

# Data sharing: using audiences to build loyalty

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▲ Good at sharing: Jules Hammond

When Arts Council England announced in 2013 that all national portfolio organisations (NPOs) which gather audience data would be required to share that data with their visiting touring organisations (such as orchestras, choirs and theatre companies), there was much concern about the opt in/opt out arrangements. The initial intention was that NPOs would follow an opt-out approach, whereby a customer, when purchasing tickets for a touring organisation's performance at an NPO venue, would have to specifically opt out of having their details shared.

Objections were raised by NPOs, concerned that customers would feel a lack of control over their own information, and would therefore be put off attending concerts or theatre performances in the future. The Information Commissioner's Office agreed, intervened, and confirmed that an opt in policy would be better:

It is still a divisive subject. The safety of transferring customer data is a sensitive

topic. Some venues already have data-sharing agreements in place but as internet security becomes more scrutinised worldwide, customer data needs to be handled with increased care and security, especially as venues – as data-collectors – are responsible for the safety of that data.

Moreover, the cost implications are worrying. ACE expects that each 'share' of data could take a venue over a day's work, and cost over £100 – or more, if it outsources (which in itself opens a can of worms around privacy). Large venues could face having to employ a data controller or charge a 'data-usage fee' to a touring organisation. ACE concedes that the touring organisation might 'reasonably expect to share some of these costs'. So on the one hand touring organisations are being promised contact details for their audiences, and on the other there is a risk that they may need to pay to be able to actually get that data – at a point when arts funding is being cut and budgets are already tight.

Purple Seven is an audience insight expert (to date, we have processed more than 27 million ticket transactions from 5.2 million customers to the performing arts), with a streamlined data collection process and stringent security. We collaborated with three major NPOs – the Barbican Centre, the Southbank Centre and Sadler's Wells – to create a data-sharing tool which can be used by as many performing arts organisations as possible. Recognising the industry concerns around data security, our data-sharing tool has two-factor authentication to ensure the highest possible level of security for sharing sensitive customer data.

Sebastian Cheswright Cater, marketing & sales director at Sadler's Wells, says: 'Purple Seven were the first choice for Sadler's Wells, Barbican and Southbank because they had all of the skills, experience and tools that we needed. Their data sharing solution will benefit us and our touring partners in streamlining reporting processes in a timely and cost-effective way.'

We have been able to make sharing data cheaper and faster than the ACE estimates. Instead of the per-share costs predicted by ACE, data-sharing enables a venue to share data in a matter of minutes, through our highly secure system, with unlimited use. We help venues to save a huge amount of time and money, so they can avoid having to share the costs with their visiting ensembles, which in turn makes it more beneficial to these touring organisations. We have also been able to make our data-sharing tool completely free for touring organisations to use.

We don't think that sharing data is a bad thing – quite the opposite. As Nick Cutts, general manager of the Bach Choir, says, 'Knowing your audience, and what it wants, is key to the success of any arts organisation. Working with Purple Seven will ensure that the Bach Choir knows more about those people and how we can engage with them successfully.'

It is this successful engagement with audiences that is going to prove the worth of sharing data and enable touring organisations to start having an ongoing dialogue with their audiences and building lasting relationships. This increased loyalty will not only benefit the touring organisations but have a positive impact on the venues to which they tour, with higher ticket sales and greater engagement. As Simon Mellor, executive director of Arts and Culture at Arts Council England puts it, 'All our evidence suggests that the most successful businesses in the creative industries are those that know most about their customers – who they are [and] what they like.' <sup>GM</sup>

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