The Beast – Fuzzylogic Dance Company

Online Audiences Toolkit

Your audiences are online

It's impossible to overstate the impact that digital technology has had on the arts. From the ways in which artists make work to the manner in which we consume it, it has been truly revolutionary – and it's evolving all the time.

One of the biggest developments in this digital era – in terms of the opportunities that it has created for artists and institutions alike – has been the shift in our relationships with audiences. Indeed, the potential 'virtual' audience for a piece of work includes people living 5 feet from your front door who never walk through it because "it's not for them" and those on the other side of the world who love your work but can't get to it because of geography.

Moreover, cultural organisations can now take control of their relationships with their audiences and respond to them directly online. This kind of engagement is hugely powerful, both for building a market for a body of work and for developing deep connections between artists and the public.

But we know it isn't easy. There are so many platforms, so much jargon and so much content already out there that it can seem overwhelming. We know from our work across the sector that there is a need for some straightforward and practical advice for cultural organisations around effective online audience engagement.

This Online Audiences Toolkit is our starter for ten: it's not intended to be either exhaustive or definitive, but hopefully it will be a valuable resource that offers some ideas for developing and engaging with online audiences.

Inside you will find guidance on: why and how to audit your current digital audience; how to find your target audiences online; top tips for engaging digital content; an introduction to the major social media platforms and what they work best for; how to get your message out there; and, how to measure your success.

With the digital opportunities available, artists and arts organisations no longer need to wait for their latest work to be picked up and trailed in the mainstream media. And as this cultural curation model becomes increasingly marginalised, interacting directly with the public online will become ever more important.

Effective online audience engagement means harnessing digital methods to foster more meaningful relationships with arts fans and consumers and can bring a bigger and more diverse audience to your work. It is worth the effort, truly.

We hope this Toolkit is a useful springboard for those looking to get started.

Fiona Morris is Chief Executive and Creative Director, The Space.

Contributors

Katie Connolly
Digital Producer, The Space

Katie is a Digital Producer, Trainer and Mentor who has worked with creatives and creative organisations across the UK to produce digital work that focuses on new platforms and takes advantage of new distribution opportunities.

She has worked in a range of strategic and digital management roles in the public, charity and academic sector, including all of the BBC's major youth brands, Youth Sport Trust and University of Birmingham.

Katie was an early member of the BBC's Digital Guerillas innovation group, a team of specialists developing digital content for BBC TV, Radio and Digital, with a focus on young and diverse audiences. While there, she worked with digital partners including Radio 1, CBBC and BBC Three, before being asked to join the BBC Three team full-time.

Rob Lindsay
Digital Producer, The Space

Rob Lindsay is a Digital Producer and Social Marketer, who specialises in helping arts organisations use digital media to engage meaningfully with new and developing audiences.

Having worked in arts and broadcast for over 15 years, Rob focuses on audience responses, and how social videos have to behave differently to other media.

Manuela Rotstein
Digital Consultant

Manuela Rotstein is a digital consultant specialised in developing the digital presence of media companies and nonprofit organisations.

She has worked with the BBC, Global Radio and UNICEF UK, among others, to enhance their SEO and reach new audiences.

Sarah Fortescue
Head of Distribution, The Space

Sarah specialises in distribution, working within the broadcast and digital sectors. Her previous experience at the international theatre company Cheek by Jowl involved establishing national partnerships for their inaugural live-to-digital work in 2015, a Russian-language Measure for Measure, as well as a successful international campaign for their multi-language livestream of The Winter's Tale.

Working as an associate for The Space, her projects included balletLORENT's Rumpelstiltskin, Candoco's award-winning Unspoken Spoken, and Corey Baker's Antarctica: The First Dance. Her projects have featured on the BBC, Channel 4, The Guardian, UpWorthy and Buzzfeed. Since taking on the role of Head of Distribution, Sarah has worked with commissioned organisations to take work into cinemas, worked with broadcast platforms including Sky Arts and the BBC, and has forged new relationships with digital platforms such as Twitter and Google Arts and Culture.

John White
Chief Operating Officer, The Space

John has overall responsibility for the operational delivery of The Space's programmes. Since 2013, he has managed the process of commissioning over 200 digital projects from UK arts and cultural organisations and overseen training programmes including workshops, mentoring and the provision of online learning materials.

John has 20 years' experience as a digital consultant, advising Arts Council England, the BBC and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, amongst others. He has led and contributed to a number of policy initiatives in the DCMS's Culture is Digital programme. John was previously Managing Director of Amuzo, a BAFTA-nominated, multi-award winning games agency, where he ran a digital team delivering games for clients including LEGO, CBBC, Disney and Warner Bros. Prior to this, John was Commercial Director and digital consultant at marketing agency, VLP, where he set up its interactive division, working with clients including the Radio Authority, Railtrack and the Richard Rogers Partnership.

Contents

Part 1: Who?

How to work out who your current and target audiences are

What do we mean by online audiences?

When you say "audiences" to cultural organisations, most think of their physical audiences: the people who sit in their theatres, visit their exhibitions or listen to their music in situ. But the vast majority of them also have a virtual audience, whether that's the people who buy their tickets through a website, who like a Facebook or Instagram post about an upcoming event, read programme notes online or watch a short video interview with a featured artist.

This online audience might overlap with the physical audiences coming into your space or building. But they might be unique. In fact, this online engagement may be the only way they interact with your project or organisation.

Indeed, some cultural organisations are now viewing these online 'visitors' as a core audience group, and thinking about how to make their digital journeys as powerful as they would be if they were discovering content in the organisation's main physical space.

It may be that some members of your online audience will never come to you physically for reasons of geography, money, poor health or other access issue. Therefore, your digital content – whether that is a whole performance you are livestreaming, an article they read on a partner website or a viral Tweet – is a window on your work for them and a way for you to broaden your reach.

But your online audience may also include people who are being introduced or reintroduced to your work and who you can attract to an event, exhibition, visit or performance with content that's pitched in the right tone and on the right platform for them.

A Mile in My Shoes – The Empathy Museum © Cat Lee

Your online audience is split into four tiers, each increasing in its potential size if you engage well with them.

Your direct audience – already following your channels and enjoying what you publish there

People who follow supporters of your organisation and your team

People who follow supporters of your content

People who encounter your material once it has been shared by those above
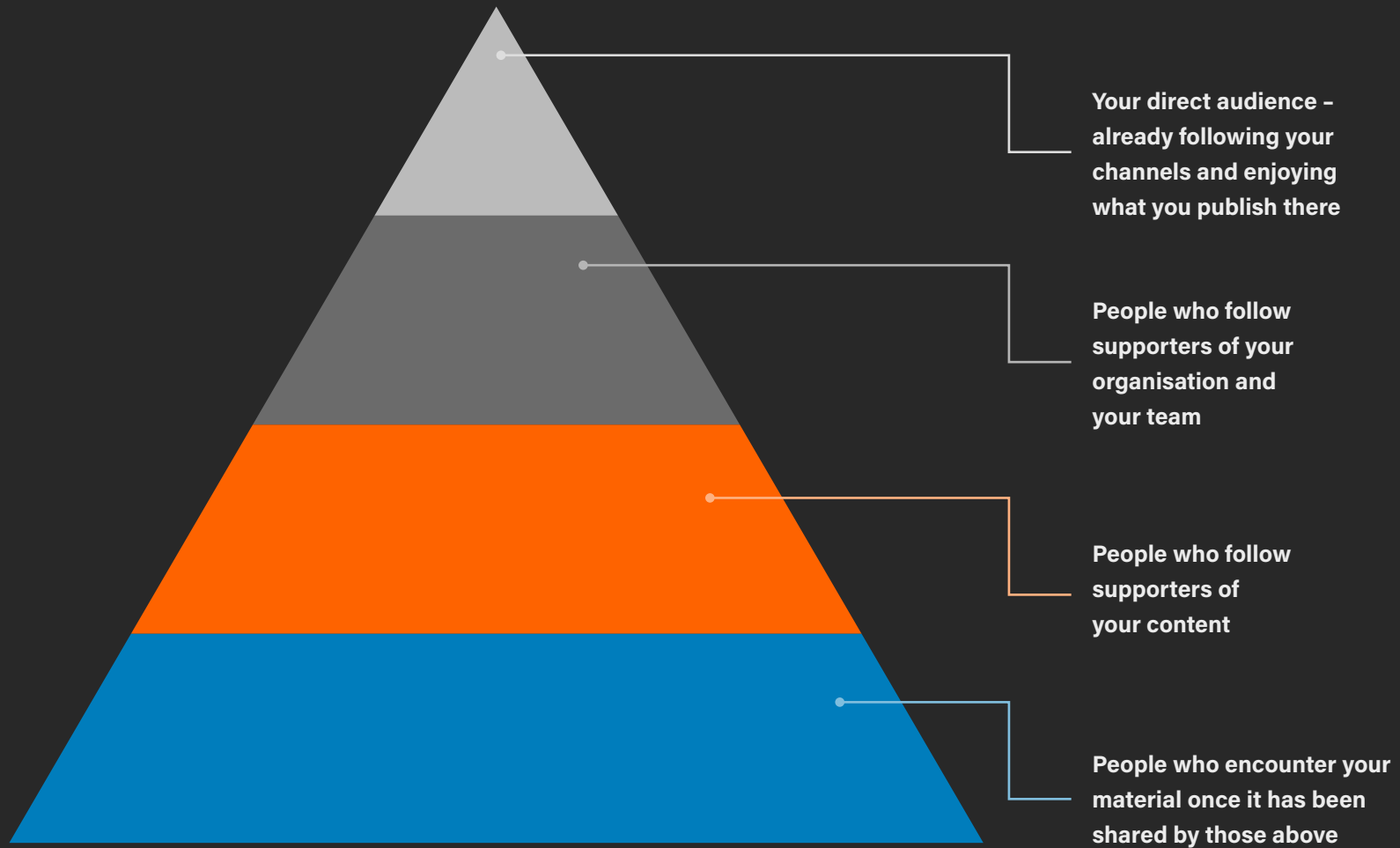
What do we mean by online audience engagement?

In its broadest sense, 'online audience engagement' means publishing content online and using digital means to attract audiences to it. However, arts and cultural organisations can engage with audiences online in many different ways and for many different reasons. Here's just a sample:

To show art/creative work

This could be through digitising your collection or library, or by capturing an artwork, installation or performance through video, photographs, or sound recording.

To deepen the knowledge and understanding of an artwork/collection of works

This could be through articles, podcasts or video content and allows your audience to build their knowledge about work you hold or are hosting.

To interact directly with audiences

This might be through one or more of your social media channels and allows you to build a conversation and a community around your work.

To introduce your brand to a wider audience

This might be through your own social media channels or by partnering with other organisations, influencers or media outlets in order to connect you to a broader audience who might be interested in your work.

To highlight a certain event, show or experience you are hosting now or in the future

This is digital marketing where you are aiming to convert those engaging with your content online into ticket buyers.

To offer digital tools to help fans of your work to act as online ambassadors

You may have supporters who are active online, and perhaps even have substantial numbers of followers on social media. It can be extremely beneficial to supply this type of supporter with the kind of digital content that will empower them to champion your organisation to their followers.

To nurture support and interest in your art form more broadly

Your aim may not always be organisation-specific – projects like World Ballet Day bring together companies from all over the world to raise the profile of an art form together.

What is an online audiences audit?

An online audience audit is an assessment of your current digital audience: who they are, what they like and what they respond to. It may also include where they are based, what their interests are and their ages, depending what information you can obtain. This enables you to work out who is in your current base audience, and from there you can work out where there are opportunities to develop.

During an audience audit, you will assess:

- Who is following you and interacting with your content on social media platforms

- How your content is doing: what is being clicked, shared and commented on

- What it feels like to be in your digital spaces – your website and your social media platforms

Rob Lindsay, Digital Producer at The Space, explains the key to an audience audit:

"Leave your ego at the door and be brutally honest with yourself – you may represent a huge institution of great legacy and acclaim but that doesn't mean your online content is working. It also doesn't mean that you already have the broad, diverse audience you would like."

He adds that you also need to ask yourself, if someone on your team is putting lots of energy into digital, is it having any results? And are the results worth the time and effort currently being invested?

Akram Khan's Giselle for English National Ballet © Laurent Liotardo

How can I do an online audiences audit?

There are lots of different analytics packages that are available to help you to assess who is engaging with your content – almost all the big social media companies offer them and Google Analytics is a free service that allows you to measure and track the activity of visitors to your website as well as their demographics and behaviours.

Google Analytics and social media insight packages can be useful if you are seeking particular information (for example, the average age or the gender split of your online audience). But they come with a health warning: they offer reams of data without any guidance on how best to use it.

Rob explains: *"There is no point using Insight tools at all unless you are going to give your team the time and space to talk about their implications. Google Analytics is free and you can pull lots of data from it about your website, but it's not necessarily clear how to use the data it offers or turn it into actionable insights. The problem for many arts organisations is not how to get the data, it's what it really means."*

Nevertheless, Rob says that there are a couple of specific tools that can be very useful:

"On Facebook's video function, you can see who the most notable sharers of your video content were and how many views they generated. This can be useful to work out who your own pool of 'influencers' are.

"On Twitter, you can run a search with a filter that only shows tweets that earned more than a certain number of likes or retweets so you can easily work out what your most popular content has been whilst you are doing an audit."

However, Rob says that an online audience audit can be undertaken simply by setting aside enough time to properly look at your followers on social media, what your most popular content is and by having a frank discussion internally about the look and feel of your website and social media channels.

Rob's top tips for a successful audit are:

☑ Be honest – approach the audit as if you are a new team taking over legacy platforms and try to view them objectively.

☑ Look closely at who is engaging with your content and who is sharing it – not all your followers are sharing, or even seeing, all your content. Remember that social media is meant to feel social, so personal recommendations are important.

☑ Assess what content is working – gaining the most views, shares, comments and likes. Is there a particular type of content that resonates with your audiences?

☑ Pay attention to when things have done well and why they have done well – what has connected the content to the audience?

☑ Finally, also look at examples of the types of people your organisation would like to target and work out who they are following and what kinds of content they are responding to positively.

An online audience audit for cultural organisations is one of the services that The Space offers and is a time and cost efficient way of quickly getting to know your online audience. If you would like more information about this, please get in touch.

Who should my target audiences be and how can I reach them?

Who to target

Your new target audiences should be:

- **Linked to your overall organisation or project mission**
- **Identifiable**
- **Reachable**
- **In numbers that justify your time and effort**

You can't be everything to everyone, especially online. This means your target audience shouldn't be 'everyone' or even 'everyone under 30' – this will actually make it harder rather than easier to create content that works.

Mindset

The starting point for building online audiences is your approach.

"You need to be serious about it," Rob explains. *"One piece of content does not build an audience – you need to be prepared to commit to these audiences long-term and you don't want to lose your existing audiences along the way."*

Use your audit

Go back to the results of your audit and see what you discovered. What did you find out about your existing supporters, especially those who have actively engaged with or shared your content in the past? What are they interested in? Do they represent a particular demographic? What is their behaviour online? Why do they care about you?

You can use the information you gleaned from your audit to work out what's working and for whom. The result may be an online audience development plan that is about shifting the tone or the type of your content (or of some of your content), or it may be about making your current content 'stickier' so it's seen and shared by more people, or it may be about trying something new altogether.

As Rob describes, you need to be honest about what has worked and what hasn't worked – if you have 1000 followers on Facebook and your recent Facebook posts have only garnered 3 likes, your content isn't working. Plus, bad posts harm your channel – web companies like YouTube are watching how all the content across their site does using an algorithm so they know if no one is engaging with your content and it will make them less likely to foreground your content – same with Facebook and the others. See more details on social media algorithms.

Turn your fans into digital cheerleaders

Once you have worked out who your existing supporters are online, the first step in audience-building will be transforming them into cheerleaders who trumpet your work to their networks.

Your most important cheerleaders will be the people who are active online and have their own large and active networks. They are your own pool of 'influencers' so make sure you know who they are at this early stage.

At the beginning of an online audience development push, it's also valuable to speak to senior staff and talent within your organisation/production/studio and ask them about influential contacts who might be willing to act as online ambassadors, says The Space's Head of Distribution Sarah Fortescue.

She suggests going to your Artistic Director, Executive Director or Patron and finding out who they know who could act as online cheerleaders by sharing your content online thereby bringing you to the attention of new audiences. Sarah says: *"It can be amazing which names fall out of those little black books who are willing to do something relatively small to help an organisation they have a relationship with."*

Part 2: Where?

How to find your target audiences online

Where should my content go?

The short answer to where your content should go is:

You need to be where your audiences are

During your audience audit, you will have worked out which of your platforms are the most impactful and assessed examples of individuals in your existing and target audiences and where they are most active online. You now need to use that research and let it guide you to the platforms where your content will be most effective and engage your target audience.

Rob adds: *"Don't automatically assume that you have to post content on the site or platform you associate with that type of media, e.g. videos to YouTube. Most content can work across a host of platforms. You need to be where your audience is and make the content work for them there.*

"Also, try to avoid making people click through to different websites, such as posting a link on Facebook taking people off to your YouTube channel. Audiences like to stay in one place, especially on mobile. You already have their attention, and can post the same message in more than one place, so why create obstacles?"

There are two main arenas online where people consume cultural content:

1. **Social media platforms**

2. **Other websites, including news sites, specialist genre publishers, on-demand/streaming services and so on**

Social media platforms present the biggest opportunities in terms of volume but – depending on your project – more specialist platforms may be worth investigating and offer you a more targeted approach.

Backlash Against the Bland – Free Radical, part of the Beatfreeks Collective

Social media: where should I start?

When it comes to your social media strategy, our advice is to ask yourself the counterintuitive question:

Which platforms are we going to allow ourselves NOT to post on?

Rob explains: *"When it comes to social media platforms, give yourself a break. There will always be somewhere else that you could put your content and you need to ensure you don't get sucked down the rabbit hole of trying to be everywhere at once.*

"Remember: if you are successful and build an audience on a certain platform, you will have a community to manage there and this will take time and resources.

"And to build that audience you will need to be present – three episodes of a podcast isn't enough, neither is a single Instagram story. You really do need to be serious about it.

"So, allow yourself to focus and say no to platforms if they are not right for your audiences or your content. If you want to experiment on different social media platforms, by all means do it, but you don't need to be everywhere at once – really think about where your target audience is and go to them."

Can you give me an introduction to the pros and cons of the major social media platforms?

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram: the major social media platforms all have strengths and weaknesses, and they all have restrictions. For example, Twitter only allows videos of 2 minutes 20 seconds except for live streams. So you need to do your research and work out how to make your content work for your chosen platform and its audience.

But what are the different platforms best for?
And what to be wary of?

Digital Producer Katie Connolly offers her social media 101 overleaf.

	Facebook	**Twitter**	**Instagram**	**YouTube**
Good for...	✔ Advocacy and ambassadorial work, especially through its share function ✔ Discussion directly with an audience ✔ Personal and human stories, which makes it very good for arts content ✔ An enormous potential audience thanks to its huge number of users ✔ A safe space: its users generally feel Facebook is a safe place for them to be/endorse/comment	✔ Topical discussion ✔ A sense of immediacy ✔ Public sector content ✔ Playfulness and experimentation ✔ Making the news: Twitter is a major source of news stories for online journalists so if your content goes viral on Twitter, it may well be picked up by the mainstream media	✔ Visual content ✔ People viewing on their phones – the site is optimised for mobile ✔ Engaged users – as a newer platform, it doesn't yet have the legacy of older and unused accounts that some of the other social media platforms have	✔ Hosting video content that can be embedded on other websites – this is how it is most flexible and useful ✔ As a single source for your content: a YouTube video can be embedded on multiple other sites meaning that if you need to take it down – perhaps after a licensing period expires – and you remove it from YouTube, it will be removed from all the other sites where it was embedded simultaneously
Be wary of...	⚠ As a content publisher sometimes it can be difficult to navigate	⚠ Arts organisations and professionals getting into internal conversations – there is risk of the sector talking to itself too much on Twitter and not appearing inclusive	⚠ Discoverability on the site is not fantastic ⚠ There is no native (within-site) way of sharing	⚠ Using it as the only 'screen' for your content – it can be very difficult to find things on YouTube unless viewers have searched specifically for your content or channel or you have paid YouTube to promote it. Embedding a YouTube video elsewhere where your audience will see it is a better protocol ⚠ Building subscribers to a YouTube channel can take a resource and regularity that is beyond the means of many arts organisations

How else can I get my work in front of new audiences?

Windrush: Movement of the People | Phoenix Dance Company © Brian Slater

The Space's Head of Distribution Sarah Fortescue sums up her approach to online distribution in one word:

Partnerships

Thinking imaginatively about partnerships

Sarah says the first step for any online distribution strategy is to think about who your piece of content might speak to beyond your traditional audience. *"Ask yourself: what is the subject matter of this work? What are its themes? Next, think laterally about which audiences those subjects and themes might appeal to, and then think about where those audiences might be online.*

"The next step is to approach those online channels and make a case for partnering with them or for them hosting your content by clearly articulating how your content is relevant to their audience. In my experience, people often say yes if you can demonstrate that you understand their audience and content."

Sarah describes a project she worked on with the contemporary dance company Candoco for The Space. *"As Candoco is made up of disabled and non-disabled dancers, I thought that the national disability equality charity Scope might be interested. I also thought – given the nature of the piece – that the viral content website Upworthy could be a good partner. Upworthy promotes positive and progressive news and were happy to run a feature on the show."*

Scope shared Candoco's Facebook post with their own Facebook audience and a feature on the Candoco dancer Jess Dowdeswell was watched by over 3 million people through the Upworthy site.

Sarah had another success promoting the live capture of 5 Soldiers by the Rosie Kay Dance Company. The contemporary dance piece explores the physicality of combat. The company already had a relationship with the British Army from their research on the show and Sarah explains how that fed into their distribution strategy:

"We thought that an audience who might really respond to the work – but who might not find themselves in front of much dance press – was British service personnel. So I advised that the Rosie Kay team partner the British Army on Facebook to promote the piece. As they already had a relationship, it was straightforward for them to reach out."

5 Soldiers was broadcast live from an army base in London by BBC Arts Online, The British Army and Sadler's Wells. It had more than 45,000 views and many service personnel actively commented during and after the live stream on Facebook.

Partnerships like these can bring your work to audiences well beyond fans of your art form and can be an effective way of building new audiences online.

Sarah offers her advice on how to brainstorm partners that could work for you.

Ask yourself:

- **What are the messages in this content?**

- **Who do we want to see this who aren't existing arts audiences and how do we get them in front of it?**

- **Who are the organisations that will be interested in the themes of this content?**

- **Who are potential ambassadors for this work, either because of their relationship with us as an organisation or because of their interests?**

Digital Live – Tongue Fu

Partner brands can add stardust, not just numbers

In terms of partnerships, it's also worth thinking about the context they provide for your work. Certain brands can add stardust and authority to your project. These sites may not be where your work gets the most views or clicks, but may give kudos to your project that adds considerable value.

Sarah describes working with the architecture collective Assemble on a film project which documented the creation of Granby Winter Garden in Liverpool. *"We explored what contacts Granby Winter Garden already had and then pitched a story on the project including a 360-degree video to the influential architecture, interiors and design magazine Dezeen. Assemble had developed a good relationship with Dezeen in the past and the magazine agreed to host the video and still photographs alongside an article about the project on their website exclusively for a month."*

For Sarah, this was an ideal partnership that put the project into the spotlight but that also – crucially – did it on an influential platform that brought it to the attention of opinion-makers in that sector.

Making your content into a story makes it easy for partners

When you are approaching partners, especially news and arts websites, you need to think like a journalist and transform your piece, its stars or its themes into a narrative with a hook. You also need to make it clear when you contact them why the content is relevant to them and will resonate on their site.

Sarah explains: *"I like to think about it as a hybrid of PR and digital marketing – pitch a story with an angle and then offer embedded content (perhaps a video, or 360 footage, or a selection of high-quality still photographs) within the article as a kind of payoff for readers."*

For a project with the New Zealand choreographer Corey Baker about Antarctica, Sarah pitched to the news site Buzzfeed. The key to this partnership was researching the type of content that works on Buzzfeed, and also where within the Buzzfeed platforms content works best. Sarah explains: *"We knew that Buzzfeed gets its most clicks on the articles on the main site so – as well as the Antarctica content being promoted through Buzzfeed's social media channels – it existed first and foremost as an article with embedded video on the main Buzzfeed site."*

Sarah says that offering embedded YouTube or Vimeo videos to other sites is a good way to showcase your content to their audiences. In terms of destinations for embedded video, don't just think about big news platforms, think about who is in your peer network who might host your video content on their site – perhaps the theatres your production will tour to, for example. Make these people into online distribution partners too.

Are there other online distribution channels I should consider?

Creative platform choices

The key to successful distribution is to really think through what the content you're offering is, who it is for and where they will find it.

Sarah Fortescue, The Space's Head of Distribution, says: *"Depending on your content, there may well be other, more specialist distribution channels that you should consider. For example, on the artist Rhiannon Armstrong's Slow GIF Movement project for The Space we knew we needed to think GIF and that meant approaching Giphy – the online database and search engine for GIFs."*

Furthermore, lots of platforms are actively seeking creative content. It's your job to find them and make the right pitch to them. Once again, do your research.

Sarah describes: *"For choreographer Jonathan Watkins' production 1984 for Northern Ballet, The Space helped broker a very clever partnership with WeTransfer, the file transfer platform. WeTransfer supports creative work in its WePresent strand, through which the company profiles artists and showcases new projects.*

"Under this banner, 1984 was available to stream on WeTransfer for a limited time. It was a really imaginative way to get this dance piece to a much broader audience."

Staging Schiele – Shobana Jeyasingh Dance

On-demand platforms

It's competitive to get your work onto on-demand digital platforms but Sarah says not to be put off by this if you really believe your content could work there.

She advises that you research the platform in detail and approach commissioners (especially any broadcasters) well in advance of the project opening, explaining clearly why you think it would be right for them and their audiences.

She says: *"It may seem like a dark art approaching commissioners but these platforms can be worth exploring as they are looking for exciting content. After all, if you don't ask, you don't get!"*

On demand platforms include:

▪ **BBC iPlayer**

▪ **Netflix, Amazon and Apple TV**

▪ **Marquee TV, which hosts arts content**

▪ **Digital Theatre and Digital Theatre+**

  Digital Theatre+ hosts performance content for educational use and Digital Theatre is its sister platform where individuals can watch theatre productions online.

Part 3: What?

What content works

Dos and Don'ts for creating great social media content

Rob Lindsay
Digital Producer, The Space

What to do

DO: Focus your efforts. One effective piece of content is far, far more beneficial to you than a wealth of poorly performing material.

DO: Assume that your reader, viewer or listener has no idea who you are. Great social content attracts an audience by being shareable, and that means that it needs to be just as engaging to a complete stranger as it is to your existing audience.

DO: Consider in advance what point you're trying to make about your organisation or its work, and then develop that into a story that your target audience cares about. This isn't a new idea, it's the basis of most of the positive press coverage that your organisation has ever generated. Think of your content as a press story that you're creating yourself, not a marketing brochure.

DO: Prepare a script outline for any audio/video content, in order to test whether or not your story is as compelling in practice as in concept. You can develop your story further when you come to edit, depending on what you manage to record, but writing a script outline first will quickly show you any gaps you have in your narrative and should be the first use of your valuable time and energy.

DO: Give yourself permission to edit the material in order to most effectively tell your story. This is the case even if it's just text and photos, and especially if it's sound or video. Efficient, effective storytelling is key, so don't just cut out bloopers and repetition, cut out great material if it doesn't contribute to the point you're trying to make with this piece of content. You can always save it and use it somewhere else as part of another story.

What not to do

DON'T: Forget to establish your story up front, and hook people's attention. You won't do that if your video starts with logos slowly fading in and out, or your podcast rambles for three minutes before you introduce your topic and contributors. Stop parading yourself and start communicating, quickly.

DON'T: Take people's attention for granted. There's no perfect length for an article, podcast or video, but be brutal with yourself. How much of people's time do you honestly need to ask them for, in order to make your point?

DON'T: Wrap your message in acronyms, jargon and industry speak. Viewers, readers and listeners will not pause your story while they go and look up the meaning of unfamiliar words. They'll just switch off, forget about you, and you'll have failed as a communicator.

DON'T: Neglect your social copy. Whatever content you decide to create, when you publish it, you'll need to type in a title, and probably a caption. This is where a number of publishers unintentionally undermine the strength of their own content. By filling out your caption field with "Check out our new video!" or "Listen to the latest podcast in our series" you've given readers precisely no reason to do so. Don't neglect this opportunity to demonstrate value, even with a simple quote or headline from the piece itself.

DON'T: Forget to use text in the videos that you create. 85% of Facebook videos are watched without sound, by people on commutes, in offices, on the sofas of family living rooms with the TV on in the corner. As well as subtitles, text lets you quickly impart statistics, set out bold headlines, and introduce contributors through captions, while they get on with talking about your story. If you're not using text on your screen, you're denying yourself a valuable and effective communication tool.

Part 4: How?

How to help people find your content: search engines, social media and seeding

Victoria – Northern Ballet © Guy Farrow

What can I do to give my content the best chance?

Manuela Rotstein
Digital Consultant

i: Search Engine Optimisation

If you have created a beautiful piece of digital content, you want it to be seen by as many eyes as possible. That means you need to make it 'discoverable' so potential audiences come across it.

But, with so much content online fighting for attention, how can you do that?

One key method is Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This means ensuring that the content of your website is easily 'found' by Google and other search engines. It's all about how your website is worded and built and takes time to get right, but can pay enormous dividends in terms of building audiences.

SEO expert Manuela Rotstein shares her advice for arts organisations.

Discover your strengths through keyword search

What is the most evocative language you can use for your audience that will motivate people to buy a ticket, attend your event, watch your live stream or promote your show? Keyword research can provide clues, giving you a way to understand your potential audience better.

You can find out how popular your potential keywords are using a Google tool called Google Keyword Planner, which anyone with a Google account can access here. By dropping your potential keywords into this tool you can see what their search popularity is and will find that some words have stronger traction than others.

Take a look at your current online visibility around the search terms you feel you should rank well or highly in: how easy is it to find you?

At this point, you can make an educated decision about your editorial choices, such as the title of future projects, their descriptions and the ways you promote them to your audience online. You can also rewrite or edit existing content where necessary to improve relevance and ranking in searches.

Think about how to integrate with your audience's agenda

Your target audience searches Google a lot. But what are they searching for?

Take a group of friends spending a weekend in Manchester – what are they searching? The keywords "things to do in Manchester" have 40,500 searches a month, while "Manchester theatre" has, on average, 33,000 monthly searches.

People follow quite a structured pattern when searching for art content and events, as they go from spreading a wide net, to researching several options. For example, "theatre reviews" has 3,600 monthly searches and narrowing down to a specific offer and buying tickets leads to "Manchester theatre tickets" with 1,300.

If people find you when they are searching, you can invite them to join in with whatever you are offering.

Explore past projects similar to yours on Google Keyword Planner and look at the search results pages and related searches at the bottom.

Once you have identified users' search patterns, prioritise those that have the most potential for your organisation or project based on volume of searches, whilst striking a balance in terms of relevance. Then build landing pages on your website that address their queries, using their language and thinking of their intent. Make sure you think through your title and description and ensure that it's something your audience will want to click on.

In order to build your landing pages in a way search engines can understand, get to know your content management system (CMS) and learn how to use the basic SEO elements: URL, H1, H2, meta titles and meta descriptions for search listings. I would recommend including your keywords in the URL and in the title, and making your meta-title and meta-description clear and compelling.

Use your star talent

For search engines, people are an important element in the definition of any work of art. IMDb, for instance, puts the cast list next to the title and the description. Whether or not it features high profile artists, talent or celebrities, your project is likely to be searched for by the names of people in it.

Create content around all the people in your team or production, such as names, portraits and a brief biography. On top of that, a personal quote by each team/ production member, a distinctive image or a short exclusive video clip will provide a unique experience for your audience. Search engines will reward you for that by boosting your place in the listings.

Make sure your content will work for everyone

When adding visual content, make sure you work to good accessibility practices. Ensure alt text is included, which describes what is happening in an image, and add subtitles to your video clips. This will make your project accessible to all audiences, enhance the experience for everyone and improve searchability.

Build your network and Google will discover you

Due to the way that Google works, it is important to build a good network of referrals – links to your project or organisation from partner sites. These digital referrals will ensure your project is discovered and will "transfer" authority to you in the eyes of users and search engines alike.

Make it last

Develop a simple set of SEO guidelines for future site content and review SEO presence regularly.

Staging Schiele – Shobana Jeyasingh Dance

If you are short on time or expertise in house, you can get an SEO audit done by a freelance consultant or agency, with recommendations for what to focus on and how to do it. It can be done quickly and at a reasonable cost. The Space can offer this as part of a digital audit. If you are interested in finding out more about this service, please get in touch.

What can I do to give my content the best chance?

ii: Social media algorithms

Most of the channels we've spoken about use algorithms to decide what content to show you – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube.

As a result of their algorithms, all these platforms register how well content is performing and how many views, likes and shares it's getting. They are specifically looking at how well the content does in its first 24 hours on the site and then checking in on it day by day.

As a result, don't publish and leave to fester. Your publication strategy needs to be geared around getting maximum hits in the content's first 24 hours online.

You can't do this alone. You will need other advocates and supporters to draw people to your content in order to show the algorithms that your content is popular as soon as possible.

What you need is a seeding strategy.

Minimalism Changed My Life – Paraorchestra with Charles Hazelwood
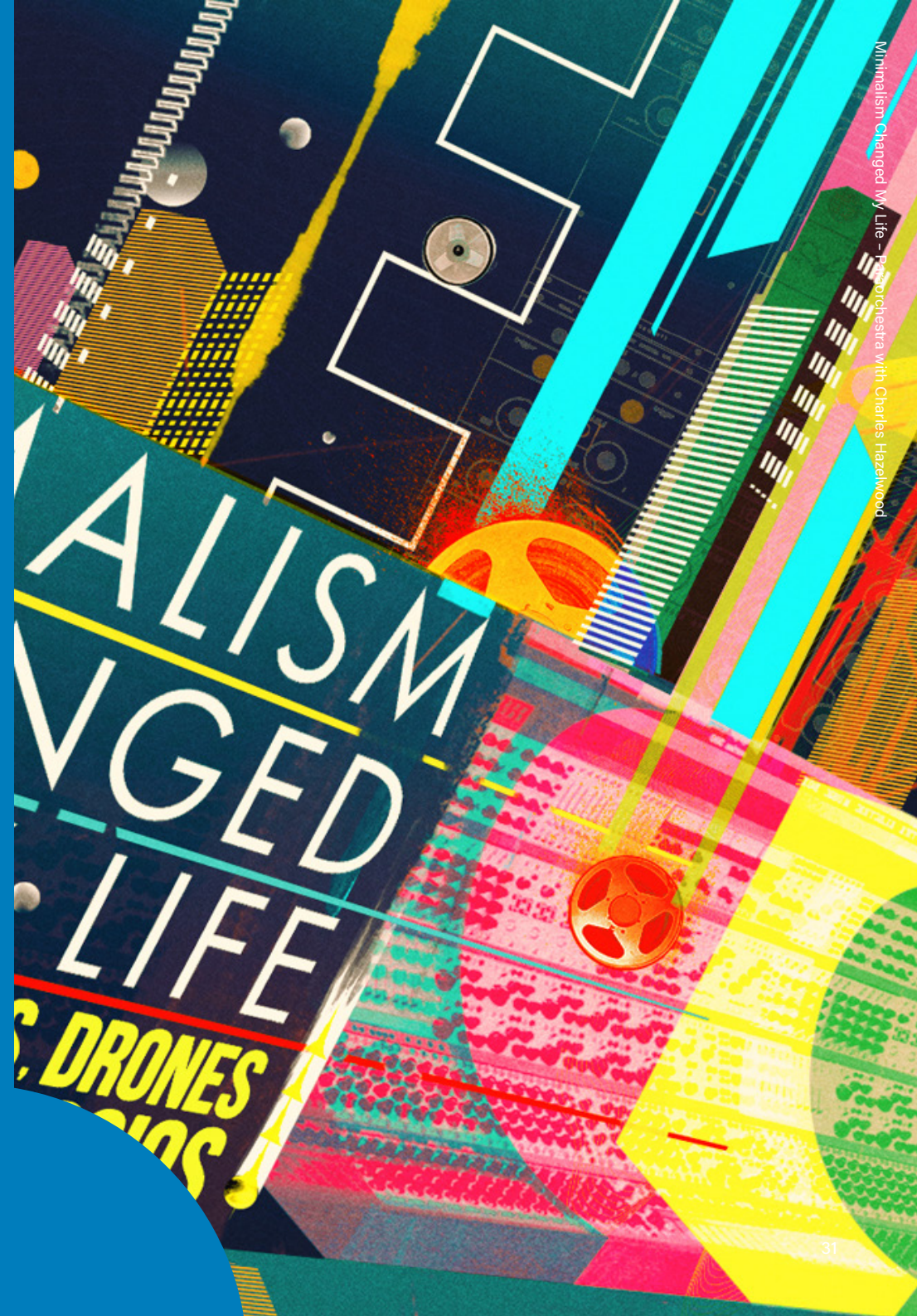
What is seeding and how can I do it?

Seeding: an introduction

Rob explains what seeding means:

"Seeding boils down to telling someone that you have made something great and asking them to share it."

It is using publishers, partners and influencers to share your content on social media in order to reach bigger audiences which will in turn give your content a boost and make it even more visible thanks to those algorithms. And to make that happen, you need a seeding strategy. First, a quick explainer…

Seeding strategies

A successful seeding strategy is the means to get the word out there about your content and – with the help of your networks, influencers and cheerleaders – generate views and a buzz around it.

And you need help. That means approaching partners, news sites and influencers and pitching your content to them with impact by explaining why it would be great for their audiences.

When you make these approaches, don't go cap in hand as if you are begging for a favour. If you have made a really good piece of editorial content, be proud to ask them to share it. *"It's about making good things and telling people they are there,"* Rob explains.

And then you need to time things with your new partners to generate the 'hit' the algorithms are looking for. This means coordinating timings with them around the launch of your content and asking them to act at a particular time (within the first 24 hours of it being uploaded).

Content can be uploaded onto sites such as Facebook and YouTube without being public so you can show it to your potential partners ahead of the launch date. Likewise, on Vimeo you can password protect your videos until you are ready to publish. This means you can get your content lined up, your partners can preview and then you can go live with them all sharing within the key 24-hour launch window.

Native sharing

Native sharing is sharing within a platform – if a platform has a 'share' button, it means users can share content to their followers without leaving that site. Native sharing is something that Facebook, Twitter, Soundcloud and others make easy.

Non-native sharing

Non-native sharing means people have to go to a different website in order to share existing content. For example, a YouTube video – although it is hosted on YouTube – can be 'embedded' to view on other sites. This can be extremely useful. Tweets can also be embedded, which means they can work as news or feature content on blogs and other websites.

The Space's Top 5 Tips
For approaching potential publishers and partners

1 **First, ask yourself: who are your target audience following?**

Search on Facebook or Twitter by topic and make a list of publishers and partners who your target audiences are following AND who you think your content will work for.

2 **Email them with personalised messages. If there is no option to do that, direct message (DM) on social media.**

3 **Before you write your emails, ask yourself: why should they care?**

As the creator/creative, remember the reason they will care is nearly always different to the reason you care.

4 **Be clear about what you are asking for**

At its core, you are contacting them because you can offer something of interest to their followers/audiences, but what is that and what do you need them to do?

5 **Do the hard work for them**

Make their job easier – give them a range of stills and/or video clips and write suggested copy for their website or their social media platforms.

What are my options if I have some money to pay for digital marketing activity?

Sarah Fortescue, Head of Distribution at The Space, says it is sometimes worth paying for adverts on social media in order to target your desired audience. She explains: *"By paying for ads, you make your content more targeted than you could ever hope to achieve yourself. Social media companies hold lots of data on people and paying for sponsored content is the No.1 way of making those assets and algorithms work in your favour.*

"There are currently 2.5 billion monthly active users on Facebook. Targeting means you can navigate to the people amongst them who are most likely to be interested in your content. Using their systems, you can list the demographics, geographical location, interests (and much more) of your target audience and the platform will seek out matches on the site. All the personal details are anonymised but if you are trying to get to a certain audience, it can be a really clever way to find them."

And needless to say, a platform like Facebook has made it really easy and user-friendly to use their targeting software.

Rob describes one Facebook paid-for service that can work well for arts organisations, depending on their aims: Look Alike Audiences. It works by taking, say, 1000 of your followers and analyses their likes, dislikes, demographic, etc. and then finds 1000 more people like your followers and reaches out to them to see if they are interested in following you too.

Ads can hugely increase the visibility of your content and therefore your brand – from cutting through to your target audience to giving your video content priority on YouTube. And with social ads you can do a lot with a a small two or three-digit budget.

Sarah describes a project where social ads delivered: *"For Corey Baker's dance piece Antarctica, we thought that one group who would be interested was people who were concerned about climate change. It was by using paid-for targeting that we were able to get the content in front of them and bring our target audience to the work,"* Sarah explains.

Furthermore, Google Ads has a great deal for charitable organisations, which many arts, cultural and heritage organisations are. For registered charities approved by Google, it offers free Google Adword advertising spend worth $10,000 a month. This means that charities can appear in the 'sponsored' box that comes up at the top of a Google search results page on certain terms if they use their budget to bid on these terms. This visibility enables those organisations to potentially compete with commercial and large organisations. It may be hard to do this for terms which are broad, and which many organisations are interested in bidding on, so the best way is to be really specific about the words you choose and also to review this regularly. You can also use the budget when you are launching a specific activity if that makes it go further.

Sarah says: *"In the online life of any digital content you don't have long to build up optimisation, but Google's free ad spend can make you much more visible, which is why I always encourage arts organisations to look into it.*

"For example, if you have just launched a live stream of your production of Hamlet, you will have a lot of competition on a Google search. However, if you use Google ads and play around with key words to ensure you have optimised your messaging, someone typing in 'Hamlet production' might find your stream. This just wouldn't be possible without promoted content."

I've published, now what?

When you are in the middle of a busy project or production, what to do afterwards may be the last thing on your mind. But you need to think about what comes next: if you attract a crowd, have you got more to offer them, and what will they want to do next?

As The Space's Digital Producer Rob Lindsay outlines:

"Have a plan – are you geared up for success? If you are looking for a younger audience for your work, are you going to offer a deal on student tickets to get them into your building? If you have a podcast and it's a hit, when will the next episodes land?

"A good analogy is a successful first date: why would you put all that effort into choosing the perfect restaurant, picking an outfit and ensuring the conversation flows easily if you are never going to contact that person again?"

Sarah also stresses how far-reaching the impact of a digital success can be for a cultural organisation. *"A hit can give you data that will inform the marketing plan for your next production; it can give you information that will help you to pitch for another digital project and improve on the last one; it can increase your brand equity and visibility, give you more insight into your audience, including where they are geographically, which might inform your touring plans... A digital success can impact the whole organisation."*

But the key to gaining the kinds of information described above and the final – and perhaps most important – stage in your digital audience development strategy is to measure your engagement and success.

Victoria – Northern Ballet © Emma Kauldhar

Part 5:

Metrics and measurement

Tony Iommi at Home of Metal – Capsule © Katja Ogrin

John White
Chief Operating Officer, The Space

Why measurement is important

Put simply, it's only by tracking the performance of your content – whether that's your website, email newsletter or social media posts – that you will know whether what you are doing is effective. And it's only by knowing how effective your content is that you can finesse your strategy and grow your audiences further.

What is 'success'?

When you start working to develop your digital audience, it's key that you ask yourself:

What does success look like for us?

The answer will not be the same for every artist or organisation and will dictate not only what you focus on doing, but also what you choose to measure (your 'metrics').

There is a broad spectrum of results that a cultural organisation might be aiming to get out of an interaction with their digital audience – it could be raising brand awareness, getting more sign-ups to an email newsletter, getting people to buy tickets to an event, increasing the number of repeat visitors to the host venue… The list goes on, so be sure you are clear about what your aims are.

Sanctuary Reach – Sanctuary Lab

Be wary of competitors

When you are thinking about what 'good' and 'successful' would look like for you or your organisation, don't get too caught up in comparisons with competitors.

It can be useful to look at competitors' activity to see what types of content they are publishing online and how well it is being received/engaged with. However, comparisons are not necessarily useful. Always bear in mind the scale and resources of those organisations (which may not compare with your own), where they started from (they may have been publishing social media content for years) and what they are trying to achieve (which may be different from your goals and therefore give their content a different focus).

Indeed, if your aim is to get 50 followers to a craft fair, it is no use coveting a million followers from all over the world. It would be more useful to have 200 people who live locally who are really engaged in craft and who – with the right content – you can entice to your event. Always keep your goal front and centre – big is not necessarily best.

Windrush: Movement of the People – Phoenix Dance Company © Brian Slater

What you should be looking for

John suggests that, when choosing what to measure, it can help to simplify things if you think of metrics in three broad categories:

Reach:
How widely your content goes

For example: how much traffic you get on your website, how many people view your social media posts or YouTube videos.

Engagement:
How deeply your content goes

For example: how long people read/watch/listen to your content for, how long people stay browsing on your website, whether people 'like' or share your content, etc.

Conversion:
How successfully you 'convert' those interactions into your desired behaviour

For example: how many of your online audience go on to buy a ticket/sign up to your email newsletter/click through to your website, etc.
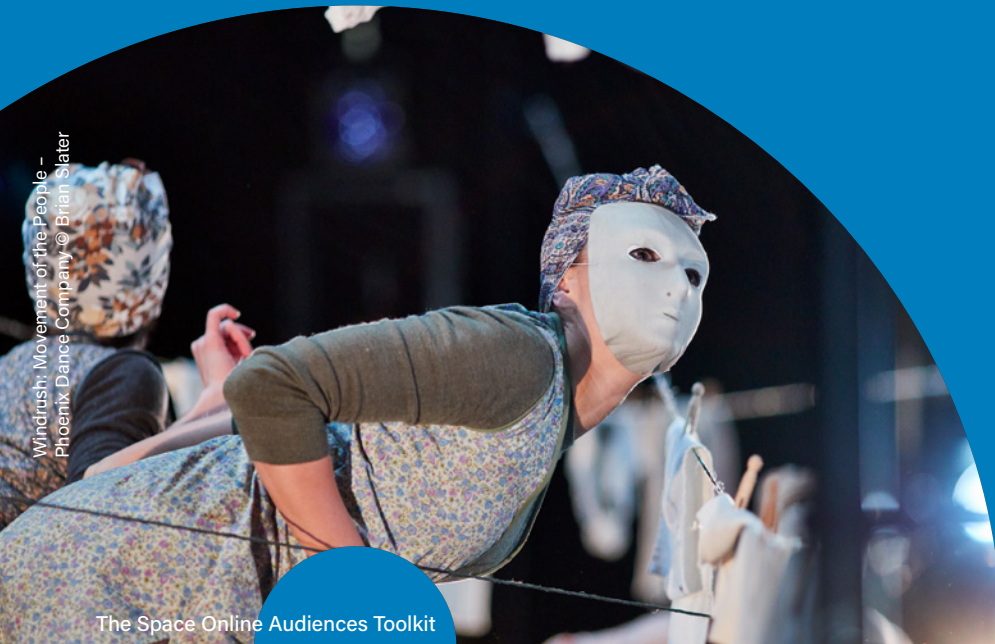
What data to measure

Finding data to measure your performance online is not an issue – there is an abundance of free analytics tools, including those built into the big social media platforms. The challenge is knowing what it means and how it can be made useful to your organisation.

Keep going back to the question, 'What does success look like for us?' With the answer to that in mind, you can then decide which are the best tools to measure your progress with. From there, the key is to focus on as few metrics as possible to get the information that you need.

John says: *"I think the best approach is to ask yourself 'If I knew the answer to this, what would I do with that information?' If you don't know, drop it.*

"Knowing how you would action things is key to knowing what to measure. For example, perhaps when you see that certain types of social media videos are shared and liked more, you can decide to resource more of them. Or perhaps realising that people watch your videos for less than 3 seconds but the articles on your site get good read times will change your approach. Good measurement can alter your content strategy and how you focus your team's time."

Where to start

The starting point for good measurement is that all-important Audiences Audit. It is vital that you establish where you are at the beginning of the process and get baseline results for your chosen metrics – this might include your current number of followers on different platforms, traffic levels on your website, average watch duration on your video content, or whatever you want to see improvements in.

It's important to get these baseline results before you begin any activity, so that you can measure change and improvement.

How measurement might work in practice

Once you have established your baseline and your measures of success, where should you focus your attention next?

John says: *"I would say the next step is to look at the audience behaviours that are immediately adjacent to your key objective and assess those. For example, if I was looking at ROI (Return on Investment) and wanted to increase the number of transactions on my website, I would look at my payment process and see how many people 'drop out' at different stages of the purchase – if the greatest percentage of drop-outs is at page three of a four-page payment process, I would first look at ways to improve that part of the process, since that could have the greatest impact on overall results. Even a 5% reduction in drop out levels at one part of the process could have a significant impact on your bottom line.*

"Alternatively, I might be looking at increasing the number of people who click through from my weekly email newsletter to my main website. If this was the case, I could experiment with different headlines and measure what headlines resulted in an improved click-through rate, thereby measuring my desired 'conversion'."

However, John emphasises that when you are looking at the data, it's important to step back and think about the context of the user's experience.

He explains: *"It's easy to think that having visitors spending a longer time on your website is a good thing. But that's not the case if the user is lost and can't find the information they are looking for. Perhaps they are looking to find directions to your venue – if it takes them five minutes to find this information, that's poor, whereas five minutes reading an article may be good.*

"Likewise, if you have a collections page, think through what you want the user experience to be – do you want people to browse between pages discovering content serendipitously, to navigate to key items quickly or be able to do both depending on their task on the day?"

There are also useful data that you can track aside from standard metrics. For example, John suggests that you might want to use your web analytics to track failed searches within your website (ones that return zero results). This information can enable you to either reconfigure your site so that people can find the content they're looking for more easily and/or create content around those failed searches, because you know there is a customer demand for it.

Also remember to measure your 'churn' or drop-out rate – the number of people unsubscribing from your newsletter, dropping out of your payment system, and so on. These are also important clues to what isn't working.

Amazing Men – Eggs Collective

A word of warning: what the data can't show you

There are some things that the metrics are very good at: showing you how many people are engaging with your content, how deeply they are engaging with it and on certain sites you can see specifics including the gender split or geographical location of your audience (Facebook) or how they navigated to the site (YouTube).

However, you will not get any personal details through these analytics tools like names or contact details – everything is anonymised.

It's also important to note that it is difficult to read across the different platforms and marry up the individuals on one platform to those on another.

However, you can use social platforms to segment your digital audience by interests and this can allow you to look at their behaviours and preferences in a focused way and be highly targeted in how you promote your content online.

How often to share the results

When reporting on digital analytics, be very wary of generating miles of reports that sit in inboxes unread and (worse) are never considered or actioned. If you don't give yourself time to review and reflect and if you don't know that you will have the time and resources to take action on the insights generated, then there is little point in investing the effort to gather and report on the data in the first place.

John says: *"Always ask yourself, 'What information do I need to share, for what purpose and who with?'*

"Then diarise when regularly you are going to collect the information and distribute the information. You might want to consider setting up your Google Analytics account to send an automated email containing the data you are interested in at regular intervals to a chosen distribution list.

"But you also need to think about creating a process for reviewing and actioning what you find. Are you going to meet monthly/quarterly to discuss the results and decide how you are going to act on the findings? This process is important even if you are just an individual artist or one-person team."

Finally, remember to keep setting targets as part of this measurement and review process. The key in all these discussions is to keep that initial question in your mind throughout:

"What does success look like for us?"

The Space is currently working with The Audience Agency, the BBC and NESTA on a digital audience metrics framework for the cultural sector.

Appendix

Getting started with Google Analytics

Google Keyword search

A Beginner's Guide to SEO

What are keywords?

Making the right landing page

Make the most of your YouTube Channel

The Campaign Playbook
This campaign planning 101 gives you all the info and digital marketing tools to run brilliant online campaigns.

The Space's Digital Rights Toolkit
What is required for publishing work digitally in terms of rights.

Case Study on A Mile in My Shoes
An award-winning podcast for a global audience.

Case Study on Circus Arts Scotland
Expanding audiences with social media assets.

Case Study on the Rosie Kay Dance Company
Reaching outside traditional arts audiences.

For further resources and case studies and for information about The Space projects mentioned in this toolkit please visit The Space website **Build skills** and **Our commissions** sections.

the space

The Space is a commissioning and development organisation, established by Arts Council England and the BBC to support greater digital access to the arts. The Space is committed to supporting and facilitating the UK arts sector to realise its digital ambitions. The organisation commissions arts projects, offers online audience and digital skills development, and provides a production and distribution pipeline to ensure that these projects reach a wide and diverse range of audiences.

Email: contactus@thespace.org

Edited by Natalie Woolman