ENGAGING OPERA'S NEW AUDIENCES

A RESOURCE GUIDE TO TURN RESEARCH INTO ACTION

Made possible with the generous support of
The Dr. M. Lee Pearce Foundation

OPERA AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

> " We need more room to experiment and fail at finding new audiences. That there's no universal playbook is one of the things that was scary, but also comforting, about the Understanding Opera's New Audiences study. There's no set recipe of '1 – 2 – 3' presto: new audiences!' "
>
> — Adam Scurto, managing director, external affairs, Central City Opera

Opera companies across North America have benefited in recent years from an influx of first-time operagoers. The great opportunity now is to bring them back — to cultivate these newcomers into a loyal audience for the future. In 2024, OPERA America published *Understanding Opera's New Audiences*, a national research study into the motivations, experiences, and barriers faced by these first-timers. The report offers key findings and detailed analyses of responses from over 11,000 operagoers across 36 opera companies of all budget sizes, geographies, and formats. It was produced in partnership with the cultural research firm Slover Linett at NORC, based at the University of Chicago.

Understanding Opera's New Audiences points to numerous avenues for additional inquiry, experimentation, and strategic action. It invites you — the staff and trustees at opera companies — to devise and test initiatives that inspire your first-time audiences to return, and to return more frequently.

This resource guide, *Engaging Opera's New Audiences*, picks up where the original report leaves off. It is designed to inspire you to respond to opportunities presented in the *Understanding* report and engage your new audiences, potentially in new ways. It offers insights into what members of the field are thinking about in response to the original research, a selection of possible tactical ideas you might consider at your company, and a framework for implementing some of these ideas in testable ways.

This guide is built around the voices of administrators, board members, and other professionals who shared their reflections on the research and their ideas for how it could be turned into action. The contributors are acknowledged for their important role in the guide's development on page 17.

Together, the research and the resource guide can be used to rethink your audience development efforts, inform your strategic planning, and engage your staff and board in cultivating loyal audiences for your company into the future.

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ENGAGING WITH THE RESEARCH

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Y ou need to engage with audience research before you engage your audiences. Research provides important insights into prevailing trends and issues affecting your newcomer audiences. By understanding your audiences, you can begin to take strategic action to fortify your relationship with them.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OPERA America's *Understanding Opera's New Audiences* offers insights into the motivations, experiences, and barriers faced by new opera audiences in the years following the pandemic.

The study reveals differences between ongoing audiences (who first attended before the pandemic) and newcomer audiences (who attended for the first time since 2020). Newcomers are more diverse in age, race/ethnicity, levels of income and education, and cultural appetite. Those who responded to the survey were enthusiastic about opera and expressed interest in coming back.

UNDERSTANDING OPERA'S NEW AUDIENCES

UNDERSTANDING
OPERA'S NEW AUDIENCES

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 2024   OPERA AMERICA | sloverlinett | NORC
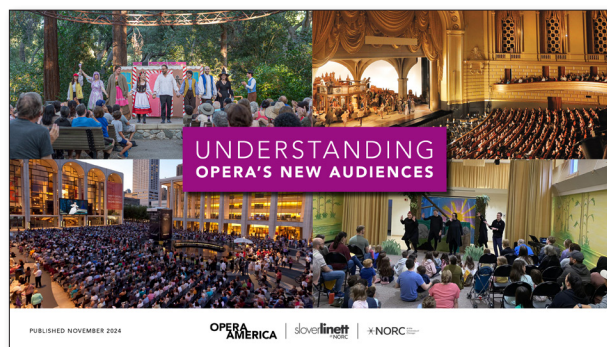
Read the full report at OPERAAMERICA.ORG/NEWAUDIENCES

The report's findings offer important takeaways in six areas:

1. EXPERIENCE
Newcomers are interested in a new "experience." They are drawn to the total theatrical and experiential spectacle of the operagoing outing.

2. TICKET PRICE
Newcomers identify price as a major barrier to repeat attendance. They are willing to pay in full for their first visit but see high ticket costs as preventing them from returning more frequently.

3. DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT
Newcomers listen to and watch opera recordings before and after they attend in person. Their first engagement with opera is often digital, and they rely on digital communications around performances.

4. DISORIENTATION
Newcomers who don't return report feeling disoriented at performances. They feel welcome when they arrive, but they leave feeling distanced by language, the length of the performance, and other factors.

5. REPERTOIRE
Many newcomers are initially motivated by the classics. They come in the door for well-known works of the inherited repertoire but still show interest in new work with contemporary resonance.

6. ECOSYSTEM
Newcomers attend different types of opera companies for different experiences. They turn to their cities' flagship companies for more traditional entry points and, in time, seek out alternative experiences from other companies.

STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVATING RESEARCH

The research findings point to numerous avenues for further inquiry and strategic experimentation. They offer insights to direct audience development efforts and inform strategic planning. But where and how can you get started?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Start by reading the *Understanding Opera's New Audiences* report on your own. Then expand your reading circle by bringing the study to your next staff, board, or community meetings. You can use the following questions to guide your discovery:

What do you currently understand about your audience, your company, and your community? Is it data-based or anecdotal?

How do the findings of this national research resonate with your current understanding?

How do the broad findings align with your company-identified goals for audience retention and diversification?

What areas could you investigate with greater granularity by surveying your audiences or mining your data?

How can the takeaways of the report help refine tactics you have already tried to retain newcomers?

What standard practices could you try upending in response to a takeaway of the report?

What local assets might your company use when responding to a takeaway of the report?

How can the report inform or focus organization-wide planning efforts?

Since the report has so much in it, you might consider hosting a series of conversations with different members of your company, each focused on a specific area of the findings. In one meeting, talk about digital engagement; in the next, talk about the "experience." Focus on the topics that matter most to your company, and involve the department staff, board committees, venue partners, and others whose expertise lends itself to each discussion.

Ultimately, you and your fellow staff and board members should discuss the best ways to leverage the findings within your own organization.

ADVICE FROM A PEER

[*Understanding Opera's New Audiences*] is a treasure trove, if you have the patience of a beachcomber. My best advice: Try not to tackle it in one sitting. Rather, digest it in several courses, allowing each page to spark questions and invite further investigation. Curiosity is key here. I found myself coming back to it again and again over several weeks, each time walking away with new understanding, new questions, and new ideas."

— Katherine Powers, executive director, Pacific Opera Project

IDEAS FOR ACTION

N ow is your chance to try out something new at your company. How will you engage your newcomers so they come back as loyal audiences? What actions will you take to respond to the findings of the research?

THIS SECTION OF THE RESOURCE GUIDE:

1. Provides you with INSIGHTS into how your peers in the field are engaging with the implications of the research in each of the six areas highlighted on page 2.

2. Posits the PREVAILING HYPOTHESES about how each research area is linked to the retention of newcomers.

3. Offers IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED at your company with strategic audience building.

It can be hard to think of creative new ideas when the financial, organizational, and cultural pressures of the moment are severe. But action doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Use these tactical ideas to build out your company's newcomer strategy, or allow them to inspire other new approaches based on your specific situation.

EXPERIENCE

INSIGHTS

How can opera companies enhance the overall operagoing experience so newcomers wish to come back again and again?

Consider some facets of this issue:

- Opera offers multiple points of entry and excitement, from the theatrical elements and music, to the total effect of grand spectacle. How can companies benefit from the innate advantages of the art form?

- The "experience" of attending opera is stereotypically tied to elitist tropes, yet many new audiences enjoy the opportunity to dress up for a posh evening. Should companies lean into this expectation of the "experience" or push back against it?

- The experience of the opera extends beyond what is onstage to participatory engagement, including dynamic learning activities, immersive events, behind-the-scenes peeks, and other targeted activities. How can companies enhance these opportunities?

> **"**
> **We need to expand the horizons of our audience and get people to think differently about all the things that opera could be."**
>
> — Marjorie Beale, interim managing director, Long Beach Opera

PREVAILING HYPOTHESIS FOR ACTION

Newcomers will be more likely to return if going to the opera is a one-of-a-kind experience that is bigger than just the performance.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Diversify venues or activate theaters in new ways.
- Implement themed nights.
- Offer immersive experiences.
- Create unique opportunities to share on social media.
- Offer backstage/onstage access.
- Enhance food and beverage options (e.g., specialty cocktails).
- Host pop-up performances in lobbies.
- Extend VIP-level customer service.
- Reward newcomers with seat upgrades.
- Foster healthy FOMO ("fear of missing out").
- Implement state-of-the-art production methods.

Newcomers will be more likely to return if performances are fun, social, and part of their evening (but not their entire evening).

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Host meet-up events.
- Reduce performance length.
- Offer intermission entertainment.
- Schedule curtain times to allow for comfortable dinners.
- Include complimentary beverages in special ticket offers.
- Implement a surprise-and-delight strategy for newcomers (e.g., invite to lounge, gift on seat).
- Offer pre- and post-show activities that are participatory and engaging.
- Create a social watching area in your theater.
- Sell food and drinks in the aisles.
- Use the curtain speech to stir up convivial energy.

TICKET PRICE

INSIGHTS

What can opera companies do to mitigate newcomers' perception of price as a barrier to returning?

Consider some facets of this issue:

- Many opera companies deploy discounts to entice audiences to attend for the first time. How can companies leverage discounts in strategic ways to lure first-timers back for subsequent visits?

- Discounts offer a financial reprieve, but they can also undermine the perceived value of performances. How can companies preserve the worth of their product while addressing price sensitivity?

- One-time ticket discounts serve companies' short-term sales goals, but audience building requires cultivating taste, appetite, and loyalty over time. How can companies effectively balance immediate and long-term strategies?

> **It's not necessarily about a cost-prohibitive thing. It's about how people choose to invest their time and resources.**
>
> — Tara Branham, director of patron experience, Opera San José

PREVAILING HYPOTHESIS FOR ACTION

Newcomers will be more likely to return if they are offered a less expensive point of repeat entry.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Implement a multi-year or multi-visit discount plan for newcomers.

- Offer flexible, refundable subscriptions.

- Offer "pay what you want" or "pay what you thought" ticket options.

- Offer a buy-one-get-one deal.

Newcomers will be more likely to return if the cost of a ticket delivers high value by their standards.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Offer a free or discounted beverage with every ticket purchase.

- Include free or discounted parking with every ticket purchase.

- Partner with community organizations to provide childcare during performances.

- Extend VIP-level customer service.

- Reward returning newcomers with seat upgrades.

- Invite returning newcomers to lounges at intermission.

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

INSIGHTS

How can opera companies leverage digital recordings and communications to cultivate greater engagement among newcomers?

Consider some facets of this issue:

- Many opera companies produce behind-the-scenes videos to promote ticket sales on social media and in e-communications. But how can companies use production recordings to cultivate familiarity with and appetite for the art form?

- Production schedules and rights agreements pose challenges to opera companies for using video and audio of their own work. How can companies draw on other sources to engage their audiences digitally?

- Email communications and websites are key in providing crucial information about the art form, both pre- and post-performance. How can creative digital content advance this form of audience communication?

> " I call everyone opera-curious, because I am convinced everyone loves opera. They just don't know it. "
>
> —Julia Noulin-Mérat, general director and CEO, Opera Columbus

PREVAILING HYPOTHESIS FOR ACTION

Newcomers will be more likely to return if they build an appetite for opera by engaging with digital recordings before and after performances.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Curate playlists of publicly available videos on YouTube.

- Curate playlists of recordings on Spotify.

- Integrate video/audio clips into pre- and post-performance email communications.

- Integrate video/audio clips into brochures and promotions.

- Share video/audio of rehearsals and the production.

Newcomers will be more likely to return if they receive communications that are tailored to them.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Segment your email communications.

- Create a special email sequence or campaign for newcomers.

- Create a special website section for newcomers.

DISORIENTATION

INSIGHTS

What can opera companies do to minimize newcomers' barriers to understanding and enjoyment?

Consider some facets of this issue:

- Understanding and following an opera often requires audiences to prepare by reading a synopsis, studying character names, and learning what to listen for — practices that few newcomers know to do. How can companies provide introductory material that is informal, accessible, and intuitive?

- For long-time operagoers, the conventions of a performance — from what to wear, to where to park, to when to applaud — are second nature. How can companies make attending, and returning, easy for newcomers?

- Longtime audiences, who adhere to the unwritten rules and etiquette of operagoing, can be the most unwelcoming forces in newcomers' experience. How can opera companies build empathy and make newcomers feel welcome?

> **"**
> **I think a lot of the issue that I see with new audiences is a fear of doing the wrong thing in the space. I think we've done a lot of damage by telling people there's a right way, and a wrong way, to respond to opera."**
>
> — Kerriann Otaño, vice president of engagement, OperaDelaware

PREVAILING HYPOTHESIS FOR ACTION

Newcomers will be more likely to return if they can understand what's happening on stage from beginning to end.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Provide a short-form, easy-to-read plot summary.

- Remind newcomers to read the plot summary in advance.

- Make the plot summary easy to find in the program book.

- Post the plot summary in the lobby and other common areas.

- Add character names to supertitles.

- Promote the availability of supertitles (and explain what supertitles are).

- Include pictures of all characters in costume in the program.

- Produce a short introductory video to the opera.

- Appoint wandering docents to answer audience questions during intermission.

Newcomers will be more likely to return if they have a frictionless experience from ticket purchase to post-show email.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Create a video tour of the venue.

- Provide venue tips tailored to seating locations in pre-show emails.

- Offer pre-show tours to ticket holders.

- Create a phone-friendly seating area.

- Create a special website section for newcomers.

- Train ushers to assume all guests are new to the theater.

Newcomers will be more likely to return if they can enjoy their experience without feeling they lack enough knowledge.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Celebrate and welcome newcomers in the curtain speech.

- Include an opera cheat sheet in the program.

- Invite audiences to react when they're moved to react.

- Create informative lobby displays with fun facts.

- Share watching tips in pre-show emails.

- Promote the availability of supertitles or captions.

- Share resources about the opera and opera experience in advance.

REPERTOIRE

INSIGHTS

How can the field leverage inherited repertoire and new work to engage newcomers in the full breadth of the art form?

Consider some facets of this issue:

- Inherited repertoire can serve an important role in introducing newcomers to the art form. How can companies ensure their presentation of the classics encourages modern audiences to come back for more?

- Newcomers' demographics, listening palates, and broad cultural attendance patterns make them natural prospects for contemporary work. How can companies promote their varied repertoire to appeal to newcomers' interests?

- What brings newcomers back is not necessarily the same repertoire or experience that brought them in the door. How can opera companies build links between productions to hook audiences from one to the next?

> **"**
> **Much of our community hasn't seen any opera, period. How do I do the traditional ones to the very best of my ability in a way that competes with the best in the world? And how can I find the key programs and new operas that will also resonate and bring somebody in from a new angle?"**
>
> — E. Loren Meeker, general and artistic director, OPERA San Antonio

PREVAILING HYPOTHESIS FOR ACTION

Newcomers will be more likely to return if they know, feel a connection to, or can see themselves in the work.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Hire a director/designer team with a track record in making works relevant.

- Produce new work with a specific connection to your community.

- Hire a living composer/librettist team to reinvigorate a work from the inherited repertoire.

- Employ a dramaturg to elicit modern and relevant themes.

- Offer a preview of your next production post-show in the lobby.

ECOSYSTEM

INSIGHTS

When multiple opera companies serve the same city, how can they work together to cultivate shared, loyal audiences?

Consider some facets of this issue:

- Audiences who are new to opera may not be aware of other opportunities to engage with the art form in their city. How can companies assume the role of influencers in helping newcomers explore opera?

- Joint planning of repertoire among local companies can enhance the choices available to audiences, build thematic programming between companies, and use shared resources to enhance marketing capabilities. How can companies create more opportunities for shared planning in their communities?

- The arts ecosystem in a city is not limited to other opera companies. How can companies work with other cultural institutions to create powerful cross-cultural programming?

> **"**
>
> **We try to really make it clear to all our patrons that we appreciate them being fans of the arts. It's not about picking or choosing, but that we are all in it together, that we are all working together and collaborating."**
>
> — Nicole Malcolm, director of marketing and communications, Pacific Opera Victoria

PREVAILING HYPOTHESIS FOR ACTION

Newcomers will be more likely to return if their opera company encourages them to explore opera at other companies.

Ideas for Getting Started:

- Promote upcoming performances at nearby companies.

- Foster a spirit of abundance with opera companies in your community.

- Collaborate with other companies on a local opera festival.

- Develop a "vertical subscription" that allows newcomers to purchase tickets to multiple companies.

- Invite other companies to perform at intermissions.

- Coordinate season repertoire with other companies.

- Create citywide shared ticketing databases.

IMPORTANCE OF TESTING

Y ou might consider taking a number of different actions in response to the research. As you activate the findings at your company, it's important to do so in a way that is strategic and measurable — so that you can learn about the efficacy of your efforts and build on the outcome in future iterations.

Some actions lend themselves more easily to rigorous testing; they can be measured in quantitative metrics such as ticket sales, email clicks, or event registrations. Other actions might require a smart approach to surveying. Either way, an effective test begins with the fundamentals of the scientific method: A/B testing.

A/B TESTING

A common practice in cyclical learning is A/B testing. An A/B test is an experiment that compares two cases. In case A, you complete an action one way. This serves as your "constant." In case B, you do the same action again, but you change one aspect of it. What you change is your "variable." When you measure the outcome of both cases, you can compare them to see which was more successful.

For example, many opera companies do A/B tests with email subject lines. Perhaps you want to know if adding a person's first name to the subject line (the variable) improves open rates. For your constant, in case A, you would send an email to half your list with the subject, "You'll love Tosca." For case B, you would send the exact same email to the other half of your list with the subject, "[FirstName], you'll love Tosca." Then you would compare the open rates of the two emails: Whichever subject line resulted in higher open rates is the winning strategy.

The simplest A/B tests involve changing only one variable, like in the email example. And in that example, case A and case B happen simultaneously in order to keep all other variables the same.

Sometimes case A and case B may need to happen sequentially. For instance, you may want to test if moving the plot synopsis from page 32 (case A) to page 2 (case B) of your program book makes it easier to find and digest for newcomers. Since you can't have different programs at the same performance, case A might happen at the Thursday night performance and case B might happen at the Saturday night performance. By surveying the audiences at each performance, you can determine which strategy was more effective. (Of course, you should confirm that the audience experience across the two performances was otherwise as similar as possible in order to make sure only one variable was impacting the result.)

What you learn from each A/B test will allow you to refine your approach through iteration.

SCHEMA FOR ACTIVATION

As you think about applying A/B testing to the research findings, consider following this four-part schema:

STEP 1: IDENTIFY A SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH FINDING

Begin with the research: What findings resonate with you about the experience of first-timers at your company? Are there barriers or opportunities presented in the research that your audiences face? Is there one issue in particular that your company wants to investigate with an A/B test?

Example: Price was not a barrier to new-to-opera ticket buyers for their first show, but it was cited as the greatest barrier to returning for a second performance.

STEP 2: DEVELOP A HYPOTHESIS

Once you've identified the finding you wish to address, develop a hypothesis: What change in strategy would respond to the research finding and its role in first-timer retention? Do you attribute that barrier or opportunity to a specific aspect of the opera experience? Do you have an idea for how to counteract what the data or trend shows? Your hypothesis should be clear and testable.

Example: Offering a steep discount to first-time ticket buyers for their next purchase will encourage them to return for a second performance — and to develop a pattern of repeat attendance.

STEP 3: CREATE A STRATEGY

How can you construct an experiment to determine if your hypothesis is true or false for opera newcomers? For your A/B test, think about what action you will take in case A. In other words, how will you define your control? Then, what will your variable be? How will your case B play out? Can cases A and B happen concurrently, or must they take place sequentially? As much as possible, your experiment should limit additional variables that may distort your test results; and make sure your case-A and case-B cohorts are big enough to provide a sufficient sample size.

Example: After our first production of the season, we will invite half of all newcomers to a future production without a discount (case A) and invite the other half of newcomers to a future production with a 50% discount on their tickets (case B).

STEP 4: MEASURE THE RESULTS

Here's the most important part: Did case B perform better than case A among returning first-timers, or vice versa? Or was there no difference? How did the impact on first-timers compare to the impact on ongoing audiences?

In order to answer these questions, you need a way to measure the results of your experiment. This might include comparing ticket sales data, email click-through rates, website visits, or other such metrics. This might also mean conducting a thoughtfully constructed survey of your audiences.

Consider what would indicate a meaningful difference in the outcomes for your case-A control and case-B variable group. How long must your case B play out before it's time to measure the results? It's important that you think through your approach to evaluation before you begin your experiment so you can be sure you're able to learn what you want to learn.

Example: We will track the usage of the newcomer discount throughout the remainder of the season. We will compare the rate of return of those newcomers who were given the discount with those who were not to determine if the discount removed the perceived barrier to repeat attendance.

Once you review the results of your test, it's time to start the four steps over. How does the new information you've learned change your hypothesis or strategy for the next iteration?

One caution: When reviewing the outcome of your test, you should keep in mind that a single experiment might not be enough to reach a conclusive outcome. Unforeseen variables, small sample size, execution error, and other factors may bias your findings. If you're not sure about what you learn, there's no harm in repeating your test!

CHALLENGE OF DATA FIDELITY

Many opera companies face a fundamental challenge when thinking about engaging their first-time audiences: Do you know who is a newcomer and who isn't?

This is an issue of data fidelity. For some companies that perform across multiple venues, ticket data may not be aggregated into a central database. For other companies with more "clean" databases, the numbers may still be untrustworthy: An ancillary discovery in the *Understanding Opera's New Audiences* research was the fact that what companies thought was an approximate 60%/40% split of new to ongoing audiences was closer to 30%/70%. In other words, half of the individuals who appeared as new in databases weren't new at all; they likely attended as guests or partners of other purchasers.

Companies should make time to systematically evaluate current data collection methodology and systems. What data do you collect? How would you like to use the data that you collect? How is that data stored so you can use it? Especially in an age of proliferating AI, those companies without solid data practices will fall behind.

But having imperfect records shouldn't hold you back from taking action with your newcomers. There is a lot you can do without having to segment your audience — and when it comes to measuring the impact, you can design a survey to ask audience members to self-identify as new or ongoing. If you wish to segment your communications, just keep in mind that the occasional ongoing audience member will read it too. The benefit to your company in tailoring your messaging to your newcomers will likely outweigh these blips in your lists.

CASE STUDIES

Here are a few examples that members of the opera field are either considering or already testing at their companies. They demonstrate the four-part schema for activating your strategic response.

"EMAIL MARKETING FOR NEWCOMERS"
A Strategy Developed by Lawrence Edelson, General Director, Chicago Opera Theater (Chicago, IL)

Research Finding: Opera company websites, emails, and physical mailings are the most effective channels for reaching Ongoing audiences and Newcomers, who also report wanting to know more about opera.

Hypothesis: Improving the quality, content, segmentation, and timing of email communications can help newcomers understand more about the art form and enhance chances for repeat attendance.

Strategy: Chicago Opera Theater will evaluate the effectiveness of three strategies to enhance its email marketing efforts. First, it will improve its segmentation of email lists to provide tailored communication, differentiating messages based on past engagement for first-time ticket buyers, long-time attendees, and potential audience members. This will include developing automated email sequences, such as welcoming newcomers and offering exclusive content to ongoing audiences. Second, the company will increase both the frequency and value of email content by balancing promotional messages and engaging material, including behind-the-scenes features, artist interviews, and audience testimonials. Finally, Chicago Opera Theater will improve email deliverability and open rates through A/B testing of subject lines, optimizing send times, and cleaning email lists to eliminate inactive recipients. Personalization also will be a focus, incorporating recipient names, past attendance details, and targeted recommendations to foster meaningful engagement.

Measurement: The company will track email engagement data (open rates, click-through rates) and ticket purchase retention rates for newcomers to compare the impact of these strategies to historical standards for the company.

"SOLO TOGETHER: OPERA WITHOUT THE LONELINESS"
An Initiative Conceived by Morgan Sass, Director of Marketing, The Florentine Opera (Milwaukee, WI)

Research Finding: "Having difficulty finding someone to attend with" was cited by newcomers as a significant barrier to return attendance.

Hypothesis: By creating welcoming and comfortable ways for singles to attend, The Florentine Opera can increase its attendance.

Strategy: The Florentine Opera will develop a special initiative to create a welcoming environment where independent attendees can enjoy performances while feeling socially connected. Young professionals, seniors, singles, and other potential audience sub-groups will have a designated seating area that is easily accessible through online purchase. They will be offered special pre-show and intermission meet-ups that include free beverages and activities to foster conversation. The program will foster further community by offering an option to match up solo attendees and inviting participants to year-round behind-the-scenes activities, post-show meet-ups at local restaurants, and other activities.

Measurement: Success will be measured by retention rates of solo participants and by comparing survey responses of solo participants to other new-to-file attendees.

"DISCOUNT OFFERS: THE MAGIC OF 3S"

A Strategy in Action by Troy Smith, Chief Marketing Officer, San Francisco Opera (San Francisco, CA)

Research Finding: Newcomers perceive ticket price as a primary barrier to return attendance.

Hypothesis: Extending targeted discount incentives over an extended period, with three progressive offers, can increase retention rates.

Strategy: San Francisco Opera is implementing an audience retention strategy for new single-ticket buyers that is informed by research into its subscriber retention strategy. The company's analysis of its subscriber renewal rates indicates that sustaining purchases over three years increases the likelihood of an even longer-term commitment. It therefore developed an initiative to build loyalty by extending generous discounts to renewing subscribers for their second-, third-, and fourth-year renewals, with discounts getting progressively smaller over that period. Applying this "magic of 3s" strategy to single-ticket-buying newcomers means offering a generous discount for their second visit and progressively less deep discounts for their third and fourth visits.

Measurement: San Francisco Opera is tracking the rate of return for these new single-ticket buyers to compare their retention to the company's prior rates. Indications point to it working — just as it had for subscribers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kerriann Otaño
Vice President of
  Engagement
OperaDelaware

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