



8 Ways to Elevate Your Patron Experience

eBook



Introduction

The show is only one part of the perfect theatre experience.

When you think of attending theatre, your mind instantly travels to the magical experience of seeing the curtain rise on a new or one of your old favorite dazzling productions. That magic of the live, communal experience is what inspires us as performers, crew, designers, creators, and producers. That magic is why we work in theatre and dedicate our lives to bringing live productions to audiences large and small.

Now, for your cast and crew, theatre magic often starts and ends in the theatre space itself. As a producer, however, it's your job to create engaging experiences in every aspect of your theatrical offerings — for both the first timers and the 50-year subscription holders. No matter how established your theatre is, there's always room to make your audiences feel a little closer to the story and little more like family.

To help you get started, we've put together 8 ways you can elevate your patron experience.

#1

Create a Show Program

Avid theatre-goers love a show program. They're full of information, highly collectible, and fun to snap a quick photo with before the show starts. Even if everyone in the community knows the performers, show programs are an excellent way to keep audiences engaged before and after the performance.

There's no limit to the information you can directly put into your audience's hands.

A program empowers you to:

- Promote your organization
- Promote local businesses through sponsored advertisements
- Tell audience members more about your season of shows
- Provide links to educational resources
Inform your audiences about donation opportunities and fundraising campaigns
- Highlight performer testimonies about the importance of your theatre
- Include additional information and resources through a digital program QR code

Remember, merchandise doesn't have to be complicated. Common, beloved items frequently include:

- Tote bags
- Mugs
- Posters
- Show Shirts
- Socks

#2

Offer Production Merchandise

If there's one thing audiences love, it's a souvenir. Theatre is a unique and special experience and many patrons want to have something to remember the night. A show program is a great start in the right direction, but many patrons (especially children) crave something with a bit more emotional connection to the show.

Nowadays, there are many different ways to create exciting show merchandise without breaking your budget. There are now simple digital platforms that offer free tools to create your merchandise where audience members can order online. They can even pre-order their merchandise to bring to the show where they might snag a coveted autograph.

#3

Speed up the Front-of-House Experience with Ticket Scanning

Even if you can't afford a Hamilton turntable, you can still offer patrons a seamless front-of-house experience. Scannable tickets are easier to keep track of and they streamline the theatre arrival process so that everyone has more than enough time to use the bathroom, find their seats, and get settled in for the big show.

Scanning tickets also allows your theatre to collect crucial audience data such as:

- Purchases vs. attendance
- Repeat attendees
- Average number of attendees per show
- Time of arrival to the theatre

Additionally, ticket scanning makes it easier on your patrons and your ushers when dealing with large groups — no more dropped ticket stubs, lost single tickets, or separated companions. Just an easy-breezy night at the theatre.



With just a quick click to your site, audiences can discover:

- Your upcoming shows or full season lineup
- Your box office hours
- Directions to your theatre
- Nearby restaurant recommendations (which you can also list in your show program!)
- Accessibility and ADA options and protocols
- Upcoming auditions
- Any theatre job openings

#4

Create a User-Friendly Production Website

The world was already heading in the digital direction before the pandemic, but now, being online is essential — even for the live arts. Website creation doesn't have to be costly or complicated. Many programs are free, user-friendly, and more than able to create a stunning site. Websites are a great way to answer patron FAQs without the fuss of a phone call. You can also use a simple website to increase your audiences and your revenue by streaming your shows.

#5

Curate VIP Content and Experiences

The core of your theatre will always be your shows, but it's exciting to offer patrons a little extra magic that brings them further into your world. Whether you want to offer VIP experiences at a higher ticket price or create content exclusive to patrons, there are so many unique ways to include your audience in the story:

- Bring the community together with cast meet and greets: especially if your show is family-friendly! Younger patrons deeply value the chance to meet their heroes and talk to their favorite characters.
- Include patrons with post-show talkbacks: they're free, quick, and a great way to get your audiences asking questions. Even if your season is made of tried and true family favorites, audiences always love a chance to talk to the performers and discover more about the theatrical process.
- Bring patrons behind the scenes with the chance to attend an exclusive dress rehearsal: the night before opening is always a rush of excitement that patrons love to get a glance at. Any chance to see how the magic comes together is a great opportunity for engagement.
- Create a VIP dinner and show experience as a fundraiser: patrons will often pay a little extra if they know their money will support a good cause and give them a unique experience. VIP-only events allow patrons to give back to your theatre in a way that makes them feel special and includes them in your theatrical family.
- Advertise sponsorships for actors and crew: if you have actors coming in from out of town, they need a home away from home. Many theatre lovers are happy to sponsor an actor either financial or through hosting. This sponsorship ties your actors to the community and gives your sponsors a strong, emotional link to your theatre.

#6

Set the Scene Before You Hit the Stage

We love shows because they transport us to other worlds, but that transportation can be jarring. As a producer, you have the power to ease your patrons into the world of the show from the moment they walk through the door.

Let's say you're doing a production of *Grease* and you want your audience to feel like they're walking the halls of Rydell High before the curtain goes up. You can:

- Turn on a playlist of snappy 60s tunes.
- Set up a photo op with the classic red and white pom-poms.
- Create fun, show-based drinks - like a "Summer Night" that's really a tequila sunrise.
- Put up a photo display of your cast set to look like a Rydell yearbook page.

As the producer, you have the power to add to the smells, tastes, sounds, and feels that your audience experiences. There's no limit to the impact of your creativity!



#7

Emphasize your Community Impact

When your theatre season is live, you're not the only business that benefits. Every time a show goes up, everyone in the audience heads out in search of places to eat, places to park, and perhaps a fancy outfit to wear. Your theatre also helps local businesses thrive every time you need supplies — be it lumber, costumes, or construction paper. These purchases are more than business exchanges, they're community-building efforts. If you build your set with pieces from your local lumber store, you can give a shout out to your supplier in exchange for a small discount. It's a win-win situation: your set looks incredible and you drum up interest for trusted community businesses.

You can also partner with related businesses for unique show-night experiences. For instance, if you're putting up "Beauty and the Beast," reach out to local restaurants to see if they might be interested in creating a "Be Our Guest" dinner theatre package with a discounted pre-fixe menu. You'll draw business for the restaurant and your patrons will see your theatre as an integral part of the community.



It takes a village to put up a show, so when you're getting ready for your next production, keep in mind where your resources are coming from

- What lumber goes into your set?
- What fabric stores or volunteer sewers help build your costumes?
- What craft stores do you go to for props?
- What local businesses let you put up posters?
- If you're hiring local actors, do they attend any local dance schools or drama camps?

Every time you impact the community, your own community grows.



Ways your theatre can educate:

- Partner with local schools, colleges, or universities to offer credit for attending performances.
- Create education guides and data sheets for educators.
- Offer student discounts! People rarely attend theatre alone, so you'll also bring in their companions.
- Put together a list of related books or activities for every show in your season.
- Run small masterclasses with your performers for children in the community.

#8

Promote Educational Tie-Ins

All theatre is educational, but if you're a school or community theatre, education is also the key to funds and a huge boost for patron engagement. Unfortunately, not everyone grasps the true worth of theatre and the amazing learning opportunities that participating in theatre can offer. By highlighting the educational aspects and benefits of your shows, you can show your community that you bring tangible value outside of entertainment.

Live theatre helps us all navigate life and complex emotional situations. Your work is already educational, so share that value!

“Thank you for making this process so stress-free and supporting me along the way as I learned how to use it. Everything went smoothly with our first production using On The Stage and elevated our program to the next level.”

Adrienne Bogarde Roach • Drama Director

On The Stage

On The Stage can help bring your patron engagement to the next level. Whether you need merchandise, website assistance, streaming capabilities, or ticketing services, we're here to help.

On The Stage believes that any theatre should be able to afford the resources it needs to support its artistry. That's why our theatre professionals created an all-in-one platform designed for school, community, and independent theatre makers. By partnering with On The Stage, performing arts organizations can:

- **Drive revenue** with ticket sales, merchandise, and fundraising
- **Save time and money** with box office and production tools
- **Create a professional experience** with show sites, a walk-up app, ticket scanning, show programs, and more.

To learn more about On The Stage and becoming part of our community of theatremakers, schedule a personalized demo today.

Book a Demo

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