

OPEN TO PERSUASION

How can we persuade people to try something different?

Andrew McIntyre argues that the difference between arts attenders and non-attenders is simply motivation. We talk about attenders, intenders, resisters and rejectors and tend to have a picture in our mind of lots of people who would come to our events if only we could remove the barriers that stop them. He suggests that this picture is wrong: these people are not 'intenders', because they have no intention of attending. Why? Because we don't tell them what they will get out of it. If we thought of them as 'open to persuasion', then we would communicate much more effectively.

That's what this column is about. How can we use marketing communications to persuade people that they want to come to our events?

I've been talking with Oxford Contemporary Music's core audience, some of the most enthusiastic arts attenders I have ever met. They go to all sorts of arts events but are particularly committed to seeking out new musical experiences. One even resorts to going into Oxfam shops and buying second-hand cassette tapes at random to see if there is anything unfamiliar that he can follow up. But even these enthusiasts complain that it is difficult to find new music that they might enjoy.

'It seems to me that one of my major problems is how to find new music. That's why brochures and

things that come through mailing lists are so important... If you are not particularly intimately linked to the musical process, it's hard to find music in new places.'

They all saw choosing to go to a concert or gig as inherently risky: *'You're a punter, aren't you. You're going in there and placing a bet and the bet is "I bet I will like this". If you lose on the bet, well hard luck.'*

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Some of them didn't mind whether they won or lost because it was still a musical experience.

But for two types of attender it mattered a lot. The first are short of cash to spend on themselves:

'I don't have much money so I really have to choose the one I really want to go to. I have to go for the pieces that I've read about and really want to listen to. It's a big shame because I see lots of things I want to go to but I just can't afford it.'

The second type are people with very little spare time. They have to negotiate with their family to get any time to themselves and so they feel resentful if one of these rare opportunities to go out has been wasted:

'I have money but no time. My timetable dictates what I see, I'm afraid. There are often things I would like to see and I simply can't go... I'll jot down things that stand out and that interest me and if I can go, I'll go.'

Everyone I spoke to looked forward to receiving their OCM brochure because it is packed with unusual and unfamiliar music: *'That's part of the thrill. It's all so surprising. You open the brochure and you don't know what you'll find and that's very exciting.'*

Even though they felt that OCM only put on high quality music, they still found it difficult to choose:

'I go to concerts that I know about. I very rarely just pick someone because

they've got a nice name or something. I need to recognise something about it. I think it's terribly important that people like OCM put out a blurb that gives you enough information for you to learn if this new person is someone that you are going to be interested in.'

The fact is that even these enthusiasts need persuasion. ■

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