



## Exploiting unused capacity

How Test Drive The Arts NI can  
work for your organisation





# How Test Drive The Arts NI can work for you

## What is Test Drive The Arts NI?

Test Drive the Arts introduces people to the arts for the first time, or reintroduces lapsed attendees (of three years or more), by offering guest tickets from spare or unsold capacity. A core principle of Test Drive is that no ticket is given away if it can be sold or taken up.

The idea behind Test Drive the Arts is that potential patrons have the opportunity to experience attending a performance with no risk attached, providing organisations with a new and rich source of 'hot leads' they can convert into regular attendees.

Online since February 2010, Test Drive the Arts NI is managed by Audiences NI and funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Similar initiatives have run across the UK and further afield, including Sweden and Australia, but Audiences NI's project is the first to apply the model sector wide and online with a dedicated website and Content Management System. In its first 2 ½ years of operations, there have been nearly 6,000 successful applications processed through the site with more than 12,000 tickets issued.



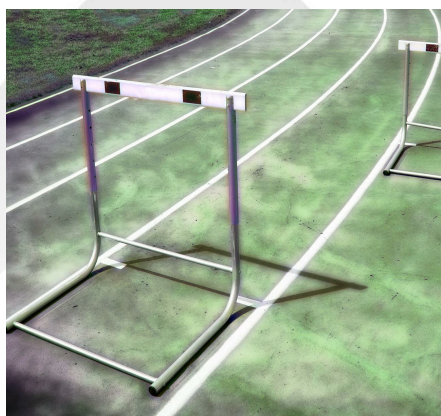
## Why should an arts organisation be involved in Test Drive The Arts?

Very few arts organisations routinely sell out shows; this means there is an untapped asset of unsold seats which are worthless once each show has started, but can be converted to a valuable opportunity in the long term.

- Test Drive is an effective and efficient way to develop new audiences.
- Test Drive allows you to tap into a wider promotional platform and increase your profile nationally.
- Test Drive converts unsold capacity into a marketing asset.
- The programme is scalable; you control the number of tickets released.
- The programme is flexible; you determine which performances are available and the follow-up offers made to Test Drive patrons.

## Who can get involved in the project?

Participation is open to all arts organisations across Northern Ireland. Both free events and events with a ticket or cover charge can be included in Test Drive, including workshops, educational classes and tours. For more information on how your organisation can get involved email [karen.orawe@audiencesni.com](mailto:karen.orawe@audiencesni.com) or call 028 9043 6480.



## What are the hurdles to success for a Test Drive project?

For a Test Drive The Arts project to be successful, it needs to clear a succession of hurdles:

- Test Drive experiences need to be primarily positive ones.
- Test Drivers need to be left with the desire to re-attend.
- Test Drivers need to actually re-attend in the future as regular customers.
- Test Drivers need to be re-attending at a level which is higher than they were attending previously to their Test Drive experience.

# Does Test Drive The Arts NI work?

## Do Test Drivers enjoy their new arts experience?

Test Drive works on the principle that if arts organisations let people sample what they have to offer at no cost, removing or reducing psychological barriers to attending the arts about perception of value and risk, then the experience will have the kind of positive impact which will increase the likelihood that a customer will attend again in the future.

75% of Test Drivers to date rated their experience as Excellent, while a further 19% rated their experience as Good – a total of 94% of Test Drivers indicating an overtly positive experience<sup>1</sup>.



## Are Test Drivers left with a desire to attend again?

For the Test Drive model of bringing in new audiences to your venue to thrive, that positive experience which results from their Test Drive attendance has to stimulate a desire to attend again in the future as a regular customer.

75% of Test Drivers to date indicated that they were definitely keen to re-attend soon, while a further 21% indicated they would like to re-attend but would probably wait a few months – a total of 96% of Test Drivers indicating a positive intention to re-attend<sup>1</sup>.



## Are Test Drivers actually attending the arts again?

An intention to re-attend does not always convert into an actual re-attendance for a variety of reasons, with time and money often cited as common barriers. We also know that arts attendance in Northern Ireland generally remains at a low frequency, with 66% of attenders only attending once within a given year<sup>2</sup>.

One year on from their Test Drive experience, 71% of Test Drivers indicated that they have definitely attended the arts again during that year<sup>3</sup>. In reality, this figure for re-attendance is actually likely to be underestimated for the following reasons:

- This figure does not take into account those for whom it took longer than 1 year to re-attend (i.e. they were surveyed before their re-attendance took place)
- Nor does it take into account those who have not yet completed a full year since their Test Drive attendance but have already re-attended (i.e. those who have attended and re-attended since July 2011 but have not been surveyed yet).



## Does Test Drive change attendance behaviour?

For some Test Drivers, their Test Drive experience marks their first ever introduction to the arts, while others are existing arts attenders who are new to the particular venue they're attending.

One year on from their Test Drive experience, 75% of Test Drivers who have re-attended indicated that they are attending at an increased level<sup>4</sup> (which equates to 56% of Test Drivers overall), with 98% of these confirming that Test Drive The Arts NI played a role in changing and increasing their behaviour.



<sup>1</sup> With a margin of error of +/- 1%.

<sup>2</sup> Audience Review 2012, [www.audiencesni.com](http://www.audiencesni.com)

<sup>3</sup> With a margin of error of +/- 5%.

<sup>4</sup> With a margin of error of +/- 9%.

# Clearing the hurdles



There are clear indications that Test Drive is clearing the hurdles required to declare it a successful model for attracting and engaging with potential new audiences. However, results also show that there is still vast potential for arts organisations to be maximising the potential return on investment from these customers.

While 72% of Test Drivers indicated that they have re-attended at the arts again since their Test Drive experience, only 40% indicated that they have returned to the venue where they had that Test Drive experience. Test Drive experiences are overwhelmingly positive and the intention to re-attend is high, so why are actual re-attendances at original Test Drive venues not higher? Only 22% of respondents indicated that their re-attendance was prompted by the venue where they had their Test Drive experience sending them information, while only 4% indicated that their Test Drive venue had incentivised their re-attendance with a special offer or discount.

Ensuring that you are talking with these customers in the right way at the right time to encourage re-attendance is essential, but so is recognising that the progression from receiving guest tickets to purchasing full price tickets may need to be managed and staggered using discounts - especially where customers are completely new to the arts.

## Committing to long term customer relationships

Attending a performance using Test Drive The Arts NI removes a key barrier to someone attending the arts for the first time - **cost**. This allows potential new customers to try attending an arts event with minimal risk. Then - having actually experienced an event first hand - other barriers to attendance such as a fear of feeling uncomfortable or out of place, or a fear that they will have a poor experience, should also be reduced.

However, other barriers to attendance may still remain. Lack of time is often cited, as is the need for family friendly product and facilities. In addition, after the Test Drive experience has occurred, cost can become a barrier again<sup>5</sup>. Even those that thoroughly enjoyed their Test Drive experience may still therefore require specific targeting and incentives in order to overcome the barriers to attendance which could remain.

Ongoing relationships with customers are grown over time and arts organisation who drive the development of these relationships with their customers will get a better return on investment than those who wait for audiences to return of their own accord. This requires adopting an approach to marketing which is known as Customer Relationship Management.

<sup>5</sup> "Research into the actual and perceived barriers to publicly funded arts in Northern Ireland", Arts Council Of Northern Ireland, 2005, [www.artscouncil-ni.org](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org)

## What is Customer Relationship Management?

Customer Relationship Management is inherently synonymous with 'Relationship Marketing' and is based on managing customers in a different way from the 'traditional' marketing model of the 4 Ps.

### The principles of CRM:

- that it is worth trying to develop long-term relationships with customers, and concentrate marketing effort on the more profitable
- therefore customer 'retention' becomes important to this approach
- and in order to develop these 'relationships' the organization must commit itself to a two-way dialogue with customers.

*Extract taken from "The Leaky Bucket: A picture of customer retention in the UK Performing Arts" by Katy Raines, 2005, [www.indigo-ltd.com](http://www.indigo-ltd.com)*



# Case Study: Theatre At The Mill and Courtyard Theatre

## About the venues

Theatre at The Mill is set in the Civic Square of the restored Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey Borough Council's Civic Headquarters. The new state of the art 400 seat theatre opened in early 2011 and offers a packed programme with a wide range of dance, drama, comedy, musicals and family shows. The venue is located just 15 minutes from Belfast City Centre with free parking and a fully licensed bar and restaurant.

Meanwhile, the Courtyard Theatre's intimate 180 seat space is located just two minutes drive away from the Mossley Mill site, primarily programming a mix of local am-dram shows and music performances.

Both venues are operated by Newtownabbey Borough Council, and share both box office and marketing facilities.

## How has Test Drive The Arts NI worked for them?

Between September 2010 and May 2012, there were 807 successful applicants receiving 1,646 tickets to attend the Theatre At The Mill and Courtyard Theatre as guests through Test Drive The Arts NI.

By May 2012, 79 of those 807 successful Test Drivers had returned to see another show, representing a return rate of 10%. This means 1 in every 10 Test Drivers have returned as paying customers.

These 79 Test Drivers, who were completely new to the venues before their Test Drive The Arts NI experience, have subsequently purchased 360 tickets as paying customers since September 2010, worth £4,895.85.

So far, on average, each Test Driver successfully converted into a paying customer by the Theatre At The Mill and Courtyard Theatre is therefore worth £61.97 and these customers have already made an average of 1.6 visits each as paying customers.

For every seat from their unused capacity which Theatre At The Mill and the Courtyard Theatre successfully filled through Test Drive The Arts (which otherwise would have remained unsold and worthless to the venues), they have subsequently earned £3 through repeat attendance as paying customers.



**Re-attendance rate of 1 in 10  
Test Drivers as paying customers**

**360 tickets paid for during repeat  
visits**

**£4,895.85 of ticket revenue  
generated during repeat visits**

**Each re-attending Test Driver is  
worth £61.96 on average to the two  
venues.**

**For every seat successfully filled for  
free through Test Drive The Arts NI,  
the two venues have subsequently  
earned £3.**

# Case Study: Theatre At The Mill and Courtyard Theatre

## How have Theatre At The Mill and Courtyard Theatre achieved this Return On Investment?

Historically, marketing staff at the Theatre At The Mill and Courtyard Theatre have not targeted Test Drivers for re-attendance separately from non-Test Drive customers.

Instead, Test Drivers are incorporated into the venue's overall CRM model which is geared at getting all new customers to re-attend at the venues more often.

New customers, including those attending through Test Drive The Arts, are added to the mailing lists of the venues and receive regular, targeted communications from the venues about forthcoming shows, news and special offers. However, every new customer also receives a "morning after mailing" the day after their first attendance, an example of which is pictured here ➡

- Phrased informally, the letter begins by welcoming the customer to the venue and expresses an interest in the experience the customer has just had attending the venue BEFORE trying to convince the customer to purchase something else.
- The letter informs the customer of a show coming up which they may be interested in seeing, specifically chosen to be similar to the show they have just attended with the aim of reducing any perceived risk of spending money on something unfamiliar.
- The letter highlights that the customer experience can go beyond seeing a show, promoting both the bar and restaurant facilities to encourage ancillary spend.
- The letter culminates with a direct call-to-action to book, coupled with a more informal message from the staff prompting re-attendance again in the future.

**Further CRM Developments:** Marketing staff at Theatre At The Mill and The Courtyard Theatre are currently piloting mailings designed to target Test Drivers who have not yet re-attended, experimenting with different types of incentives for different shows to explore response rates and identify the best approach to successfully engaging with these customers in the longer term to maximise the Return On Investment from this project.

And we have more...



James Smith,  
1 Main Street  
Newtownabbey  
BT37 1AA

Dear James,

Welcome to our theatre. We hope you enjoyed your visit to see Our Core.

There is nothing quite like the experience of a live performance and this season we have some of the best theatre to entertain you!

And we have more...

### Balletboyz – The Talent

Thurs 24 March at 7.45pm

Tickets from £9

The latest exhilarating 'boyband' dance experience in an energetic, sexy, exciting visual show

Nine remarkable dancers, handpicked from open auditions by Balletboyz star in this feast of exhilarating live dance, using a distinctive style to blend energetic and graceful dance with stunning music and film.



Balletboyz is one of the most cheekily original and innovative forces in modern dance, led by former Royal Ballet dancers Michael Nunn and William Trevitt.

This is the only Northern Ireland performance following Balletboyz sellout UK tour this spring. Just over 100 tickets left so book today!

### Treat Yourself Before the Show

Eat at The Mill Pre-Theatre Restaurant Menu Main Course £8.95 or a 2 Course Meal for £12.95. Only available on Friday and Saturday show nights – Advance booking essential. Lite Bites available from the Theatre Bar from 6.45pm- 7.15pm on all show nights.

To book and for a full listing of Theatre at The Mill shows, contact the Box Office on 028 9034 0202 or visit our website [www.theatreatthemill.com](http://www.theatreatthemill.com).

We look forward to seeing you at the Theatre again very soon  
Theatre Team



A Newtownabbey Borough Council Facility, Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey, BT36 5QA

# Test Driver feedback for Theatre At The Mill

*"Never would have dreamt of going to the theatre before, but I'm now hooked."*

"A brilliant opportunity to try out a new venue. I wasn't aware of the Theatre At The Mill. The show was wonderful as well, we had a great day out. Thank you."

"Excellent scheme - and it works. I'll definitely start going regularly to the theatre."

"A fabulous experience. I would probably never have visited the mill otherwise but I will definitely go back now. A fabulous venue! Lovely intimate theatre. Stunning surroundings and a great production of Much Ado About Nothing!! Definitely go back to our newly discovered hidden gem - The Theatre At The Mill!!"

"Can only recommend it!"

"Amazing!!!! I don't think I would have made the journey to Newtownabbey if it hadn't been for Test Drive. I would definitely go back! The venue was amazing, it was only a fifteen minute drive from Belfast and the production of Hamlet blew me away! I will be looking into going to see more Shakespeare plays and returning to the Theatre At The Mill thanks to Test Drive."

"I love to attend different events but have always tended to stick to the big venues such as the Odyssey, Waterfront etc. It was refreshing to try a new venue and my daughter and I enjoyed ourselves immensely. I would certainly attend future events at the Theatre at the Mill and will try new places from now on. I would recommend that other people do the same."

"Enjoyed it so much that I am going to go again soon. Also have told friends and family to apply for tickets and give it a go. Well done to Test Drive The Arts."

"A wonderful way to bring the arts to people who don't normally go. I, myself, loved the play that I saw, so I am grateful to thee ... (yes, it was Shakespeare)."

"A great way to try out a theatre you're unsure about - and mine turned out to be a real treasure of a find!"

"Excellent idea! Test Drive provided the incentive to get back to the arts again. Great show! Will definitely now make this a habit!"

"Definitely try this... You won't regret it ..."

"An excellent way to discover new theatres. A lot of the people I mentioned it to did not know of this theatre either, so they may want to go too."

"Fantastic night out, very entertaining! I will definitely try to get out to more live theatre after this, in fact planning to go back for The King and I in a few weeks time at Theatre at the Mill. Thanks Test Drive the Arts for the opportunity and of course the free tickets!"

"Excellent idea - I wouldn't have known about this venue without your website. Well done."

"Grasp this brilliant opportunity to go to an event. I saw a show I never would have 'risked' paying for and really enjoyed it."

"I bought one more ticket besides the two free tickets that I got. We were able to experience theatre as a family. The first time I went to this particular theatre and it's worth the visit."

"Had a fantastic night out at a theatre that we did not even know existed until we found it through Test Drive the Arts. Great concert, great venue. Thank you Test Drive. We hope to go back there."

"Highly recommend. You might be really surprised how much you enjoyed trying something new."

"I thought the whole experience was excellent. Great seats, brilliant play and great atmosphere."

"It has been a while since we have been to a stage performance, but can now say, without a doubt that we will definitely be going again soon. We both really enjoyed the play and also experiencing Mossley Mill Theatre for the first time. The staff were extremely helpful and professional. We would highly recommend other people to consider the Test Drive experience."

"It was definitely a lovely night out. I would go again and I have actually got a brochure home with me, to see what is on in the near future with a view to booking again."

"A wonderful opportunity to enjoy the arts - would highly recommend it."

"Excellent experience, really enjoyed the event and all for free! A great way to get people interested in the arts in N. Ireland."



# Organisations involved in Test Drive The Arts NI

In its first 2 ½ years, 77 organisations have provided tickets for inclusion in the Test Drive The Arts NI project.

- Aisling Ghear
- Alley Theatre
- An Droichead
- Ardhowen Theatre
- Ards Arts
- Belfast Book Festival
- Belfast Children's Festival
- Belfast City Blues Festival
- Belfast Exposed
- Belfast Film Festival
- Belfast Music Society
- Belfast Nashville Songwriter's Festival
- Belfast Philharmonic
- Belfast Waterfront
- Belfast Welcome Centre
- Belvoir Players
- Blackstaff Press
- Braid Arts Centre
- Brassneck
- Bruiser
- Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre
- Camerata Ireland
- Cappella Caeciliana
- Carrick Marina Festival
- Catalyst Arts
- Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival
- Cinemagic International Film and Television Festival
- Courtyard Theatre
- Craft NI
- Crescent Arts Centre
- Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich
- Culturlann Ui Chanain
- Down Arts centre
- Dumbworld
- Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company
- Féile an Phobail
- Foyle Film Festival
- Grand Opera House
- ISLAND Arts Centre
- John Hewitt Society
- Kabosh
- Kaleidoscope
- Land of Giants
- Linen Hall Library
- Lyric Theatre
- Maiden Voyage Dance
- Market Place Theatre
- Millennium Forum
- Moving on Music
- Music Events Direct
- Music Theatre 4 Youth
- Naughton Gallery at Queen's
- NI Opera
- North Down Borough Council
- Ormeau Baths Gallery
- Place NI
- Prime Cut Productions
- Queen's Film Theatre
- Rainbow Factory
- Ransom
- Replay Theatre Company
- Roe Valley Arts Centre
- Spark Opera
- Spectrum Centre
- Stendhal Festival
- Sticky Fingers Arts
- Strule Arts Centre
- The Black Box
- The MAC
- Theatre at the Mill
- Tinderbox
- Tobar Productions
- Ulster Bank Belfast Festival At Queen's
- Ulster Hall
- Ulster Orchestra
- Waterside Theatre
- Wireless Mystery Theatre