

LOCAL THEATRE PRESS

Meredith Bean McMath, MS Arts Administration
Run, Rabbit, Run Productions, Inc.

So, you're putting on a show and you want an audience... but have no money? No worries! Here's some basics for low-budget/no-budget theatre press. Those of you lucky enough to have change in your pockets? The parentheticals are for you!

THREE MONTHS BEFORE OPENING NIGHT:

Identify a volunteer or volunteer yourself to...

- 1) Get a free calendar from a local store or print one from the net (or buy one), count backwards from opening night and outline the following highlighted items:
- 2) **Create a list** of local press, radio stations, websites, schools and organizations that may have interest in your show (Use an email service such as Constant Contact to create lists)
- 3) **Design a letter-size or three-fold flyer** for your show. either print it yourself on 60 lb. light card stock on an inkjet printer or have a printer prepare flyer and pay for it through business ads in the playbill (or have a print shop create a flyer for you). Deliver flyers to your local Chamber of Commerce or Visitors Bureau, libraries, grocery stores, parks and recreation buildings, coffee houses - any place people gather. If appropriate, see if schools will allow flyers to be sent home. (Another option: purchase desktop publishing software such as Pages to create posters, flyers, etc.)
- 4) **Arrange with director, costumer and cast members to create promotional photos**, and identify a volunteer photographer (or hire a photographer).
- 5) **Create or update a show/theatre website** with great graphics, to the point and well organized information, all the great photos you just took, and a downloadable pdf of your flyer. Offer reciprocating links from your website to other theatres and/or places of business. (Hire a webmaster to create a website).
- 6) **Write a press release** for the show:
 - make the opening line and first information attention getting - pro-active, rather than passive voice!
 - make all the following information interesting;
 - tell them to take action: "Tickets on sale now!" - ticket info and website to order tickets, etc.
 - as early on in the press release as possible.

- have a hook: Is it a new show? A fundraiser? Being performed in a new venue? Would the reporter like to interview the once-professional actor turned director? The ex-Broadway set designer? The producer who's been doing this for the love of theatre for twenty-five years? Is there a whole family involved in the cast? Every newspaper is looking for a great hook for a new story.
- provide link to website and note **DOWNLOADABLE PHOTOS** or include an attached photo in the email. Secure permission from photographer, provide caption(s) and state "Photo Courtesy of..." with photographer attribution.
- **FORMAT:** "Press Release" top center. Three tabs. At left: Date: _____. Two tabs. To: _____. Two tabs. From: Media Contact- *include all your contact* information. Two Tabs. Re: _____ - fill with short, energetic announcement of show and show date. Two tabs. Begin press release basic information.
- Send out by email by attachment, but include the press release contents in the body of the email in case of incompatible software. (Use a fee-based email service such as Constant Contact to create templates, build email lists, connect to your Social Network tools, etc.).

7) **Email the press release to editors of local monthly or bi-monthly magazines and area arts bloggers.** Call the editors/bloggers the next week to see if there's interest in a feature story. Begin to keep track of who's interested in what hook. Change "hook" each time, 'cause the press hates to repeat itself.

8) **Invite reviewers/bloggers** to your full dress rehearsal.

9) Does your town promote local events? **Get the show on the local, county and state calendars.**

10) **Find out** whether your town or one nearby has a **public announcement sign or allows banners** (this will cost you).

TWO MONTHS OUT:

1) **Send press releases** via e-mail to local clubs that may have interest in the production and meet only once a month. (Use a fee-based email service such as Constant Contact to create templates, build email lists, connect to your Social Network tools, etc.)

2) Read your local papers and area arts blogs and **become familiar with reporters' and bloggers** interests. Phone those reporters/bloggers to elicit interest in feature stories on various aspects of the production. Ask if they'd like to attend a rehearsal.

5) **Are there websites interested** in placing your show on their calendars?

6) **Social Networking:** Announce the show on your organization's **Facebook** page and use promo or rehearsal photos, **Tweet** about the show and provide an interesting link. **Blog** about the show or ask for volunteers to blog about the experience or identify an area arts blogger who might want to attend rehearsals and report.

SIX WEEKS OUT:

1) **Check back with any local cable stations** to ask whether they'd be interested in doing a news spot or feature piece on this effort - give them a hook just as you would a newspaper reporter.

2) **Facebook:** Create Event and invite interested parties; post show information and tidbits on area arts organization pages. Is there something that can be offered as an Early Bird ticket purchase incentive? A special event just for Friends of your organization?

3) **Create show poster** (secure graphic designer to create poster).

4) Distribute flyers again.

5) **Send a "Public Service Announcement"** to local radio stations. Make follow up phone calls to wrangle interest. Ask if they'd like to interview cast members or the director. (Decide whether to purchase radio ad time.)

6) **Send press release with attached photos (or link to website with photos)** to local organizations that meet more than once a month (buy display ads in local papers).

ONE MONTH OUT:

1) **Send complimentary opening night tickets to local VIPs** via snail mail.

2) About to send out press releases? Make SURE tickets are ready to be sold through a box office entity.

3) **Send "Public Service Announcement" to local radio stations** again - reminder.

THREE WEEKS OUT:

1) **Follow up the press releases** with phone calls asking whether a paper would like to do a

2) **Distribute posters** with help of cast (most businesses tear down signs posted for more than three weeks, so there's no point in putting them up any earlier. Some, such as grocery stores, clear their bulletin boards every week).

3) Does your local paper have neighborhood information columns? **Find out where cast members** are from and send out press releases to their neighborhood columnists.

4) Continue to post new information/photos/videos/interesting links about the show on your Facebook page.

ALL THE WAY UP TO OPENING NIGHT:

1) **Continue to call press** organizations/bloggers to ask about coverage.

2) **Create Cast Foyer Photographs** Poster Board.

3) **Gather album/s and/or poster, rehearsal or promo photos** and/or **digital photos or short video to display on laptop** to display in foyer during the run.

4) Keep up to date on Tweets and Facebook posts; respond to any Friends/cast members who've commented on the upcoming production.

ONE WEEK AFTER SHOW'S CLOSING:

1) **Send an email to reporters/newspapers/bloggers** to thank them for their coverage.

2) **Send a hand-written note of thanks** to supporters large and small, and all volunteers.

3) **Send a letter or hand-written note of thanks and a copy of the playbill** to businesses and individuals to those who took out an ad in the playbill.

4) **Send out post-production press releases with photos attached or link to web page with photos** to announce how many attended, how the play was received, etc. E-mail or hand-deliver these (or use snail mail).

5) **Give yourself a round of applause** (and buy yourself a bottle of champagne).

BRAVA!

