



Audience Ninja | Changing the profile of audiences through Strategic Touring Funding Quarantine | The Audience Agency

Quarantine is a Manchester-based company that makes contemporary theatre and other public events which place everyday life centre stage. In their words, they: “seek to create the circumstances for a conversation between strangers”. For artists at Quarantine, Strategic Touring funding meant they could start new conversations with different types of strangers, who they might not otherwise have had the chance to meet.

The project aims were partly about growing audiences (both developing existing audiences’ tastes and range of artistic experience and connecting with new audiences who don’t normally engage with the arts), and partly about improving the infrastructure for touring companies.

Quarantine chose three pieces of work to tour, all of which had been ‘road-tested’. Easily portable, they were located in public places. The audience focused approach meant they started by removing many of the typical barriers to engagement; from placing the work in familiar community settings, to ensuring that all performances were free, to limiting the need for pre-booking.

With the social, economic and physical barriers removed, the psychological barriers of risk-taking and feeling it’s ‘not for the likes of me’ were addressed through work on the ground in the communities, and a Local Ambassadors scheme.

Audience Ninja

The Audience Agency was involved from early in Quarantine’s Strategic Touring project, helping to articulate audience aims and to develop a robust approach to measuring impact.

Quarantine appointed a new 'Audience Ninja', which The Audience Agency supported through offering specialist advice and tailored training over the course of the project. This included one-to-one support on how to gather qualitative information, which was essential for learning about how audiences, ambassadors and partners felt about their experiences and the impact that engagement had on individuals.

Throughout the project the qualitative research was undertaken directly by the Audience Ninja, ensuring consistency in methodology. It also represented an important element of the role, helping to build relationships and creating spaces for reflection and evaluation, to enable the rest of the programme to be adjusted in response to the learning. Delivery Partners, project artists, and local ambassadors were also given the responsibility of gathering postcode data from audiences, which The Audience Agency mapped and profiled as part of the wider project evaluation.

The Work

Quarantine toured three pieces of work. **The Soldier's Song** is an installation made with and about serving soldiers. Audience members are invited to enter a karaoke video booth and share an encounter with someone who might fight in our name. **Table Manners** invites audience members to a one-to-one encounter with an artist, where they are bought lunch in exchange for a conversation, with a menu of topics available to choose from. **Between Us, We Know Everything...** collects all the useful and useless knowledge that we acquire. Audience members are invited to record a piece of knowledge in a mobile film studio. This is uploaded to the dedicated project website, creating an 'online map of knowledge': <http://www.betweenuswewknoweverything.com/>

Adapting Data Collection to Artform

Quarantine's original brief was that the tone and 'feel' of the research should fit with the work. Working with the Audience Ninja, we trialled new ways of gathering data in-keeping with the style of the work.

Ensuring data was gathered consistently across all venues, performances and was recorded in a consistent way was essential to the overall reporting and evidencing of the project outcomes.

The methodology was adapted for each performance, with information gathered in variety of different ways. This included gathering postcode at point of booking for Table Manners, an 'overheards' book to capture the conversation after people's experience at Between Us We Know Everything (BUWKE), and a comments book for The Soldier's Song.

People Made It Work

The Audience Ninja worked closely with the partners to establish what they were hoping to achieve from their involvement and what support they needed to bring the project to life. A tailored approach to working with local delivery partners was required, depending on their needs and aims. The process needed to be fluid, so ways of working with partners developed organically over the course of the project.

The Audience Ninja reflected that there is no 'one size fits all' approach for advocacy. There is no doubt though, that it was this investment in local networks and people at a grassroots level that made the project a success.

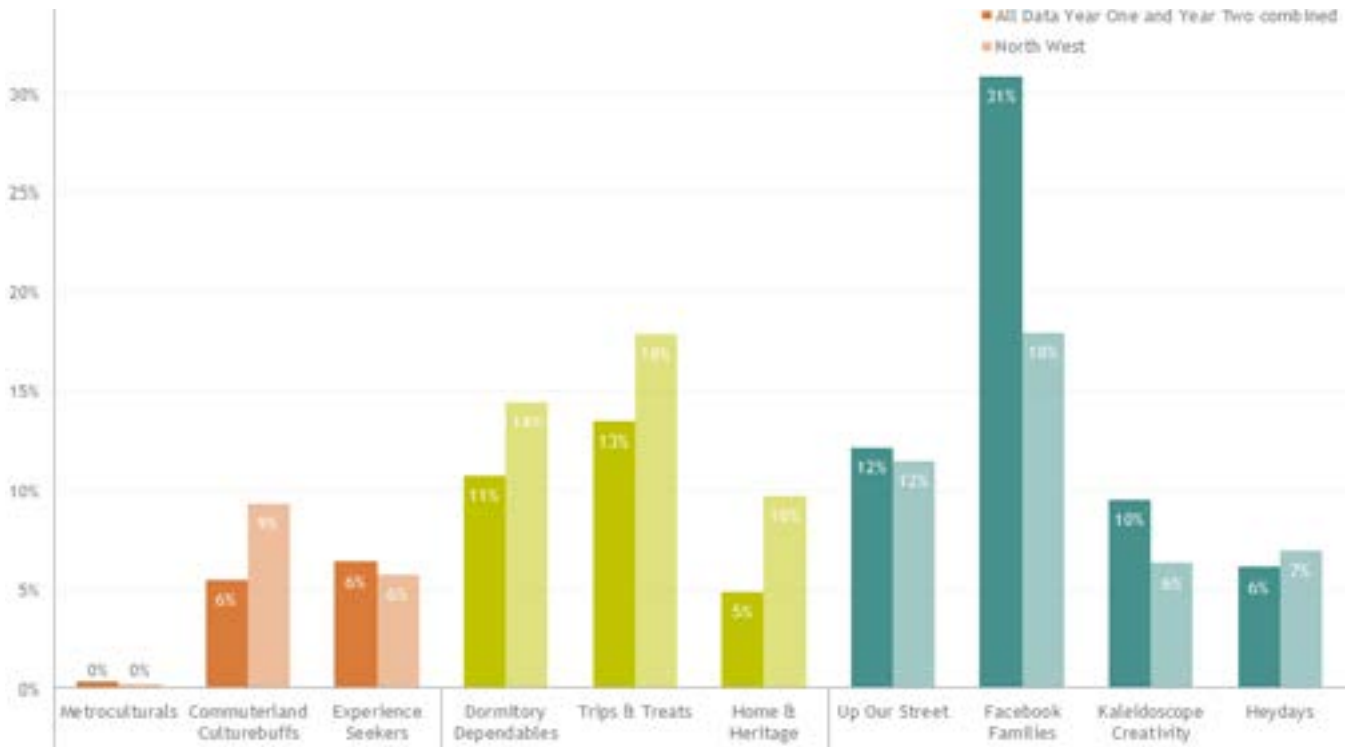
Having someone from their own community to say "actually, it is for the likes of you" is essential in asking people to take that jump.

Experience Seekers to Facebook Families

As part of the overall project report The Audience Agency mapped postcodes of attenders. Across both years (2014-2015), it was apparent that the work was successfully engaging local people. The majority of audiences were hyper-local, showing us that placing work directly inside the community was effective.

Quarantine's own audience profile for venue based work tends to form a standard pattern, with Experience Seekers forming 29% of the audience in a profile they had from shows performed in Manchester and Salford venues and Facebook Families only representing 9%. ([Click here](#) for in-depth information about Audience Spectrum segments)

The profile from the Strategic Touring project shifts this considerably with Experience Seekers making up just 6% of the overall audiences and Facebook Families making up over 31%.



Comparing their arts-venue-based profile to their Strategic Touring profile, there are other notable shifts: three of the four of the low-engaged groups are much more prevalent in the audience, one has stayed the same; all three high-engaged groups are less prevalent; two of the three medium-engaged groups are less prevalent, one has stayed the same.

Overall, the balance has shifted, giving a completely different picture of engagement: almost 60% of the audience were from low-engaged segments.

The Virtuous Circle

The findings from this project demonstrate that there's potential for contemporary work to be part of the cultural offer in areas that have low levels of engagement with the arts. That it needn't be just a safe, mainstream offer: assumptions about tastes can be challenged and new connections made if they are pitched right and resourced properly.

The increase in partners' confidence - not just in how to programme such work, but why they should - creates a virtuous circle: the touring companies have a bigger circuit to host their work and the host venues have more adventurous product available. And this revitalised offer then supports them in meeting their organisational aims.

All of this ultimately leads to communities in areas of low engagement having more opportunity to access great art, and build stronger connection with the place they live and the people around them.

[Read the Quarantine Everyday Places Everyday Participation report.](#)

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