

Social Marketing For Theaters

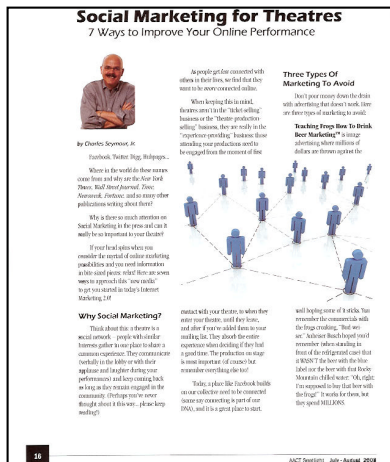
7 Ways To Improve Your Online Performance

By Charles Seymour Jr

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Facebook. Twitter. Digg. Hubpages...

Where in the world do these names come from and why are the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Fortune*, and so many other publications writing about them?



Why is there so much attention on Social Marketing in the press and can it really be so important to your theater?

If your head spins when you consider the myriad of online marketing possibilities and you need information in bite-sized pieces: relax! Here are seven ways to approach this “new media” to get you started in today’s Internet Marketing 2.0!

Why Social Marketing?

Think about this: a theater is a social network – people with similar interests gather in one place to share a common experience. They communicate (verbally in the lobby or with their applause and laughter during your performances) and keep coming back as long as they remain engaged in the community. (Perhaps you’ve never thought about it this way... please keep reading!)

As people get *less* connected with others in their lives, we find that they want to be *more* connected online.

When keeping this in mind, theaters aren’t in the “ticket-selling” business or the “theater-production-selling” business, they are really in the “experience-providing” business: those attending your productions need to be engaged from the moment they enter your theater until they leave. They absorb the entire experience when deciding if they had a good time. The production on stage is most important (or course) but remember everything else too!

Today, a place like Facebook builds on our collective need to be connected (some say connecting is part of our DNA), and it is a great place to start.

Three Types Of Marketing To Avoid

Don't pour money down the drain with advertising that doesn't work. Here are three types of marketing to avoid:

- Teaching Frogs How To Drink Beer Marketing™ is image advertising where millions of dollars are thrown against the wall hoping some of it sticks. You remember the commercials with the frogs croaking, "Bud-wei-ser." Anheiser-Busch hoped you'd remember (when standing in front of the refrigerated case) that it WASN'T the beer with the blue label nor the beer with that Rocky Mountain chilled water: "Oh, right: I'm supposed to buy that beer with the frogs!" It works for them, but they spend MILLIONS.
- Not Knowing Marketing™ is what nearly ALL restaurants use: how many times have you enjoyed a great meal, left a hefty tip, walked out, and the restaurant had NO idea who you were? They never asked. They didn't sign you up for their newsletter. And when their business slows down, how quickly can they contact you to join them for their Friday night special? They can't. And don't let that happen to you! Get EVERYONE'S name and email address – even those visiting your website or purchasing single tickets.
- Cold-Postcard Marketing™ is a great reminder to your "insiders" that a production is coming up, but they are lousy for building rapport with people who don't know you yet. *Never* send a postcard with a large graphic on one side and just the dates of your production on the other: a total waste of the postcard's "real estate." You need to build rapport with everything you do.

But let's be clear: I don't want browsers to my websites – I only want buyers. Let the browsers waste someone else's bandwidth: I want to be sure that all my Social Marketing efforts produce effective results, so here are seven ways to tap into existing communities waiting to learn about your theater!

Tap Into Existing Communities To Sell Tickets (and the Experience)

Social Marketing (connecting people like neighbors chatting over backyard fences) can be done in many ways, but here are seven ways to get started:

1. Facebook. It's free and easy to join (get a high school student to help if you have problems). And after you complete your "profile," then create a "page" about your theater. Be sure to include links to your main website. Remember: think that these are your friends and be sure to tell them what you are doing.
2. Blogs. WordPress is a highly optimized, open source (can you spell "free") program for blog hosting. Get your web host to set up WordPress directly on their server – avoid using WordPress.org (which is set up on THEIR server). Every time someone reads your blog, you want Google to give credit to YOU and your website for the activity, thus raising you in their rankings (active, dynamic websites rise quickly in Google rankings).
3. Websites created USING blog software. Though you won't be able to see the difference, WordPress and Moveable Type are so well optimized for search engines that many people now create their whole sites using them. For ME,

- I'm creating six new sites, and each will be built on WordPress because of the search-engine results experience.
4. Podcasts. Audio and video embedded in blogs is quickly becoming a great way to attract more attention. Have you noticed while searching Google that video can now actually play in the results window? Google is telling you that it likes this "rich media" because it displays video and audio blogs very high in its rankings. Video and audio editing is as simple as editing Word. You CAN do this... and should!
 5. Hubpages.com articles. If you don't know this site, now's your chance. You create articles on specific show-related topics and publish them on this site. Publish rich content to Hubpages.com and you will be rewarded when Google does its rankings.
 6. Social Bookmarking. This is one of the most powerful and overlooked social marketing techniques – bookmarking your favorite locations and articles and using an online bookmarking site to do it. Places like Digg.com or del.icio.us. You'll be surprised when you bookmark your own online writing how high in the search engines you can go making it easy for interested people to find you.
 7. RSS Readers. Really Simple Syndication is powerful both coming-in and going-out. Here's what I mean: people reading your blogs can subscribe to your "feed" so that every time you update your writing, they see it in their favorite RSS Reader, even without going to your site. AND, you can take feeds from one or more of your blogs and "aggregate" them to a website or blog so that those following you will quickly see your thoughts on several subjects in one location. (As an example of what I mean, look at my Facebook Page for theater to see Reviews and other related Articles in one location: www.facebook.com/pages/StageMagazineOnlinecom/10614038853)

Is There More?

Oh, yes... much more! This is just the beginning, but if you do a great job with these seven steps, you will be rewarded in the search engines and be on your way as a Social Marketer, selling your empty seats.

Charles Seymour Jr is a Social Marketer, Community Builder, and frequent speaker who has 32 websites (including StageMagazineOnline.com) and consults with entrepreneurs and theaters. He also is the fourth generation of his family to direct theater at The Players Club of Swarthmore Theater (near Philadelphia), which recently honored him on his 50th anniversary of service to the theater. For additional information and a checklist of additional resources, please visit a special site he set up just for our AACT members: www.GetThemOffTheRaftMarketing.com/AACT.

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