

Audience Insight Wales is an Arts Council Wales project delivered by Clearview to help arts organisations understand and develop their audiences by collecting, analysing and interpreting data. This is the first of a series of bulletins exploring themes emerging from the data. For further information please go to <http://www.clearviewbusiness.com/solutions/audience-insight-wales/>

Do you and your colleagues talk about “the dance audience”? If you’ve got a dance event coming up, do you contact everyone who has bought tickets for dance in the past year? The data from Audience Insight suggests you should think again.

I’ve analysed the 82,000 tickets worth £1.3m bought by 20,400 unique individuals for 468 live dance performances at 12 Welsh venues over three years between 1/4/2012 and 31/3/2015.¹ The results show that our perceptions of dance audiences are way off beam.

So let’s bust some of those myths.

Mythbuster #1: There’s no such thing as the dance audience

On average, ticket buyers purchased for 1.2 live dance performances in 2014/15. Over three years, average frequency increases to just 1.5 performances. That’s not hugely enthusiastic.

So, let’s define the dance audience as people who buy tickets for more than three live dance performances over three years. Just 6% of ticket buyers across the 12 venues fall into this definition.

It’s inescapable - most people just dip into dance: 76% of ticket buyers bought for just one dance performance over three years.

So where did this myth that most of the audience are dance enthusiasts come from? Well, it could be because over three years 33% of ticket buyers for live dance have only bought for dance. That sounds impressive. But 30% have only bought for one event of any kind during that time so of course they have only attended dance. Only 3% of ticket buyers for dance have bought more than once and only bought for dance.

Mythbuster #2: Increasing the number of dance performances doesn’t increase frequency of purchase

Maybe they are only occasionally buying tickets for live dance because there isn’t much dance to see. That could be true in the four venues that programmed fewer than six dance

¹ The venues are Aberystwyth Arts Centre; Chapter, Cardiff; Galeri Caernarfon Cyf; Sherman Cymru, Cardiff; The Riverfront, Newport; Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea; Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon; Theatr Clwyd, Mold; Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan; Torch Theatre, Milford Haven; Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff; Wyeside Arts Centre, Builth Wells.

performances in 2014/15. But, there were between nine and 26 performances in each of the other eight venues.

Most audiences seem to be happy just dipping into dance. This means that average frequency doesn't necessarily go up if you programme more dance. Average frequency at the venues programming more than 25 dance performances per year ranges between 1.2 and 1.6. Of the two venues with an average frequency of purchase at live dance of 1.6, one programmed 17 performances in 2014/15 and the other programmed 26.

Programming more dance usually, but not always, means an increase in the pool of people buying tickets for dance. As with all artforms, what is programmed has more impact than how many events are programmed.

Mythbuster #3: They are not dance audiences, they are arts audiences

Maybe audiences don't go to dance more often because they are too busy seeing other artforms. Let's look at the people who have bought for more than one event at the venue including dance. Do they go to other live performances? That's a big yes - 86% of their visits are to other artforms. Among the venues programming six or more dance events a year, the venues with the highest average frequency to all live events also have the highest frequency to dance.

It's really good news: your repeat attenders are all potential audiences for dance.

Mythbuster #4: They are not dance audiences, they are venue audiences

Most people don't travel to see dance. Ticket buyers for dance are more likely to be local than audiences overall with an average of 85% coming from inside the venue's catchment.

They appear venue loyal, too. Only 3% of them had bought tickets for dance at more than one of the twelve venues over three years. There was one exception. 24% of the relatively small pool of ticket buyers for dance at one of the Cardiff venues had also bought for dance elsewhere in Cardiff. At the other two venues with much bigger audiences for dance, 3% and 12% had bought for dance elsewhere in Cardiff.

Mythbuster #5: Dance audiences are not weird – they're like venue audiences

The Mosaic² profile of ticket buyers for dance is similar to the profile of ticket buyers for all events at each venue. Ticket buyers for dance are from all age groups but are less likely to be from financially challenged groups and more likely to be from Mosaic Groups with no children living at home and at least some disposable income than overall audiences at the venue. They are at least 25% more likely to be from these groups:

- A: City Prosperity - High status city dwellers living in central locations and pursuing careers with high rewards
- N: Urban Cohesion - Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity

² Mosaic is a geodemographic segmentation system created by Experian that divides the UK population into clusters depending on the characteristics of their neighbourhood.

- O: Rental Hubs - Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods

Mythbuster #6: There's no such thing as "dance"

We think of dance as everything from ballroom to ballet, but what do audiences think? The 12 venues categorise their dance events as ballet, commercial dance, contemporary dance, culturally-specific dance, dance theatre and other dance.

Two of the venues only present one style of dance. Only 10% of ticket buyers at the other venues bought tickets for more than one dance style. The biggest crossover was between ballet and dance theatre and between contemporary dance and other dance. Just 16% of ticket buyers for contemporary dance who bought for more than one dance style picked ballet.

One venue has regularly programmed live screenings of dance and live dance performances (almost exclusively contemporary dance) and has categorised them as both dance and cinema. Just 18% of ticket buyers for live screenings of dance have also bought for live dance performances. But this could be because all the live screenings but just one of the 46 live performances were ballet. Does this show that most ticket buyers don't crossover between live screenings and live performances or that they don't buy for both ballet and contemporary dance?

Ticket buyers for dance are more likely to buy tickets for another artform than for dance. They are arts omnivores, seeing a wide range of artforms. Ballet audiences are most likely to buy for cinema, drama and musicals. Dance theatre audiences are most likely to buy for musicals and drama. Audiences for contemporary dance are most likely to buy for drama and cinema and culturally-specific dance audiences for cinema, culturally-specific music and drama.

Mythbuster #7: Most people who participate in dance don't watch it

Just one venue consistently categorises events by both type of event and artform. Of 123 ticket buyers for adult dance workshops, just 11% have also bought tickets for live performances of dance.

Mythbuster #8: Dance is difficult to sell

It can certainly feel difficult, but maybe that's because our myths about audiences for dance mean we're talking about the wrong things to the wrong people. Here are my top tips for getting bigger audiences:

- Don't assume potential ticket buyers think of themselves as a "dance attender" let alone a "dance lover"
- Don't assume knowledge
- Talk about the things that will appeal to the general venue audience and use images that convey story and emotion (just like you would for drama and cinema)
- Of course you need to talk to the 6% of ticket buyers that make up the core dance audience but target them separately – and don't assume knowledge as they don't attend dance as often as you think

- Target the people most likely to buy tickets – they're your regular ticket buyers who haven't seen dance for a while, if at all
- Dismantle the dance ghetto on your website and in your season brochure. List events chronologically rather than by artform. That way they are more likely to catch the eye of your arts omnivores.

Finally, take a close look at your audiences for dance. Then you can do some mythbusting of your own.

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