



Key Issues in the Arts and Entertainment Industry

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1 The Audience Experience

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1 The Audience Experience: Changing roles and relationships



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Introduction

This chapter will focus on the changing role of the modern-day consumer and audience member and explore the implications of this development for arts and entertainment organisations. It will begin with an exploration of the ‘experience economy’ (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), demonstrating how the changing needs, abilities and expectations of audiences and consumers are effecting a revolutionary shift in behaviour from the traditional push from producers towards a creative dialogue, where consumers have at least a voice and sometimes even an equal role as artist and co-producer.

The chapter will go on to discuss the rise of what we’ll call ‘creative interaction’, the intermediary space where professional artists, producers, venues and content providers join their audiences and consumers to create or experience something new together. This discussion will be underpinned by a focus on the changing role and mission of arts and entertainment organisations from privileged gatekeepers to facilitators. It will also discuss the various factors and developments that are effecting this change.

The evolving role of audiences will then be explored in detail through a review of the theory and practice of audience development. The changing focus and practice of audience development will be illustrated by case studies on Audiences Central’s Big Picture project and York Theatre Royal’s TakeOver Festival.

2 Key Issues in the Arts and Entertainment Industry

The experience economy

The term ‘experience economy’ was famously coined by Pine and Gilmore (1999: 2) to describe the new environment of customer focus where ‘experiences are a fourth economic offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods’. Pine and Gilmore trace product development from basic commodities through goods and services to the complex modern realm of the experience. This development is illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Economic distinctions

Economic offering	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences
Economy	Agrarian	Industrial	Service	Experience
Economic function	Extract	Make	Deliver	Stage
Nature of offering	Fungible	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable
Key attribute	Natural	Standardised	Customised	Personal
Method of supply	Stored in bulk	Inventoried after production	Delivered on demand	Revealed over a duration
Seller	Trader	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager
Buyer	Market	User	Client	Guest
Factors of demand	Characteristics	Features	Benefits	Sensations

Source: Pine and Gilmore (1999: 6)

The terminology employed in Table 1.1 illustrates the different expectations demanded of organisations by consumers in the experience economy. Notable developments from services to experiences include a focus on the personal, an expansion of distribution from short-term to long-term and a shift in demand from benefits to sensations. The implications of this semantic shift are far-reaching and they highlight the need for today’s organisations to create long-term, personal relationships with their ‘guests’ by appealing to their senses and creating a sense of occasion.

Developing their thesis that successful products must also be memorable and meaningful experiences, Pine and Gilmore (1999: 20) urge organisations to ‘draw the consumer into the process’ of designing, producing and delivering their products to maximise the impact of their experience, claiming that consumers enjoy the acquisition process as much as the end result. They also highlight the need to enrich the consumer experience, evoking the concept of the ‘sweet spot’ to denote the holy grail of the experiential product, the ‘distinctive place’ where the realms of aesthetics, escapism, education and entertainment overlap

Chapter extract

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