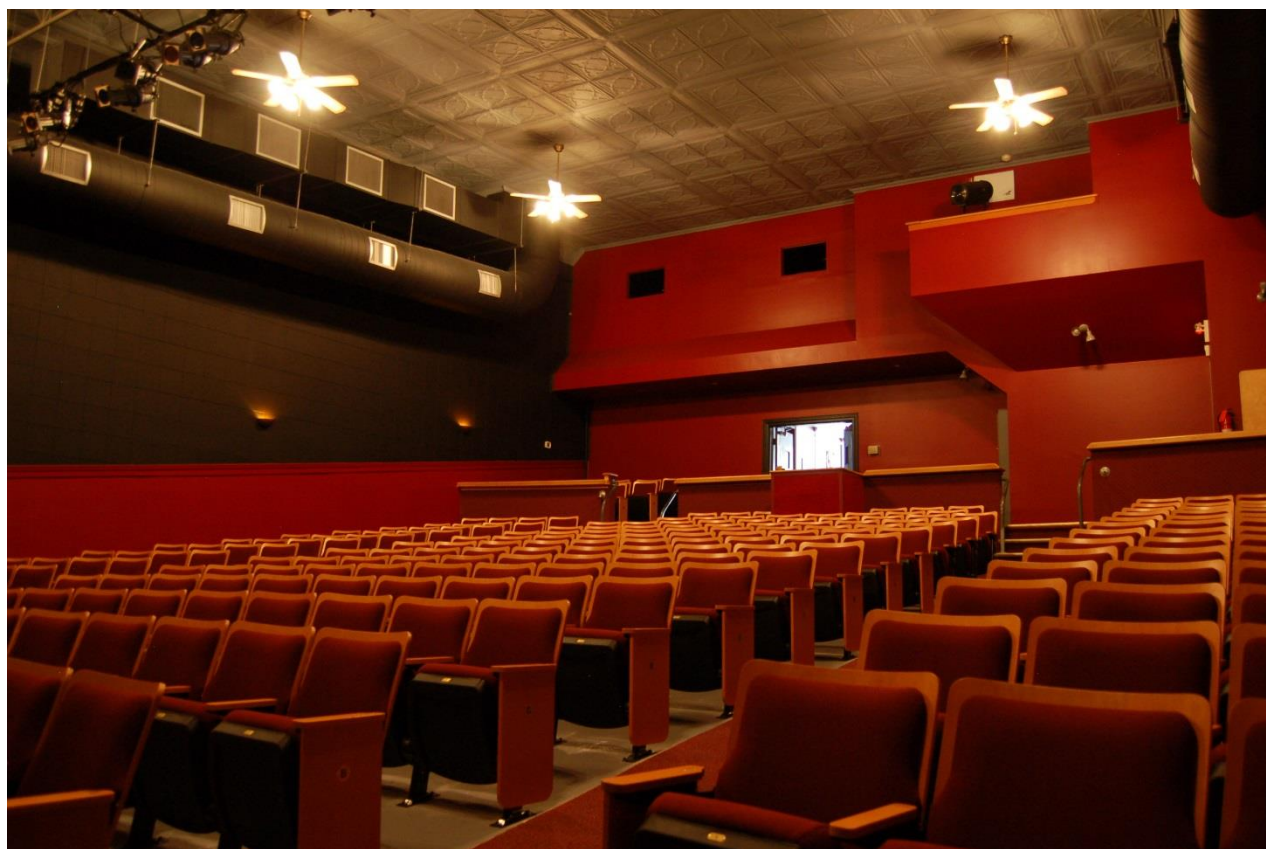
Marketing tips, tricks and best practices for the clients of the Fergus Grand Theatre



Prepared by Eric Goudie, Theatre Coordinator

Last updated Jan 4th, 2018

Your Magic Number is 254...



There are 254 seats for sale at the Fergus Grand Theatre.

254 might not seem like a lot, and yes, there are other theatres that are much larger than ours. Yet it's quite rare to actually see all 254 seats filled at the same time – achieving a sell-out is a lot harder than many people think.

And it's not that people in Centre Wellington don't like going to the theatre or other live events – they do. The number one complaint we hear from people after a show is over is that they didn't know it was happening in the first place. That's why marketing is so important!

This publication has been prepared to help you stage successful events at the Fergus Grand Theatre, whatever they may be, and help you fill more of those 254 seats more often.

The first thing you need is a plan...

A Simple Sample Marketing Plan

This is a simple sample marketing plan. It doesn't represent the pinnacle of scholarship in arts marketing, but it does provide you with a compact, durable list of things that you should do when putting on an event at the Fergus Grand Theatre.

This marketing plan has been built by you and your colleagues; the fellow producers, presenters, businesses and organizations that have staged events at the Fergus Grand Theatre over the years. Our contribution has been to simply take what's worked for other events in the past, thrown in a modest amount of industry standards and best practices, and cut away as much business-speak and technical jargon as we can.

This marketing plan has three steps:

1. Identification
2. Creation
3. Execution

Step one: Identification

Gather the essential information about your event and how you want it to unfold. This includes:

- The name of the event, what it's about, who is involved with it, when and where it is happening, how to get tickets, ticket prices, box office phone number, etc
- Who your target audience is for the event, and why. Be specific. This may involve some research.
- How much money you have to spend promoting your event. Get a number, even if that number is zero, so that you know what you've got to work with.
- How much time you have to promote the event, in both days remaining and the amount of time you can devote to marketing on each of those days.

Step two: Creation

For many people this is the fun part – it's also where many people confuse what they're doing with the not-so-fun part, which is Step 3. All you are doing at this point is creating marketing materials (posters, flyers, press releases, etc) and establishing a number of marketing channels – all the things that you are going to do. We'll list some materials and channels on the next page, and go into more detail about each of them in the remainder of this document.

Step three: Execute

Do it. Quite simply, use the materials you've created in the channels you've identified to do the work of selling tickets for your event. It does sound simple, but actually this is biggest job, and the most difficult.

Marketing Materials

- Posters
- Flyers
- Press Releases
- What to give us

This not an exhaustive list of every possible marketing material you could use to promote your event – you can and should create marketing materials that fit your show and your target audience. That might mean printing your poster on baseball caps, using a Japanese-style manga comic to explain the storyline or hiring a town crier to tell people to come and see your show (it's been done). Don't be afraid to get creative and think outside the box.

Marketing Channels

- Word of mouth
- Family and Friends
- Poster and flyer distribution
- Print Ads – newspapers
- Radio
- Website
- Email Marketing
- Social Media
- One-off marketing opportunities
- In-house – what we do for you

Once again, this list is not exhaustive – it is only a place to start, and these are only the basic must-have marketing channels that virtually everyone staging an event at the theatre should seriously consider taking advantage of. Don't be afraid to get creative and think outside the box.

Staffing

For shows in a theatre as large as the Fergus Grand there should be at least one designated publicity person working on every show. By "designated" we mean that they have no other responsibility than making sales. Poster design, copywriting, and flyer


distribution should all NOT be a part of this person's job description – each should be delegated to someone else. A “publicity committee” is a good way to meet the needs of the show, and to divide up/delegate jobs. A typical committee might include the following members:

- A supervisor, responsible for creating and adhering to a publicity schedule, and liaising with the event producer, the venue, and the rest of the production team
- A graphic designer, responsible for creating visual marketing materials
- A copywriter, responsible for creating written marketing materials (this person and the graphic designer work closely together)
- A media rep, responsible for contacting media outlets, sending press releases and photos, placing print, radio and other ads, arranging interviews, etc
- A distribution manager, responsible for getting posters, flyers and other print materials distributed throughout the community (via cast and crew members, as well as a dedicated distribution team)
- An online marketer, responsible for website, email, and social media marketing initiatives, including online advertising, free online listings, and possibly selling advertising space to sponsors
- A program person, responsible for gathering the content for the program, and possibly selling advertising space to sponsors
- A “minister without portfolio,” responsible for taking advantage of any special events, one-off marketing opportunities, or other miscellaneous chances to market the show that may come up

Marketing Materials

Posters

A good show poster (or flyer) should contain the following information:



The poster for 'An Evening With... Joy Dunlop' features a photograph of Joy Dunlop in a white dress against a dark, forest-like background. The text on the poster is as follows:

- An Evening With...*
- Joy Dunlop**
- Contemporary Gaelic Singer
and Scottish Stepdancer
- From Glasgow, Scotland
- Saturday August 2, 2014**
- 8 PM**
- Fergus Grand Theatre**
- Tickets \$30 (all inclusive)
- Box Office 519-787-1981
www.fergusgrandtheatre.ca
- WeeAlec Productions

Callouts from the poster identify the following information:

- The Title of your event
- A striking image that your target audience will recognize
- Date and Time
- Location
- Ticket Price(s)
- Where and how to get tickets

Poster design tips and best practices:

- Bigger is not necessarily better – an 8 ½” x 11” poster is often the largest sized poster many locations will accept, and the larger the poster, the more they will cost you.
- Use text sparingly. Convey the information you need to convey, but no more. Let the image be the star of the piece.
- Pay attention to legal requirements. Royalty information must sometimes be displayed on posters, and at other times a playwright’s name has to be a certain font size relative to the name of the play. Find out what these requirements are before you start designing your poster. Mistakes like this can be costly if you have to reprint, and in a worst-case scenario you could lose the rights to perform your show altogether.

- Ticket prices should include all taxes and handling fees – the price you advertise is the price your patrons pay. There is some disagreement amongst the client base on this, but some patrons (especially kids and teens) will show up with the exact amount they think is required for admission, and an unadvertised fee can quickly cost you a sale (or at the very least gain you a disgruntled customer).
- A QR code is that square box of pixels you often see on print ads. These are becoming more and more common, and are free and easy to make – why not include one that links to your event page in TixHub on your posters?

Flyers

- Flyers should contain the same essential information as their corresponding posters, and should be created by the same graphic designer in a similar style. You should, however, make adjustments to fit the smaller size and different shape – a poster simply shrunk to fit may look misshaped, and may be hard to read.
- The most common types of flyers FGT events tend to use are referred to in the printing industry as “2-ups” and “3-ups.” A 2-up is simply two pieces of the same copy placed on a single 8 ½ x 11 page in landscape and then cut in half. A 3-up is the same except the page is divided into thirds instead of halves. Both sizes are a good choice, since they stuff easily into programs and don’t get hidden in tall brochure racks. They are also small enough to leave in a pile on a table.
- While flyers are cheap to produce it is still a good idea to gauge as closely as possible how many you will need for both economic and environmental reasons. Remember, after your event these pieces of paper will be useless.
- Hydro bill flyers: Centre Wellington Hydro will insert flyers in their bills at no cost – you simply have to provide the flyers in the quantity and specification that they require – typically 5000 – 7000 pieces of 8 ½ x 11. The cost of this is comparable to a large print ad in the Wellington Advertiser. This promotion is often used by family-friendly events, and for subscription sales.

Press Releases 101

- A press release, no matter where it is being sent, should utilize a number of industry standards and best practices, many of which are outlined below. A press release about your event should be presented in a way that is easily recognizable to any media outlet.
- Put your logo at the top of the page. If you have a lot of events this will get your pieces noticed over time, and if your events are good, hopefully your releases will get published.
- Underneath the logo, justified to the right-hand margin, should be the words “For Immediate Release.” It should be obvious, but occasionally this line will read “For release on or after _____ date.” This is an outdated practice, and editors are

so overwhelmed with content they're unlikely to set your press release aside until your preferred date. Send out your releases when you're ready to talk about your event.

- Include a headline – make it brief and direct. Don't try to be cute or funny unless you know exactly what you're doing.
- Content should be 1.5 spaced, in a sans serif, 12-point font, in complete sentences arranged in logical paragraphs. Press releases should be a maximum of one page in length, including your contact info at the bottom.
- Write using the "inverted pyramid" formula, with the most important information (name of event, time, date, etc) in the first paragraph, and information of subsequently less importance in the paragraphs that follow. There's no guarantee that there will be room for the entire release, and the bottom part may get cut off.
- Proofread! It seems so obvious yet so many people fail to do it, and even those who do fail to catch every mistake, but you should always do it anyways. Have someone else read it over for you, or step away from it for an hour or two and then come back.
- Fun fact: there's an excellent chance (especially in a small-town media outlet with limited staff) that your press release will be run verbatim. Don't send out anything you wouldn't want read by the public, word for word.
- At the bottom of the press release you should indicate the end of the press release by the "◆" sign, or by "-30-"(for some archaic print industry reason). Below that give the media outlet your contact information in case they would like more information, including your name, phone number, and email address. Offer feature interviews, photography sessions or anything else unique to your event (like a phone interview with the performer, or comp tickets for reviewing the show).
- Photographs: Sometimes you can dramatically increase the chances of your press release running by including one or two photographs. Each photograph should be attached to your media email separately, and each should be clearly and succinctly labelled (don't just leave the camera's default). You should also attach an additional document entitled "Suggested Cut Lines" in which you provide a caption that could be placed under each photograph. Be sure to mention the name and date of the show in each cut line, if nothing else. Also watch out for legal traps – you may have to credit the photographer or the people in the photograph in a cut line, depending on your event.

What to provide us with to help serve you best:

- Timely information! You should have your promotional material ready to go as soon as you are ready to sign your contract, or at the latest the date you want your tickets to go on sale. There's nothing we can do to help you if you don't

provide us with the material to do so. While we can generally work with whatever material you are able to provide, in order to serve us best please provide:

- Lo-res Digital Poster for use in TixHub
- Gallery View image or video for use on TixHub main page
- Hi-res Digital Poster, for use in print publications
- Banner image, for use on Theatre Homepage
- Button image, for use in The Grand Fan e-Newsletter
- Brochure Rack Cards, for program stuffing and walk-in traffic
- A short one-sentence description for use in the eNewsletter
- A two-three sentence “elevator pitch” about your event for use in the box office
- Please note: FGT reserves the right to edit your materials to fit available space, to take advantage of new promotional opportunities for your event, or to bring your graphic design in line with industry best practices
- Please see our Copy and Graphics standards Guide (available on the Rent the Facility page on the website) for specific information on file type, pixel size and other requirements for publicity items

Marketing Channels

Word of Mouth

- Get in the habit of mentioning your event to everyone you meet
- Perfect your “elevator speech” – this is your 10-15 second pitch that includes the when, where and why of your show, as well as the call to action (i.e. how to buy tickets)
- Learn how to sell tickets on your computer and/or mobile device, so that you can sell tickets to people while having conversations with them
- Always have promotional materials on you (flyers, business cards, etc) at all times, so that you can give anyone information about your event
- Frame conversations about your show so that you convey three key messages every time:
 1. The when, where and why of your event
 2. How to get tickets
 3. Why people should care – what is the value to them

Family and Friends

Your cast and crew are, by far, your best sales people for community-based events, with our data suggesting that over 53% of sales for community theatre coming from this one source.

As a producer or director it's important to remember that these sales have little or nothing to do with you, your marketing efforts, or your creative vision - these people are here because the person on stage wants them to be here. This may be a

humbling truth, but tickets are tickets, regardless of where they came from, so it's best to simply dust off your ego, accept reality, and then make sure that do everything you possibly can to turn your cast and crew into hard-working sales machines:

- Give the cast and crew a talk at the start of rehearsals about making sales
- Make sure the cast all have flyers or other publicity materials to hand out
- Make sure that all cast members have the theatre's phone number and website memorized!
- Distribution – every cast member should be responsible for handing out flyers and getting the word out about the show – don't be shy about asking each one of them to distribute flyers and posters at their school, work, places of worship, while volunteering, while grocery shopping – anywhere. Be annoying! Be persistent! It's your money on the line, not theirs!
- Quiz cast members – what have they done to sell the show today? Be annoying! Be persistent! It's your money on the line, not theirs!

Poster and Flyer Distribution

Posters and flyers should be distributed together, since some places will accept one type of publicity material, and not others (a few will even accept both). Distribution isn't anyone's favourite task, but it must be done. At a minimum you should seek to cover the downtown areas of Fergus and Elora, as well as key places throughout Centre Wellington where people congregate (community centres, libraries, banks, post offices, etc). Don't overlook the smaller places like Belwood, Salem or Alma, especially if your event is taking place in the summer – at certain times of the year the population of these satellite communities can swell considerably (or at least the volume of traffic passing through them). It should go without saying that you must ask permission before putting up a poster, and that you should have push pins and scotch tape with you in addition to your materials.

Print Ads – Newspapers

- The Wellington Advertiser is far and away the best local value in print advertising at this time, with a free distribution to approximately 40,000 homes throughout Wellington County every week. The paper is widely read, as much for its kitsch as its actual news value. Tribute concerts tend to benefit the most from print ads here, with over half of some audiences coming from this one source, but most clients can trace a “bump” in sales back to ad in this newspaper. It is also a good place to advertise to seniors.
- The only other surviving local print paper is the Guelph Tribune (free), which is able to reach a city of 100,000 plus people (most of whom are within a 30 minute drive of the theatre) that are not necessarily serviced by the Wellington Advertiser.

Radio – The Grand at 101.1

Centre Wellington finally has its own radio station! The Grand is a community station that launched a few years ago, and has since become a focal point for individuals, businesses and community organizations to get the word out about their events. The station is widely played throughout the community, and most businesses will have it playing in their stores every day. Their programming is mostly contemporary pop music, but they also offer a wide variety of additional programs that cover country, oldies, talk, and other genres at various points throughout the week.

Contact the station for pricing, as they are eager to work with community groups and small businesses to find the ad fit that is right for them. Writing, production and voicing are all included in the price, and depending on the event the station can also offer interview opportunities and mentions on-air and on their social media pages.

Website and email

This isn't a comprehensive web design manual, so we'll simply say this: have a website. Not just a Facebook page. A blog is okay, if you know what you're doing, and a free website is okay as well. What matters most is that you have a clean, professional, up-to-date website, and that any and all information that you post about your event is linked back to your sales page in TixHub. Similarly your email (whether a targeted e-blast to a mailing list or the signature of your everyday messages) should also include the TixHub link. If you don't take the time to create the link and this establish this vital connection these powerful online marketing tools are next to useless.

Channel: Social Media

- Social media marketing is a rapidly-evolving field, so it's important to pay attention to what's happening on social media websites – what was legal yesterday could become illegal tomorrow, and just because something was a great success once doesn't mean it will be so again.
- Don't use social media for sales... what? This is a marketing guide! Of course you can use social media to sell tickets – you can and you should, but Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites are not the equivalent of putting up a poster on bulletin board at the local library. You need to make it personal. For example, instead of simply posting the show poster and saying "I'm doing this show, you should come and see it," you need to be more personal. Post the show poster, but say "I have a part in this show – I'm playing the giant chicken and I lay a 20 pound egg on stage. You will laugh your face off. And get to sing Village People songs. And your kids will get free candy if they come up on stage. Click on the poster for tickets." This post is not about the person doing the show – it's about how much the people who come to see the show are going to enjoy it, in real, concrete terms (laughter, singing, free candy). You have to show people how this

is going to deliver value to them, not how great it's going to make you feel if they come.

- Always, always, always include the link (the direct link to the sales page, not the generic link to the FGT website) to buy tickets with every single post you make! Train your cast and crew to include the sales link every time they talk about the show in Facebook/Twitter posts, in emails, or anywhere else they happen to be talking about the show online. Make it easy to buy tickets.
- The show poster is okay, but a picture from rehearsal is a thousand times better. Try posting interesting, original content – outtakes, funny stuff, short videos, etc. The more interesting you make it the better the chances that it will be picked up.
- Make sure you tell your cast and crew what you're doing – it's up to them to share this content, so encourage them to do so (within the bounds of what's legal – again this is one of those evolving areas you need to watch out for). The more they share, like, and comment, the more often it will show up.

One-off Opportunities

There's no real way to tell you how to do this, since each event is, by definition, a "one-off" – a one-time opportunity to promote your show. This could be a radio interview, the Santa Claus Parade or the happy accident that the play you're producing just happens to be the one that's being studied by the high school English students this semester. All you can do is keep an eye out for these kinds of opportunities and be ready (armed with your handy marketing materials and your elevator speech) to take advantage of them when they arise.

That being said, here are a few ongoing "Freebie" marketing opportunities that we know about that you might want to take advantage of:

- Listing on the Township of Centre Wellington Calendar of Events (ask to be a Featured Event – if granted you will gain more exposure)
- List your company in the Centre Wellington Business Directory
- Complete a Google Businesses Listing for your event
- Not for profits can post show information on Cogeco, and in some newspaper listings (Wellington Advertiser, Echo, etc)
- Contact the local retirement communities (Heritage River, Pine Meadows, Maple Leaf Acres) along with retirement homes (Highland Manor, Wellington Terrace) and the Victoria Park Senior's Centre and see if anyone is interested in organizing a group outing to your event. Hint: seniors love a discount.
- SNAP – the picture-taking free newspaper will often come to an event
- Put a float in local parades – Santa Claus, Scottish Festival, Canada Day, etc
- Listing in the CKCO-TV "What's On" event listings

- ...and many others – if you know of a freebie listing others may benefit from please let us know!
- Program Advertising: Selling ad space in your event program is technically not marketing but sales, however in practice it's often handled by the same person or delegated to the marketing team. This can be a great way to make a little extra cash for your production – just offer a rate for a full-page, half-page, quarter-page and business card-sized ad, and then put those rates into a letter to give to local business that you feel would be interested in advertising to your audience. These could be your suppliers or service providers, other performing artists or companies, employers of your cast members, downtown merchants, etc. Sometimes program ads are easy to sell, sometimes they aren't – just remember that your patrons want a program, not an advertisement, so don't forget that the program is about the show, not about the ads!
- Flash Mobs – this is a technique a few local groups have been using lately. Make sure you have flyers to hand out, and that you get the venue's permission beforehand.
- T-shirts – wearable advertising is a great way to get the word out about your show. Just make sure that the people wearing the clothing have flyers with them to give to people who express an interest in what's on the shirt
- "Commercials" – you may be able to partner with other upcoming shows at the theatre to offer a sneak peak of your event at their event – think of a variety show where you can offer a 5-minute piece of entertainment that includes the dates and times of your show, put on by some of your performers. Other events in the community (from as formal as a business reception to as impromptu as a Karaoke night) can also provide you with advertising opportunities, if properly prepared and done as a form of entertainment
- Senior's Lunch – related to the above – the Victoria Park Senior's Centre offers a weekly lunch for seniors in the community, and they are often willing to host entertainment. A great opportunity if you have the right kind of material for this type of crowd.
- Personalized advertising – custom posters featuring an individual or group can be great if that person has a place where they can post it and people will take notice (ie the water cooler at their workplace). Use this idea sparingly, as the time and printing costs can quickly pile up.
- Southern Ontario Live Music – poster listing and creation website. Contact Tasha Heart, 519-787-8746, Livemusicevent.swo@gmail.com, www.ontariolivemusic.ca

In-house – what we do for you

- A TixHub listing, for ticketed events
- Full box office and FOH services (ushers, concessions, house management)

- Inclusion on the FGT website
- Inclusion on the Township of Centre Wellington digital signs in Fergus and Elora, 30 days prior to your event
- Inclusion on the digital sign in the window
- Inclusion in The Grand Fan, FGT's patron newsletter
- Inclusion in the Centre Wellington Leisure Guide, subject to print deadlines
- Inclusion in our "What's On" brochure of upcoming events
- In-house space to place flyers
- Program stuffing of flyers in preceding events
- Promotion to walk-in customers looking for upcoming event information
- Periodic inclusion of our brochure in newcomer packages and other information packages, subject to availability
- Any other "one-off" opportunities (media interviews, reports to Council, speaking invitations, etc) that we can use to promote the theatre and its events

In Conclusion...

In the end, a successful marketing plan is all about doing the things that you say you are going to do. It is about using the materials you've created in the channels you've selected to do the actual work of selling tickets. Does following your plan to the letter guarantee success? Of course not. But at least it gives you a better chance than if you make a great plan, design some killer materials, pick some awesome channels, and then think that your work is done.

Thank-you for taking the time to read this guide. Since arts marketing is an ever-evolving field (and we will never claim to know all there is to know about arts marketing) this is meant to be a living document, constantly changed and updated to include more of the collective wisdom of the industry in general and the FGT client community in particular. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us to provide information on how we can improve this publication in the future. Just email Eric at egoudie@centrewellington.ca.