

Ignite

The Royal Opera House and Deloitte

Introduction

The [A&B Cultural Branding Award for 2009](#) went to Deloitte and the Royal Opera House for their Deloitte Ignite Festival. Through clever use of social media, the Ignite Festival helped build brand visibility as well as create something outstanding that attracted younger people to the communities of both organisations. This case study highlights how digital technology (the online) can be a common ground for collaboration between arts and businesses as well as actual live activities.

Aims and objectives

This began with an unlikely, but mutually beneficial attraction. [Deloitte](#) are a major professional services firm providing audit, tax, consulting and corporate finance who employ 11,000 people. The majority of this workforce are in the age range 26-35. [The Royal Opera House](#) is known worldwide for the integrity and quality of its artistic programme and maintains significant support from government, peers and business leaders. However, despite these attributes, research had shown that the Royal Opera House was under represented among a young audience, as is a common challenge for the artform. Hence, the partnership was born out of a desire on both sides to illustrate their respective commitments to innovation and dominance in their field, as well as to share resources; in order for the Royal Opera House to reach a younger audience and for Deloitte to contact the clients of tomorrow through a demonstration of cultural authenticity. Deloitte have committed to funding this Festival for the next five years and are an enabling partner; without their support the Festival would not happen.

Deloitte Ignite Festival

The partnership resulted in [Deloitte Ignite 09](#), a three-day arts festival held at the Royal Opera House. There were thirteen pieces exhibited, including contributions from artists such as Julian Opie and Jane and Louise Wilson. User-generated content was part of the focus, with a public photographic competition run with flickr as well as an opera performance which took its inspiration from Twitter. These ideas were supplemented by a free ticketing policy which encouraged easy access to all this content.

In terms of marketing, the event was heavily promoted online through the Royal Opera House website as well as a dedicated Deloitte Ignite microsite. There was also strong promotion on MySpace,

Facebook, YouTube and dedicated blog posts. Although the marketing strategy took full advantage of social media trends, print still had a fair share of coverage with a twenty page pull out in Time Out, the Festival's media partner.

Outcome

The Festival attracted 8,758 attendees, exceeding the target of 7,000. The typical Royal Opera House audience is usually only 16% 26-35 years old, but 42% of attendees at the Festival fitted this age bracket, a massive increase, also 48% were first-time attendees. The response to media coverage was equally impressive.

The Festival met both partners' aims and objectives. Firstly, it allowed Deloitte to go beyond the traditional and the expected, which helped achieve their ultimate goal of being recognised as one step ahead.

The Royal Opera House, on the other hand, wanted to widen its audience base, so the Festival created initiatives specifically to appeal to a younger crowd. The dynamics that made this possible were heavily influenced by growing social media trends: instead of expecting the target group to come to them and respond to a presentation, the Royal Opera House adapted their offer into a conversation which their audience could engage with. One aspect of this was to make the prospect of opera appealing to an audience who do not usually engage with it. Therefore, something bold was needed: user-generated content.

This came in the form of the much publicized Twitter Opera, which consisted of user-submitted tweets set to music by Helen Porter. The procedure leading up to its fruition was intentionally experimental functioned as a digital version of a game of 'consequences' or a 'choose your own adventure story' except on a much larger level. This meant that a non-linear narrative was created by the public; definitely a first for the world of opera and an excellent example of innovation. The only part of the story given was the opening:

'One morning, very early, a man and a woman were standing, arm-in-arm, in London's Covent Garden. The man turned to the woman and he sang...'

Through text submitted by users, a farfetched tale was dreamt and then performed. The goal was that it would demystify opera and place it in the hands of the audience. Although the entire event won numerous amounts of praise, critics were not wholly impressed with what they saw as the art world merely jumping blindly onto a new fad. Had the Twitter Opera been implemented as an isolated experiment then the accusation may have an element of truth in it, however, it should be viewed within the wider Festival context.

We are beginning to learn through these case studies that collaboration with digital technology only works if the digital aspect is integral to the creation of the art itself, rather than using existing artforms to reference a new digital idea. Using Twitter did not add any explicit value to the form of opera, but it was a successful experiment in pushing boundaries and engaging audiences in an innovative way by embracing a new dynamic of conversation, rather than presentation. In the spirit of the partnership and the experimental nature of the Festival in general, it can definitely be seen as a success.

If there is one thing in particular to learn from the outcome of this partnership, it is the benefits of participating in co-creation. The arts have the content and engagement techniques to make a call to action from both existing and potential audiences that brands may not possess. Partnering in this fashion illustrates that cultural content is a valuable asset for building communities for both partners, but it has to be used under the correct guidance.

The future

This partnership and the resulting Festival have been a resounding success with much to teach others about the nature of successful partnerships between art and business. One of the benefits for Deloitte has been the involvement of its employees in something stimulating as well as rewarding with the option to volunteer at the Festival and attend other exclusive events. It has, therefore, unearthed creative potential in its own workforce, encouraging artistic inspiration at the very core of its operations. This has been enhanced through conversations across social media. Added to the association with innovation and cultural credibility that the partnership brought, this has been very successful for Deloitte and helped them achieve their objectives.

The future holds further employee engagement for Deloitte and further integration of technology into the Festival.