

# MODULE B

AUDIENCE RESEARCH MADE EASY



# MODULE B

## BASICS OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH

### SECTION 1

#### Introduction

#### Why is audience research important?

Audience research is essential to the health of an organisation. The more you know about your audiences, your product and your competition, the better you will be able to adjust to changing conditions, experiment with new concepts and grow.

Small to medium-sized performing arts companies use audience research to explore a range of things. The most important questions centre around:

- audience behaviour – how often do they attend? Who do they come with? Are they subscribers?
- audience reactions to programs – what do they like or dislike? What attracted them to the program they attended?
- audience reactions to services and facilities – how do they feel about the venue? Is it easy to make bookings?
- participation in other arts forms and arts activities – what else do they attend? What do they like and dislike?
- sources of information – how did they hear about a program? What sources of information do they use?
- basic audience demographics – who are our audiences? What is their gender, age, education level? Where do they live and with whom? How much do they earn?
- trends and developments taking place in the arts – how will these impact on our organisation?
- attracting greater audiences – what audiences would we like to attract in larger numbers? How can we reach them effectively?
- sponsorship – how can we assess the potential value of sponsorships and create viable sponsorship propositions?

The more we know about our audiences, the more we can make effective decisions about marketing and promotions, the venue, programming, pricing policies, potential sponsors and potential partners.

Audience research involves:

1. the planned and organised collection of information
2. using that information in practical ways to make decisions.

# MODULE B

There are several types of research, including:

**Secondary research** – research that has already been carried out by others and which may be of use to your organisation.

**Primary research** – research an organisation conducts or commissions itself to find out the answers to specific questions.

Primary research is further divided into two categories:

**Quantitative research** – counts the number of people who behave in certain ways or hold certain attitudes. Quantitative research is often conducted by questionnaire, and is possibly the easiest research method for small to medium performing arts companies without specialist help.

**Qualitative research** – explores how people think or behave and why. Qualitative research often takes the form of in-depth interviews or focus groups. Usually the information is obtained through a facilitator who leads a discussion that covers the issues of interest. This type of research requires someone with experience in both research and group dynamics.

In this module we look at:

- secondary research, the advantages of using it and problems which can arise from time to time, and sources of research information
- quantitative research, using the DIY Audience Research Questionnaire (see Module C) as a model
- qualitative research, including the way in which organisations can effectively use focus groups.

## **Achieving your marketing objectives**

Most arts organisations have a number of marketing objectives. They generally want to:

- retain current audiences and build loyalty
- attract new audiences
- find ways to persuade lapsed audiences to return
- spend marketing budgets as effectively as possible
- monitor how audiences feel about their activities
- identify competitors and understand their strengths and weaknesses
- identify new opportunities
- identify changes in the operating environment which may impact on the organisation
- identify potential sponsorship and fundraising opportunities
- identify potential partners for co-operative marketing and audience development activities.

All of these outcomes require knowledge of audiences, their behaviour and attitudes. Basic audience research can be used in a variety of decision-making situations where an understanding of the organisation and its operating environment is required.



# MODULE B

## Audit of market intelligence

Information	Have done formal research	Could make an informed guess	Don't know	Knowing this will help us...
<b>Audience:</b>				
Age				
Gender				
Area of residence				
Cultural background				
Family composition				
Occupation				
Income				
Education levels				
<b>Behaviour:</b>				
How they hear about performances				
Reasons for attending				
Leisure interests				
Frequency of attendance (at our performances)				
Attendance group characteristics				
Other venues attended				
Subscription usage				
Internet usage				
<b>Attitudes:</b>				
Towards venue				
Towards ticket purchase				
Towards attending the performance				
<b>Example:</b>				
Age			√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- with funding proposals</li> <li>- decide where we advertise</li> </ul>

Review your answers. If the majority of them fall into the 'Don't know' category, consider starting with secondary research, then undertaking some informal qualitative research before conducting more detailed quantitative research.

If the majority of your answers fall into the 'Could make an informed guess' category, plan to conduct more formal research to determine if your guesses are, in fact, correct.

If the majority of your answers fall into the 'Have done formal research' category, you should have a fairly good understanding of your audience. However it is important to develop ongoing research, such as a quantitative questionnaire supported by qualitative research to keep your organisation up to date.

# MODULE B

## SECTION 2 Secondary research

There is a massive amount of research conducted by others that is publicly available and may be of value to your organisation. Secondary research is a cost-effective and timesaving way of gaining information. The challenge is locating the research that matches your research questions.

You may wish to learn more about:

- a specific market segment, such as youth or families
- your local community
- people who buy certain kinds of products, such as DVDs or computer games, or who attend particular sporting events or festivals
- a particular art form, for example, current trends in theatre or contemporary dance

You can use information from secondary sources to:

- identify industry trends
- understand your community in terms of its age, gender, education levels and current activities
- compare your audience demographics with those of your regions population to identify potential markets
- identify patterns of common behaviour or attitudes (for example, is the phenomenon of ageing audiences unique to your organisation, or is it common to other organisations and in other countries?)
- learn about research done by others which may be of interest to you
- learn about other projects to see if there are tips or guidelines that will assist you in doing your own research
- make contact with other individuals and organisations with similar issues or problems
- identify potential partners or sponsorship opportunities

### Internal records

Consider the potentially valuable information that is on hand within your organisation. The box office may be able to provide information such as:

- total tickets sold; tickets sold for individual performances
- popularity of weekend versus weekday performances or matinees
- numbers of sold-out shows
- when ticket sales take place (how many days in advance of the performance)
- proportion of tickets sold to subscribers compared with individual ticket purchasers
- addresses of ticket buyers
- gender of ticket buyers
- preferred payment options
- repeat purchases
- group versus individual purchases
- types of tickets (student, concession, full price, child).

This type of information assists you to learn more about audience behaviour and to begin building a more complete picture of your market.

## External secondary research

Begin any research project by spending some time exploring secondary research options. You may not find the exact information you require, but you can learn a lot, gain useful background information and perhaps make contact with others willing to share information and form networks.

The Internet is a good place to start. Collect data from individual organisations, government websites, specialist arts and cultural websites and State and national arts organisations, both in Australia and overseas.

Important sources of information on audience research and audience research include:

## Australian Bureau of Statistics

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) produces a wide range of data collected from the Australian census and other studies. While ABS data is often free of charge, the organisation also compiles and supplies very detailed information for a fee. Refer to the ABS website <[www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)> to see what is available.

## EXAMPLE

Report No. 4901.0 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia (released in 2004) indicates that in the 12 months prior to the 2003 survey it was estimated that 95 percent of all children (5-14 years old) used a computer and that 64 percent accessed the Internet.

This particular report also provides details on the number of children involved in organised cultural activities such as playing a musical instrument, dancing, singing and drama; it even details the amount of time they spend practising, attending lessons, and looks at cultural participation in comparison with involvement in sports, recreational activities and time spent watching television or playing video games.

This type of information could be useful when your organisation is planning programs. While the general information is free of charge, you might want to request a quote for a breakdown of the data by State or region.

Examples of other types of ABS reports include:

- 4172.0 Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview – a range of data from both ABS and non-ABS sources about cultural activities and cultural industries. Cultural data by topic (for example, participation in cultural activities, employment in cultural industries) and sector (for example, libraries and archives, performing arts)
- 3239.0.55.001 Population, Australian States and Territories – population figures, including numbers of births and deaths
- Average weekly expenditure on specific cultural activities – for example, art galleries and museums, live theatre, cinema, etc.
- Number of people employed in the arts and working as volunteers.



## EXAMPLE 1 taken from Arts RiPPA

### Arts Queensland

#### Audience development for major performing arts companies

This project involves conducting audience research to inform the development of new strategies to increase audiences for major performing arts companies.

Start 2004 Finish 2005

Contact: Bret Mannison Tel: 07 3227 6748

email: [bret.mannison@arts.qld.voc.au](mailto:bret.mannison@arts.qld.voc.au)

Partners/others involved: Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Queensland Ballet, Queensland Theatre Company, the Queensland Orchestra, Opera Queensland

## EXAMPLE 2 taken from Arts RiPPA

### Arts Victoria

#### Youth audience research: motivations and barriers to attendance amongst 12-17 year olds

Qualitative and quantitative research into youth in metropolitan, outer suburban and regional Victoria including motivators and inhibitors (both perceptual and concrete) to increase participation in arts and cultural consumption.

Start: 2002 Finish 2004

Contact: Nicky Klempfner Tel: 03 9954 5060

email: [Nicky.Klempfner@dpc.vic.gov.au](mailto:Nicky.Klempfner@dpc.vic.gov.au)

Partners/others involved: focus group of youth-oriented arts organisations

### **fuel4arts.com**

[www.fuel4arts.com](http://www.fuel4arts.com) is a free, membership-based arts marketing website for arts professionals. It provides artists and arts organisations with the best international and national expertise and discussion on arts-focused marketing and audience development.

fuel4arts.com features links to other relevant sites around the world, case studies, research papers and reports, and publications (these come with an indication of the 'degree of difficulty' of the articles so you can see which ones suit those with relatively little marketing experience and which are more advanced).

fuel4arts.com also distributes a monthly newsletter, *The Gas*. Each edition provides a specific topic – for example, the April 2005 edition looked at DIY audience research and may be accessed from: [www.fuel4arts.com/gas/default.asp](http://www.fuel4arts.com/gas/default.asp).

fuel4arts.com also hosts email-based discussion forums where guest specialists offer free insight in response to members' questions. The April 2005 edition on DIY Audience research can be viewed at the archive at: [www.fuel4arts.com/community/previousforums.asp#17](http://www.fuel4arts.com/community/previousforums.asp#17). The site has an excellent search facility, so you can easily find articles and reports.



## EXAMPLE – Using search engines

A search on the phrases 'audience research' and 'performing arts' in Google located an article about the Theatre Arts Marketing Alliance (TAMA), an informal association of mid-size, small and fringe theatre companies in Greater Boston, USA. TAMA members' year-long study of their audiences revealed that:

"According to the results, audiences at participating theatres are distributed through all age brackets, with the greatest concentration in the 45-64 age groups. The audience tends to be affluent, with a median annual household income of \$75-\$80,000, and the vast majority do not have children under the age of 18 living at home. Nearly 40% of respondents were attending their first performance by the theatre company, demonstrating that participating theatres are reaching out successfully to new audiences."

Source: Media release, Theatre Arts Marketing Alliance, Nicholas Peterson, March 8, 2005 <[http://www.stonehamtheatre.org/781-279-2200/news/tama\\_releases\\_audience\\_research\\_results.html](http://www.stonehamtheatre.org/781-279-2200/news/tama_releases_audience_research_results.html)>.

If a particular report is of interest, consider contacting the relevant organisation and asking for more information, or perhaps searching further for the full audience research report.

Other sources for contact information and web links to international arts agencies and organisations include:

- the Canada Council <[www.canadacouncil.ca](http://www.canadacouncil.ca)>
- the Arts Council Scotland <[www.scottisharts.org.uk](http://www.scottisharts.org.uk)>
- the Arts Council England <[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)>
- the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), USA <[www.nasaa-arts.org](http://www.nasaa-arts.org)>.

You can also find commercial sites, proceedings from conferences and conventions, annual reports and other useful information on the Internet.

Remember to check the date of the work when downloading information from the Internet and consider how relevant it is to your own organisation, location or region. Try to gain some understanding of how the research was conducted. In most cases, when full reports are available, you can check the executive summary or the methodology sections of the report for this information. Material that you download from government arts agencies is likely to be reliable, however you may have to check work published by students, private individuals or organisations more carefully.



If more than one person will be doing the observation, agree on a format for reviewing the results. Decide what you will be looking for and the types of people to be observed. Results are usually written as a report that includes information on:

- the setting or place where the research occurs
- the identity of the observers
- a description of the types of people being observed
- a description of the types of actions being observed
- a review of the actions and any unusual or notable variations in actions
- a summary of what was observed

Formal observational research is usually acknowledged by displaying signs in the foyer (or wherever the research is taking place) that state audience research is being conducted by the organisation and that patrons' privacy will be respected. If an audience member wonders why there is someone in the foyer with a clipboard or obviously taking notes, they will be reassured that all is well. Filming or videotaping the public is generally not recommended for privacy reasons.

### Interviews

Interviews provide very different information. Because the interviewer and the person being interviewed meet and discuss issues, there is a much higher level of personal interaction.

**Types of interviews** – there are two types of interviews. Structured interviews are where all interviewers use the same carefully worded questionnaire but have open ended questions (not a yes/no answer). In-depth interviews are where the interviewer does not follow a set out questionnaire, but has a list of topics to cover during the course of a more informal conversation.

**Interview skills** – because the contact is close and personal, the interviewer needs to have particular skills in dealing with people, managing interactions and creating an atmosphere that encourages honest responses. We generally use interviews to find out about subjects that might be fairly complex, detailed or perhaps sensitive.

**Organising interviews** – interviews can be expensive and time-consuming. The process involves:

- recruiting people for the interviews – identifying the people (or categories of people) to interview and contacting them
- organising a meeting place, setting up the room and equipment (comfortable chairs, tape recorder, video recorder or notepaper and pens, refreshments, etc.)
- providing some type of incentive – a small cash payment, free tickets, free snacks, complimentary merchandise such as a T-shirt or coffee mug – to thank participants for their time

In addition to the actual interviewing time, usually there are discussions beforehand amongst the interviewers, time spent drafting interview questions or a detailed questionnaire, recording transcripts or written notes to transcribe after the interview, and meetings afterwards to discuss the results. On the other hand, interviews provide an opportunity to explore topics, reactions and attitudes in-depth.

As with observation research, privacy is an issue. Data collected in interviews must be handled confidentially and sensitively. Information identifying a particular individual must not be disclosed and must only be used for the purpose for which it was gathered.



# MODULE B

Your recruitment script might resemble this one:

*Hello, I'm [name] from xxx theatre. We are currently holding a number of discussion groups with members of our audience. This will help us plan for the future / improve our services / learn more about the needs of our audience.*

*We are looking for someone who is a full-time student and aged under 30 – does this describe you?*

*IF YES – would you be available to attend a group discussion on .... at..... It will take about one hour.*

*IF NO – thank you for your time. Would you be interested in participating in future research?*

## **Generate the questions and brief the facilitator**

Set up the interview outline to make sure the most important issues are covered. The person acting as the facilitator should write a short discussion plan in advance, allowing plenty of time for the conversation to flow. While each focus group should cover the same topics, you may have to adapt the discussion outline for some groups, and the flow of the discussion will be different for each group. Try to use a facilitator who is not directly connected with your organisation, to maintain neutrality and ensure a more objective analysis of the results.

**Conduct the focus group** – the facilitator generally introduces themselves to the group and explains why the research is being done. Participants are not usually introduced formally to others in the group.

After reassuring the group that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, the facilitator indicates that the session will be recorded (audiotape, videotape, notes, etc.) and advises the group that the discussion is confidential and their comments will not be personally attributed.

After confirming that everyone consents to the session being taped, the facilitator opens the discussion with a general question; for example, what do they like to do in their spare time? Did they attend any festivals or events recently – or something similar? This sets the group at ease and provides an opportunity for everyone to contribute.

It is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that all members of the group have an opportunity to contribute, that all issues are covered and that good group dynamics are maintained (no aggressive behaviour, vehement arguments, or rudeness). At the end of the session the facilitator asks for any final comments and observations and then thanks the participants for attending.

**Interpret and report the results** – the best way to analyse the results is to identify the key themes that emerged under each discussion plan heading. If appropriate, quotes that represent key points in the discussion are an effective way to illustrate responses.



## Designing the questionnaire

Basic information	Name and logo of the company.  Brief introduction describing why you are doing the survey and asking for the respondent's support. If using an incentive to encourage people to respond, provide brief information about it.
Privacy	Reassure participants that their responses will be treated confidentially.
Date	If doing a self-completion survey or person-to-person survey, date the questionnaire and name the performance, if relevant.
Questions	List the actual survey questions. They should be easy to read with clear instructions.
How to return the survey	For self-completion and postal surveys, provide clear instructions on how to return the survey (drop box in the foyer, postal return, etc.).
Thank you	At the end of the survey thank respondents for their participation.
Confidentiality	Remind participants that all responses are confidential.
Incentive	If using an incentive, describe the offer in full at the end of the survey.
Contact details of respondent	If you are offering incentives or inviting people to be on your mailing list, ask for their contact details. Respondents may not want to disclose sensitive information such as income range in the survey, and then provide their name and address. Consider including a separate page or detachable form to ensure privacy.

## Writing the questions

There are two types of questions: closed and open.

Closed questions are those where the respondent ticks a box from a list of options. For example:

*Have you attended a ballet performance? Yes  No  Can't remember*

Open questions are those where the respondent is required to give their own answer without any choices being offered. For example:

*What did you enjoy most about the ballet? \_\_\_\_\_*

A good questionnaire uses a combination of open and closed questions to provide variety and to improve data analysis.



## MODULE B

Conduct interviews at different times and different days of the week to make sure you obtain a representative sample.

**Face-to-face interviews** – some issues to consider include:

- providing interviewers with formal identification and a brief introductory script explaining the reasons for the research and the privacy rules that apply
- while the actual interviews should be short, and therefore do not require seating, interviewers will need a quiet, semi-private area to work from, where they can sit, write up notes, etc. between interviews
- briefing interviewers about the sampling method being used; for example, younger audience members, women, or a random sample of every fifth person entering the theatre
- keeping the questionnaire brief. Interviews conducted in the foyer or on the street should take no more than five minutes

**Self-completion questionnaires** – some issues to consider include:

- planning the survey distribution. Will you place one on every seat before admitting the audience, or hand them to people as they enter or leave at interval? Or will you distribute them to a random sample of people either at their seats or in the foyer?
- providing pencils or pens at the venue or with the questionnaire if you want people to complete the survey while still at the venue. (Write these off as a research expense – don't expect to have them returned!)
- keeping the questionnaire brief. They should easily be able to complete the survey during the interval or post show
- making sure that the system for returning completed surveys is easy and obvious. Place clearly labelled boxes with a slit cut in the top (implying greater confidentiality) in prominent locations around the foyer
- clearly stating on the questionnaire how to return it at a later date – not everyone will complete the form on the spot. Include a Reply Paid address or design the questionnaire so that it can be folded into a Reply Paid format and mailed back
- making sure that all staff, especially front of house staff, know the survey is being distributed. Train ushers to explain to patrons why it is important they participate and return the questionnaire, and ask them to collect any uncompleted questionnaires that are lying about
- collecting the completed questionnaires regularly, then bundling and labelling them with the number collected and the date and time of the performance at which they were distributed
- monitoring the number of responses received
- storing completed research forms carefully – you have worked hard to obtain them!

**Remember the sample size**

For most research, a sample size of 100–200 is sufficient. However, to effectively analyse a sub-category within a sample, such as frequent attenders or audiences under 30 years old, you need at least 50 responses in that sub-category.



# MODULE B

## The production

- *I liked the play, it was interesting*
- *The programme, interesting*
- *I enjoyed the play and the acting was great*
- *The play was challenging and amusing*
- *I like anything by that playwright*

## The venue

- *The venue – easy to get to*
- *The theatre was comfortable, good seating*
- *We attend most performances at the regional arts centre*

## The acting

- *The performances*
- *The actors were really good*
- *I enjoyed the play and the acting was great*

Depending on how many people received free tickets, the *My cousin was in the play and got me free tickets* response would probably go into an 'Other' category.

It is preferable if only one or two people code the open-ended question responses to ensure consistent categorisation.

## Interpreting the data

Depending on the system in use, interpreting the data can be as simple as pressing a button or as complex as writing your own program.

Other types of analysis that you can do in-house (in addition to computer-generated information) include looking at:

- the total number of responses to a question, to determine the median response – the mid-point, where half the respondents are below and half above a particular response
- the mode – the most frequently occurring answer.



## Some tips for making analysis easier

- Edit the questionnaires as they come in, putting the correct codes against open-ended questions, and checking that all the questions are completed
- If you are conducting a large number of surveys, enter the results into the computer on an ongoing basis, rather than waiting until you accumulate an enormous and daunting stack
- Decide which statistical analyses you want to perform. For more sophisticated analyses, get appropriate skilled assistance to set up the computer programs you require. (Remember, however, that complex mathematical information may be interesting, but you must be able to explain it to others. Make sure you understand the methodology)
- Check the data as it comes in to see that it makes sense. Do percentages total 100 percent? Are there any odd or unusual answers that warrant checking the original surveys or conducting other investigations? For example, if an unusually large number of older people attended an event, and it seems out of line with normal patterns, you might check to see if the survey occurred during Seniors Week
- Examine the final data for patterns and answers to key questions and write the results of the study
- Allow plenty of time for analysis and report writing. Once the questionnaires have been administered, your managers, Board and others may be keen to learn the results as soon as possible. Allow time to enter the data into the computer, analyse the information and write the report.

If you do not have the in-house capability to handle the analysis of the survey, or if you want particularly detailed mathematical analysis or complex cross-tabulations, ask for help early in the process. Most data analysis professionals prefer to be involved from the very start; that is, from survey design to sampling decisions.

# MODULE B

## SECTION 6 Presenting and implementing your results

There are a variety of ways you can report the results of surveys, including:

- a formal written report with appendices and an executive summary
- a summary report, featuring highlights and major findings
- talks and illustrated presentations
- workshops and/or seminars
- information on your organisation's website
- media releases

You may want to use a combination of methods. While a formal written report is generally the main output, other elements can be extracted, repackaged and presented in various formats. For example, you may need a fairly simple report for front-of-house staff and volunteers, a detailed report for the Board, a presentation you can make to other arts companies, and information and media releases on your website for the public. Having all the material in the formal report makes it easier to develop other materials.

A typical format for the formal written report includes:

- Executive summary – highlights of the research
- Introduction – background to the research
- Research objectives – what the research was intended to achieve
- Methodology – the type of research, number of surveys conducted, when and where the research was conducted, etc.
- Results – findings of the research
- Summary, conclusions and recommendations – conclusions reached as a result of the research
- Implementation – how the research will be used by the organisation
- Appendices – a copy of the survey and any other detailed information required

Some tips for writing your research report:

- Use graphics if they make the data easier to understand and if you are planning presentations. Producing charts with standard computer programs is quite simple, and there are also websites that can help

For example, <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/graphing> is a site specifically designed for students that makes preparing a variety of graphs extremely easy

- Tailor the language to suit your audience. If you will be presenting to people who understand your organisation and its research, be as technical as you like; otherwise, present information in plain English

## MODULE B

- Format the report logically. Generally, analysis of questions is grouped under relevant headings and in the order in which the questions were asked. For example, under the heading audience profile, include all the demographic information questions (age, gender, place of residence, education levels, income); another section titled attendance patterns would present information on frequency of attendance, type of ticket purchased and subscription status
- It may be useful to incorporate information from other sources to make your research more meaningful; for example, by comparing the age of your audience with the results of published studies by other performing arts organisations
- Use the summary, conclusions and recommendations section of the report to interpret the survey results and identify what you think are the implications for your organisation. For example, if respondents have consistently complained about being kept on hold for bookings, you may recommend hiring additional staff, installing more telephone lines, or extending box office hours
- After writing the report, archive all the relevant material, including the questionnaires. Make copies of the computer databases and the results. You may want to refer to the questionnaires again, perform other types of cross-analysis or analyse different sub-group data.

### **Making the most of your research**

Research is only worth doing if it is practical and useful and assists the organisation to answer specific questions or make informed marketing and business decisions. Completing the report marks the conclusion of the research. Now it is important to act on the information and make decisions.

Circulate the report to all the relevant people in your organisation – staff, volunteers, Board members, perhaps even sponsors and funding partners. Consider circulating a summary of key findings through your website, a newsletter or media release, to notify people who participated in the research that the study has been completed.

Act on your recommendations. Research provides information about audiences – who they are, and how they react to your organisation's products and services. Armed with this information, develop a plan of action that responds to the issues identified.

You may decide to include certain recommendations in your next business or marketing plan, or to present the report and recommendations for action to your Board for more immediate implementation. Sometimes research raises questions or issues that require more study and analysis.

While some research has very positive outcomes, it may also highlight problems or concerns. After changes are made or new initiatives launched it may be appropriate to conduct the research again to compare results and see if there are improvements.