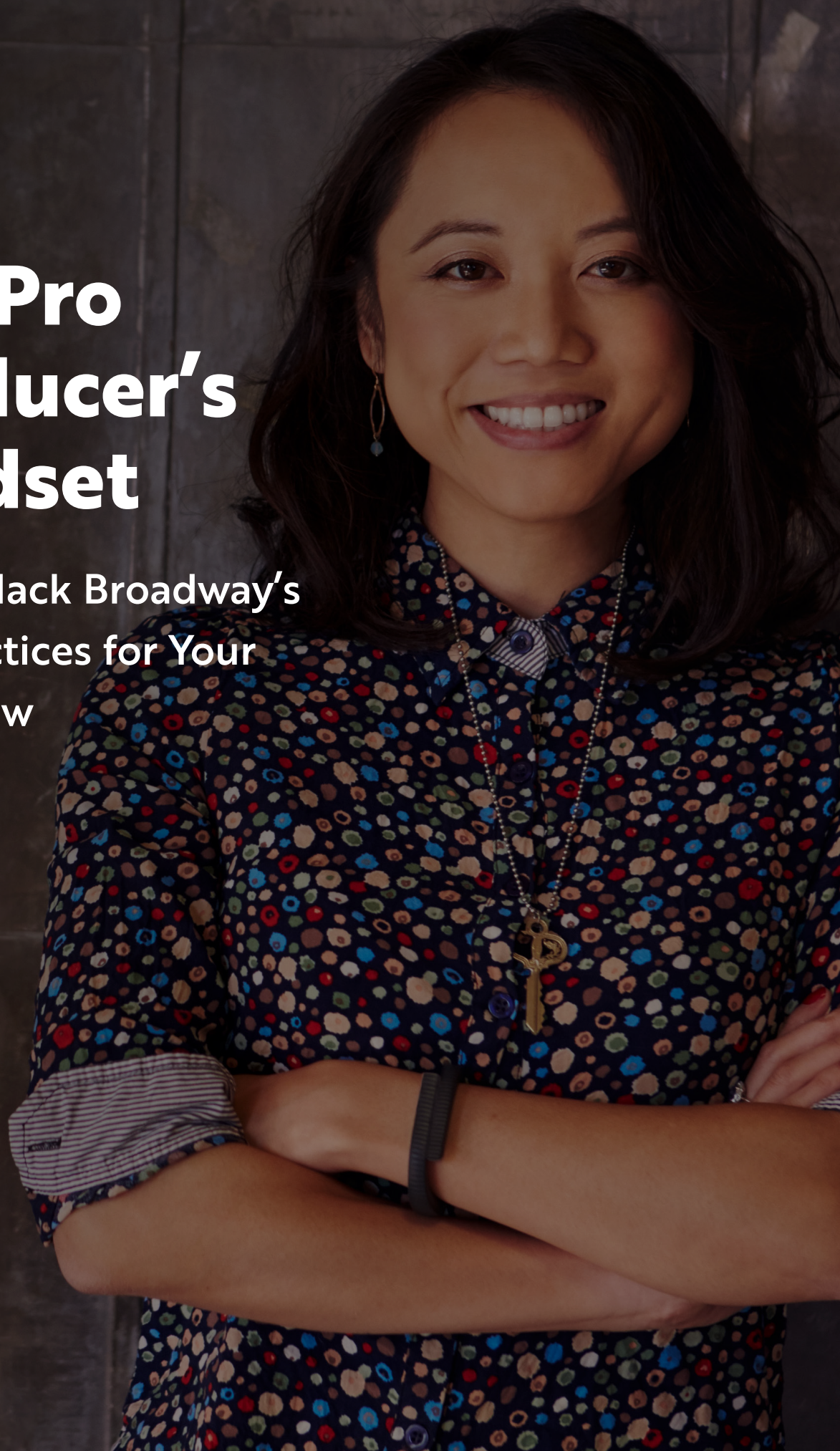




# The Pro Producer's Mindset

How to Hack Broadway's  
Best Practices for Your  
Next Show





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## INTRODUCTION:

# Welcome, Theatre Maker!

If you're reading this guide, chances are you're looking for a way to take your productions to the next level, get the business side of your work under control, achieve better, more sustainable results, or all of the above.

Whether you're producing a traditionally staged show, streaming to a remote audience, or both, if you're a drama teacher, community theatre maker, or independent producer who's excited to hack Broadway's secrets for your own local production, you're in the right place.

The one exception to that bold statement may be if you're running an educational theatre program with purely curricular goals, in which case this guide may not be for you. And that's okay! But we encourage you to keep reading anyway. You just might find yourself inspired by ideas you hadn't considered before... and those ideas might make your job a whole lot easier! No matter who you are as a theatre maker or what your motivation, the contents of this book will change the way you think about your work and provide simple, actionable tips for how to professionalize your production game.

Let's get started!





# The Pro Producer's Mindset

There's a puzzling but pervasive belief in amateur and independent theatre that artistry and business are somehow mutually exclusive. One can either focus on the creative product and hope desperately to be noticed (then simmer with resentment when the uncultured masses aren't interested), or else "sell out" and produce pablum to a full house.

At best, the business side of production is treated like a necessary and highly inconvenient evil. At worst, it's ignored altogether.

Pro Producers, on the other hand, would never dream of separating business from art. They understand that the two are as intertwined as protagonist and antagonist, motivation and action... you get the idea. Without a solid business strategy to drive audience engagement and ticket sales, artists' work goes unseen and investors lose lots and lots of money. It's a solid lose-lose situation.

So, why the major disconnect between how these different types of producers view and perform their roles?

For one thing, amateur and independent producers are often operating on a shoestring budget, with small or nonexistent staffs and little time to focus on much more than the show itself. Plus, the necessary business skills aren't usually taught in theatre programs, even at professionally focused conservatories. But that doesn't mean that only the pros can produce sustainable, even profitable shows and seasons.

**By adopting the Pro Producer's Mindset, any theatre maker—on any budget—can significantly level up their production skills, make more effective, more efficient use of their time, and create a bigger, more positive impact in their community.**

# What is the Pro Producer's Mindset?

Instead of thinking of business and art as two entirely separate endeavors, pro producers work holistically to bring current business best practices into harmony with their show's artistic values and vision.

Forget formulaic messaging and predictable processes. The Pro Producer's Mindset is all about creating authentic connections and organic opportunities for audiences to experience the kinds of theatre they want most to see.

It takes a dynamic flywheel approach to marketing and sales that builds its own natural momentum by nurturing the right audience for your show, drawing them into deeper engagement, inspiring them to purchase a ticket, and re-engaging them to continue the relationship into the future.



It may sound complicated, but the principles are actually quite simple, in full alignment with the generous, community-based spirit of the arts, and, once you have the right systems in place, very easy to apply.

In fact, by the time you reach the end of this guide, you should be able to start putting the Pro Producer's Mindset into practice for your own productions.



# Think (and Produce!) Like a Pro!

We all dream of cultivating a strong base of loyal patrons who support our work show after show, season after season. In reality, theatre companies with successful subscription programs and perennially engaged audiences don't cater to a single, monolithic group. They understand their base and create opportunities that speak to the different segments—or groups of like-minded individuals—who make up their specific community.

This might mean really getting to know the people who are already supporting you so that you can attract more patrons like them; or, you may need to focus on identifying the audiences you want to engage and then building programming and outreach strategies to bridge an existing gap. Most likely, once you start to look at audience building from the Pro Producer's Mindset, you'll find opportunities to do at least a bit of both.

But remember, this isn't work that you should be doing for each individual production. Rather, you want to work outward from who you are as an organization and which audiences you intend to serve, then build your programming and outreach around those central pillars.



# Get to Know the Players

In order to understand your audience more intimately, you'll need to look beyond your assumptions to the hard data. The best way to do this is to involve other key stakeholders in the process. This includes your Business or Box Office Manager, Marketing or Social Media Manager, Artistic Director, and anyone else who can lend valuable insights into your existing or intended audience segments. If you're a one-person operation, that's fine, too. The most important thing is that you set aside what you think you know in order to learn more.

Collect any data you have, as well as anecdotal information about your most engaged patrons, and do a thorough analysis for each subset of your audience. The idea isn't to capture every fact about every individual, but to develop a cast of the composite characters who make up your unique community.

Be sure to include:

- **Name** – This should indicate who the person is and how they fit into your community. Have fun with it!
- **Demographics** – Age range, level of education, income bracket, occupation, etc.
- **Motivations** – Why does this person attend the theatre? What do they want to experience part of a theatrical community? What do they want to feel as a result of their theatrical experience?
- **Challenges** – What factors might stand in the way of this person buying a ticket or stepping up their level of support to become a subscriber? Think beyond just the financial here. What practical or emotional factors might you need to consider?
- **Personality** – What types of theatre does this person like? Is theatre a major part of their identity, or just a form of entertainment they occasionally enjoy? How social are they, in general and in terms of their engagement with theatre? How willing are they to take risks with material they aren't familiar with or technologies they haven't used before?

In the marketing world this process is called creating your buyer personas. But you needn't think of the exercise as smarmy or manipulative in any way. The goal here is to create fully fleshed-out characters so that you can connect and meaningfully engage with the real people they represent through your art.

Think of it as a method approach to audience development. By getting to know your audience from the inside out, you gain useful insights into how to grow those relationships, whether through adjustments to your programming, leading with your organization's mission, adding new channels to your marketing strategy, or something else entirely. The choices you make will be as unique as your own particular community and organizational focus.

## What Is Audience Engagement, Anyway?

Chances are, you've heard of audience engagement. You've likely been involved in discussions on the topic, perhaps even in vague but urgent terms. But, you may still be a bit unclear about what audience engagement actually is. If so, you're in great company!

From high school drama departments all the way up through professional theatre, those of us who create, produce, and promote live theatre seem to be obsessed with achieving maximum audience engagement. We want people to see and like our shows, of course! More than that, we need engaged patrons to support the work we're doing so that we can, in a very practical and literal sense, keep doing that work.

But what exactly is audience engagement? How can it be measured? And what can we do to nurture it?

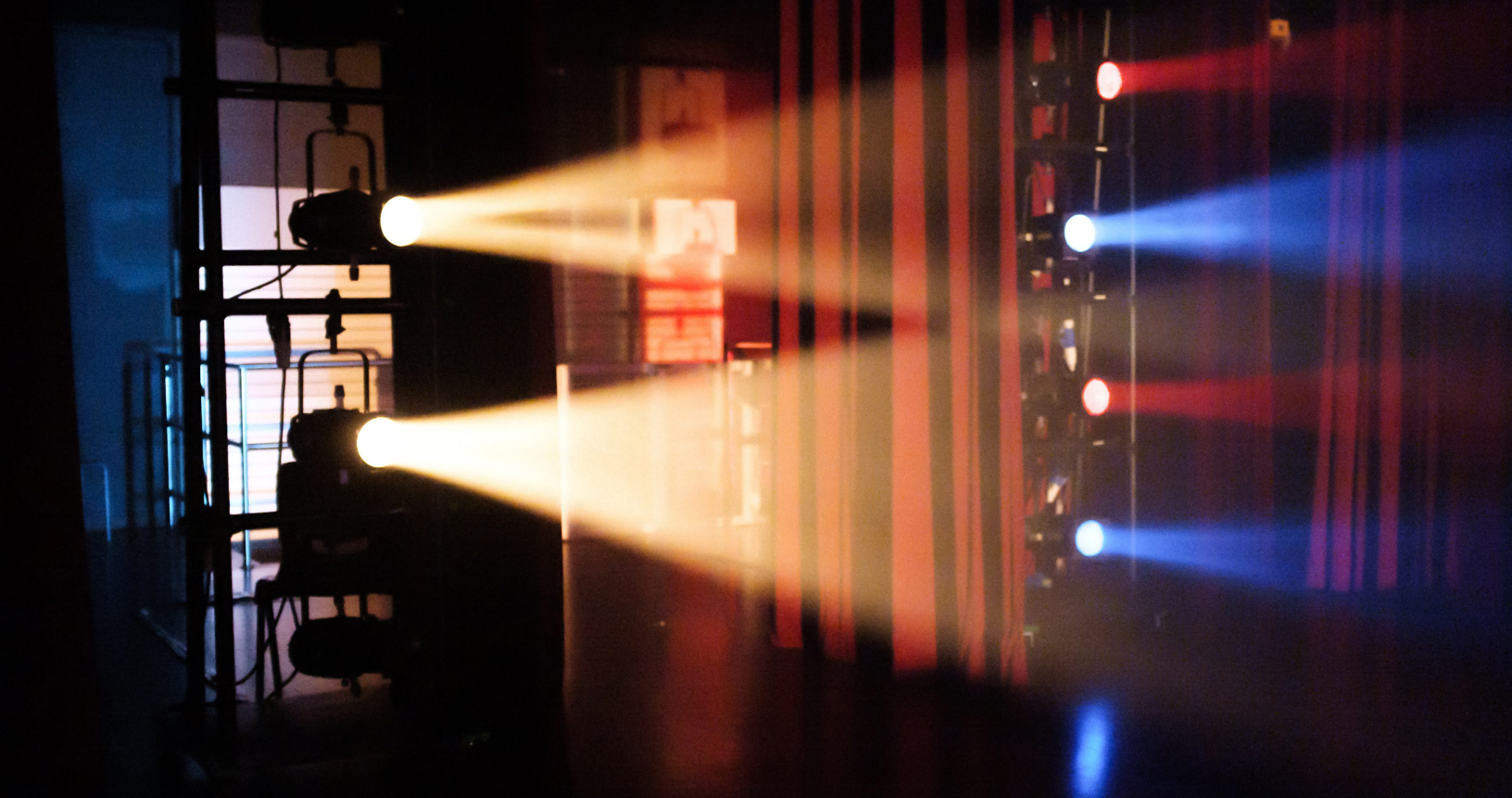
To understand how well you're currently doing and identify your areas for potential improvement, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are we selling as many tickets as we need or want to be selling?
- Do our audiences respond enthusiastically at the end of the show, with standing ovations and excited lobby talk?
- Are patrons purchasing merchandise? Do we see people wearing our t-shirts around town or showing them off online?
- Does our community talk us up on social media, share our promotional posts to their own networks, and participate positively on our page?
- Do we have a solid core of return patrons who show up to support our work show after show, season after season?
- Is the local media talking about the work we're doing? Is there organic buzz about us in the local or regional community?

If you're in the solid yes zone for all of the above, congratulations and great work! Your audiences are actively, enthusiastically engaged.

If you identified areas for improvement, that's great, too! Now you know where to focus your energy moving forward.





**THE SHOW STARTS WITH THE FIRST CLICK:**

# Creating a Complete, Broadway-Style Experience

Not long ago, when theatre lovers wanted to find out about the newest shows on Broadway they had to get scrappy.

If you were close enough to New York City, you could buy a full-price ticket or camp out on the sidewalk in hopes that your lottery number might be called. Maybe you talked with other fans outside the theater, swapped bootleg recordings, and played them over and over again to memorize every lyric before the cast recording was ever released. But the show itself remained mostly cloaked in mystery. Outside New York, you just had to wait. Maybe you'd catch a number on the morning show or in the Thanksgiving Day Parade, then bide your time until awards season rolled around and, one day, the national tour.

Then came social media. Suddenly, fans had a lot more access to content from the shows themselves... and they couldn't get enough! That's when the big shift happened in theatrical marketing: the birth of the show site. And it changed the audience experience forever.

If you've spent time recently checking out the newest hits on Broadway, you've probably experienced a content-rich show site. The key art sets the tone and then you're immediately taken in by video clips from the production, behind-the-scenes content, critical praise, cast photos and bios... then it's just a few more clicks to buy your ticket. And look, you can pick up official souvenirs!

This is the Pro Producer's Mindset in action. It's not just about selling more tickets and merch (although, of course, it's about those things, too). Above all it's about inviting the audience into the world of the show and taking potential patrons on a journey to become fully engaged fans and supporters.

Everything else that's done to promote the show points back to this same website: social media marketing, print ads, press releases, you name it. They all direct fans to the main show site, where they can engage further and check out at the online box office.

## PRO PRODUCER'S HACK

Unlike most theatre companies in the country, big Broadway shows have big Broadway budgets, dedicated marketing firms, and access to the newest technologies. But while you probably don't have the first two items on that list, you absolutely can take advantage of the third!

In fact, On The Stage has built an all-in-one platform to make it easier than ever for theatre makers like you to adapt the Pro Producer's Mindset and make a major impact in your community. You could build all the systems in this guide yourself, of course, but for those who would rather focus their energy on the creative side of production, we've got you covered.

[LEARN MORE](#)



# Opportunities for Engagement

Engagement, as we have seen, is a dynamic and ongoing process. We want to build an active and ongoing sense of community around our shows and, ultimately, our organizations as a whole. That means that, as a producer, you'll want to build in opportunities for engagement at every stage of your patrons' experience—before, during, and after their visit to the theater.

For example:

## Before the Show

- Rich media content hosted on your show site and cross promoted to social media;
- Promotional contests or giveaways;
- Community partnerships, such as co-sponsored events with local orgs whose work addresses themes related to the show.

## At the Theatre

- Selfie station or step-and-repeat area where patrons can check in on social media.
- Don't forget the hashtag!
- Concessions or merch giveaway for patrons who have met a related engagement challenge;
- Meet the cast opportunities or special pre-show events.

## After the Show

- Talk backs or other supplemental programming to expand the conversation around the show;
- Show off your show shirt social media challenge;
- Audience favorite voting opportunities for awards or future programming choices.

These are just a few of the many possible ideas. Remember: there is no formula. The Pro Producer's Mindset is all about creating unique and compelling opportunities that are holistically related to the show itself. Just remember to tie everything you do back to your social media channels and, ultimately, to your show site, where one patron's engagement can drive another's ticket purchase.

# Marketing & Promotion

You may have noticed that some of the ideas we just discussed blur the line between engagement and overt marketing—and that's okay! When you give your audience opportunities to opt in and help spread the word about your show, then reward them with an authentic community experience, it's a real win-win. And that's key to the Pro Producer's Mindset.

Of course, that doesn't mean that we forego traditional marketing altogether. There will always be a place for posters and print ads featuring your show art (and website!). But today's producers need to balance a bit of the old-school with the best of the new. Your promotional efforts should always include:

## Direct Email

As a producer, your email list is your most valuable business asset. That's why you need an all-inclusive sales and marketing platform to make use of that database in a sophisticated, highly efficient, way.

You can safely assume that the people on your list are interested in the work you do and want to hear about what's coming up next. They've already attended at least one show, after all. But, from the Pro Producer's Mindset perspective, it isn't enough to just blast your message out to past patrons and hope it inspires people to take action.



Your email marketing sequence should send different messages at different stages of the production timeline, each with a slightly different goal and call to action. Some examples include:

- **Announcement of Show or Season** – This email lets people know what show you’re producing and when tickets are on sale. The goal is to drive traffic to your show site and start filling seats.
- **Preview/Teaser** – Give patrons a taste of what’s to come with advanced critical response or a behind-the-scenes sneak peek. The goal, again, is to get people to the website, where they can engage more deeply and buy a ticket.
- **Tickets Are Selling Fast!** – Remind patrons that opening night is coming up, so they should purchase tickets soon or risk missing the show. The goal is still to drive website traffic, but more overt emphasis is put on ticket sales.
- **Opening Announcement** – Build excitement and momentum among ticket holders and those who haven’t yet purchased, alike.
- **Post-Show Follow Up** – Thank patrons for attending and plant the seed for whatever is coming up next.

Each of these emails should feature your show’s key art and link directly to your show site, where every transaction that gets processed—tickets, merchandise, or donation—should add patrons who aren’t already in your database to the list.

With the right platform, these emails can be scheduled in advance so the entire sequence is automatically delivered on whatever timeline you choose. Most importantly, you will be able to see the data and understand which emails drive the best results. This allows for more nuanced and strategic decision making next time around.

## Social Media Marketing

A producer’s second most valuable business asset is their social media network. While not everyone in your social orbit may be an exact fit for your patron personas, they have shown enough interest in what you’re doing to follow your accounts or like posts shared by others of your followers.

The very purpose of social media, from a business perspective, is to allow content to reach new and potentially well-matched audiences.

Like with email marketing, you should be able to schedule and publish social media posts directly from your sales and promotional platform. And, as with your email strategy, the content of your social media marketing posts should reflect a progression of related messages and calls to action that build momentum around your production.

You could even follow the same basic content structure:

- Announcement
- Preview/Teaser
- Tickets Are Selling Fast!
- Opening Announcement
- Post-Show Celebration

## CONTENT PRO TIP

Because the Pro Producer's Mindset is all about reaching your market in the most engaging, authentic, and business-supportive way possible, we strongly recommend that you work out a social media content strategy that strongly emphasizes community building and engagement, in addition to straightforward marketing.

Think of how you like to consume social media: do you **A)** enjoy and keep following accounts that post nothing but ads and overt promotions, or **B)** silence or unfollow those accounts fairly quickly? (If you're like most people, you chose B, unfollow.)

The old "official" guideline for social media marketing was called the 80/20 Rule. The recommendation was that a full 80 percent of your posts should be engagement, entertainment, or educational in focus, and only 20 percent should promote your brand, product, or service.

These days there is more room for experimentation and customization based on the engagement and responses you see from your unique audience. But when in doubt, err on the side of community building.

This type of content requires more time and energy than your automated promotional posts, as it is more organic and interactive in nature; but it is well worth the manual effort. An actively engaged audience will respond much better to marketing nudges than an uninvested one will.





# Ticketing & Box Office Management

With all your other systems working to drive engagement and motivate your audience to make a purchase, you'll need tools in place to carry that momentum through without lines getting dropped in the process.

As a creative professional, sales and administration may not be the most compelling parts of your job. But your approach to ticketing and box office management will either enable or undermine everything else you are doing to make your show or season a success. For this reason, understanding and optimizing this part of the overall system is important to the Pro Producer's Mindset.

Everything we've discussed so far has been pointing toward your box office. This is not just where the money changes hands. It's the threshold over which your patrons must pass to become active participants in the show itself. After all, what is a performance without an audience? If a tree falls in the woods and there's no one around to experience it, is there catharsis—in Aristotelian terms or any other? And yet, the last thing you want is for your ticketing and box office management system to pull focus. It should work like any other piece of theatre tech: elegantly, behind the scenes, and in support of the creative product.

Imagine you have captured your ideal audience member's attention, drawn them into the experience of your show through creative promotion, rich content, and opportunities for deeper engagement... but then they can't figure out where to buy a ticket. Or, they try to buy a ticket, but the system is too slow, too complicated, too much of a headache, and all that excitement fizzles to frustration. Worse, imagine you lose them altogether!

What theatre makers with a Pro Producer Mindset need is a ticketing and box office management system with the following features and capabilities:

## **Seamless Integration with your Show Site**

Once you've attracted potential patrons to your website and piqued their interest with compelling content, you want to make it as easy as possible for them to take action and buy a ticket. With online ticketing right there on the page, you'll never have seats sitting empty because someone forgot to get to the box office.

## **Fully Customizable Seating Chart**

Not only must your seating chart accurately reflect the layout of your house, you'll need the functionality to indicate accessible seating, obstructed views, and more.

Depending on your pricing structures, you may also need to set different ticket levels for different sections of your house.

And let's not forget about safety! Make sure your seating chart can accommodate physical distancing whenever that might be necessary or desirable.

## **Secure Ticketing for Streamed Performances**

If your production will be streamed to remote audiences, you'll need to ensure that only ticket holders have access to your content. That means single-user sign on to prevent one patron from purchasing a ticket and then sharing the link with others for free. It also means giving patrons an easy way to do the right thing by choosing the type of ticket that's right for them. When presented with the option of single-viewer pricing or a higher priced household ticket, we've found that most audience members want to support you and your work as fairly as they can!





## Unlimited Promotional Codes & Comps

Group discounts, age-based pricing, flash sales... if you can dream up a promotion, you should be able to make it work for your patrons with the click of a button. Since the Pro Producer Mindset is all about customizing your marketing approach to suit the show you're staging and the specific audience you'd like to reach, your ticketing platform needs to accommodate as many different types of promo codes as you could possibly create.

And let's not forget about comps! Whether you're rewarding loyal patrons or providing tickets as a thank you to your cast and crew, there will always be people you'll want to let in the door for free.

This should be a no-brainer, but it's important that your comp tickets can be processed without wreaking havoc on your regular box office operations. You need to know exactly which seats are filled and which can still be sold, no matter who is sitting in them or whether they paid to see the show.

## Subscriptions & Special Packages

Forget the one-size-fits-all season ticket. The Pro Producer's Mindset is all about thinking holistically about the relationships between your art, your audience, and your strategy.

Think about your core audience segments and what will appeal to them specifically. Have a strong base of theatre kids? How about a package offer that includes a ticket for each opening night performance in your season, plus a souvenir t-shirt for every show? Is there a strong contingent of 65+ theatregoers in your community? Offer a subscription package focused on matinee performances at a discounted rate.

Once you know your audience, you can tailor your offerings to their specific preferences in order to maximize engagement. Your ticketing platform can and should be able support you in that effort.



## **Sophisticated Contact Management**

Any transactional software will allow you to capture contact information from patrons who make a purchase, but what about the people who have supported your productions in the past?

Not only should you be able to upload contacts from your external lists, you'll also need to communicate with past and current patrons in order to drive future sales.

With a ticketing system that's fully integrated into your marketing and promotional site, the flywheel of engagement, sales, delighting your audience with a great performance, and then re-engaging them for the next production can keep spinning on its own momentum.

## **Detailed Reporting**

It should go without saying that you'll want to track your ticket sales and, for Reserved Seating performances, your seating assignments. No doubt every Box Office Manager has had at least one stress dream about the chaos that would otherwise ensue! But this is just the beginning of what can and should be done in terms of analytics.

From the Pro Producer's Mindset perspective, insight is gold. The more you know about your audience, the more reliably you can plan to delight them. This applies to programming decisions and outreach efforts, alike. And one of the best ways to understand what's working (and what isn't) for your particular audience is by looking at your sales data in a nuanced way.

Some shows will always sell better than others. The same is true for individual marketing efforts.

When you are able to look at actual conversion rates for individual emails or social media posts, for example, you can see which were more effective than others at driving ticket sales. Let's say that lots of people opened a specific email or clicked a link on your social post, but not very many of them bought tickets at that time. Why might that have been the case? Could it be that the content wasn't persuasive enough? Perhaps the timing wasn't right? Maybe your audience is used to purchasing their tickets at the door and you need to put some energy into educating them about the benefits of online presales. No matter what changes need to be made or successes need to be celebrated, simply knowing the data puts you in the position to make an educated evaluation.

The best strategy will always vary from show to show, community to community. The one thing you can count on is that your data represents meaningful facts. The information picture it provides, coupled with everything you know about your core audience segments and their preferences, personalities, and predictable behaviors, can help you to make stronger choices with each show you produce.



## Donation Processing

If your organization is eligible to receive tax-exempt donations, you'd be missing a major opportunity for fund development by not making it as easy as possible for patrons to give right there on your website.

Whether that means adding a few extra dollars as an impulse donation when they're purchasing tickets and merchandise, or returning to your site after a stellar performance to support future productions, if your platform integrates donation processing seamlessly into the content people are already engaging with and the actions they're already taking, those gifts will begin to add up without any extra fundraising effort on your part.



# The Show Must Go On[line]

Now that you have a more holistic understanding of how your business strategy can work in support of your artistic vision, the only thing left to do is get this show up on its feet!

To do that, you'll need the right systems in place so that the Nurture > Engage > Inspire > Re-engage flywheel can start spinning.

There is a lot of software out there made to handle one or another of the functions we've discussed. You may already be using one of them and comfortable with how it works. But remember, we're talking about streamlining and professionalizing your operation using the Pro Producer's Mindset.

Why spend time and resources piecing together a system when On The Stage has built an all-in-one, theatre maker-approved solution that seamlessly integrates every one of the strategies and processes you'll need into a single, easy-to-use platform? It even includes end-to-end production tools for virtual and streamed performances!

The best part is that all this pro functionality doesn't have to cost your organization a thing, unless you choose to absorb the minimal fees that are usually passed on to the patron at the box office.

To learn more about how On The Stage can support your next production, visit **OnTheStage.com** today.

We can't wait to help take your program to the next level.



# About On The Stage

**On The Stage** is the all-in-one online platform designed for school, community, and independent theatre makers—by theatre professionals with real tech industry experience.

## We Believe

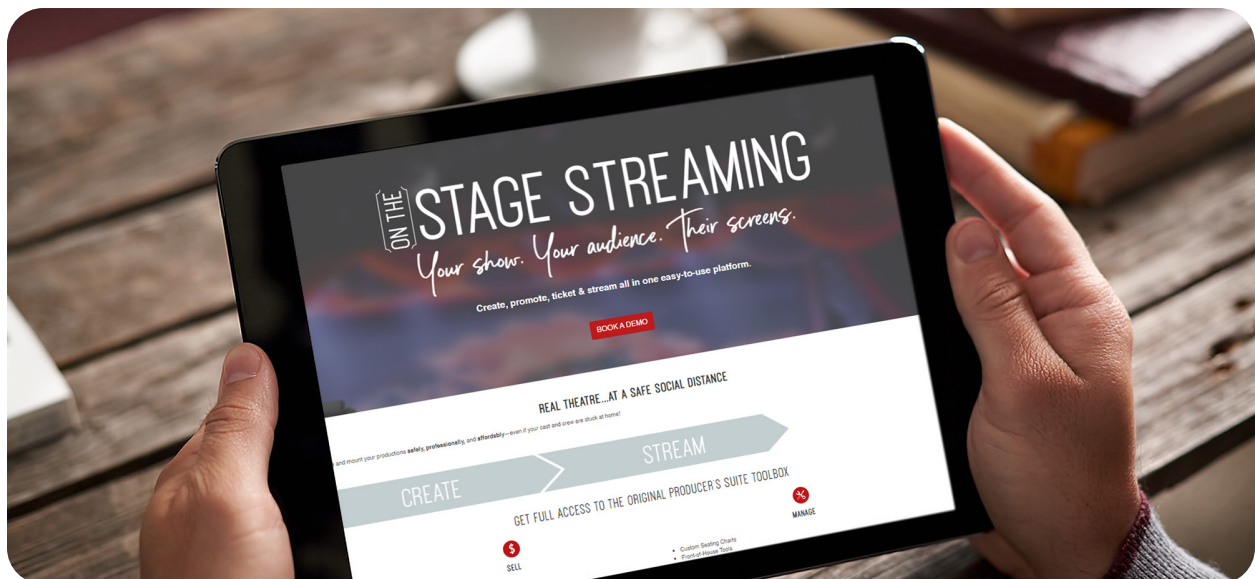
- Creativity thrives when artists and educators have the resources they need.
- Art is most successful in an environment of sustainable resources and engaged, authentic relationship with its audience.
- Everyone deserves access to the tools and support they need to bring their visions into the world.

## We Provide

Our fully integrated, Broadway-style business and promotional tools support theatre educators in achieving their creative, community engagement, and financial goals.

## On The Stage's all-in-one toolkit includes:

- **A user-friendly online TICKETING system** that saves time, increases accuracy and detail of reporting, and streamlines processes for producers, patrons, box office workers, and volunteers.
- **A public-facing PROMOTION portal**, fully branded with client/production content and designed to function as a hub for all online marketing and grassroots promotional efforts.
- **Adaptable AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT features**, such as social linking, a customized and hassle-free merchandise shop, multimedia uploads directly to web pages, season subscriptions, donation processing, and list collection for future promotions.
- **An end-to-end STREAMING PLATFORM** to let you produce, promote, ticket, and stream your show to a remote audience, whether you're recording everything virtually or staging a traditional production for at-home ticket holders.
- **Best-in-class SUPPORT from dedicated Product Specialists**, from the first day with On The Stage through final reporting and planning for your next production.





# In the Business of Technology. In Service to the Arts.

In this internet age, your show's potential should never be limited by the size of your budget or the savvy of your support team. We make the business side of your job easier so you can focus on what matters most.

**Find out if On The Stage is right for your organization**

**BOOK A DEMO TODAY**