



Twelve Top Tips for Bigger Audiences for Dance at Your Venue

1. The number of people who say they are dance enthusiasts is relatively small – however, many more people are interested in attending dance events on an occasional basis. Nurture the frequent dance attenders, not least because they also tend to see lots of other events at your venue. People are at least twice as likely to book dance more than once a year if they also book for other types of event at above average frequency. The way to build audiences, though, is to focus on the people who attend a wide range of events at your venue who will incidentally choose dance if it looks particularly interesting. Even for contemporary dance, these audiences are just as likely to be over 35 as under 35.
2. Build audiences by concentrating on people who live within a 30 minute drive of your venue (45 minutes if you are in a rural area) – audiences just don't travel to see dance.
3. Three out of four dance bookers only want to see dance every now and then – that's less often than once a year. So most of the time we are sending direct mail to the wrong people. Mail all those who bought tickets for two or more dance events in the past 12 months – but they will only make up around one in four of your audience. Then mail everyone who did not buy tickets for dance in the past 12 months but did buy the year before that. Don't forget, though, that you also need to mail those 'incidentals' who attend a range of events at your venue but haven't yet got round to seeing dance.
4. Just putting on the odd dance event won't maximise your audience. Programming more dance events means more people overall buying tickets. That's because this provides an increased number of opportunities to attend for the large pool of general arts attenders who occasionally want to see 'something different'. More events won't make existing ticket buyers attend more often, though
5. Most dance attenders talk about it offering 'the whole thing' – the combination of music, visually attractive sets and costumes, the emotional impact of the piece and the skill and physicality of the dancers. If one of these elements is missing, they are disappointed. We need to ensure we tell them about all of the aspects they think are so important.
6. Even frequent attenders of ballet and contemporary dance feel uncomfortable talking about dance and are worried that they will seem stupid or ignorant. This makes them very careful about what they choose to see and anxious about bringing someone with them. You need to provide reassurance by giving them the information they need in a clear and straightforward way. Even frequent attenders of cutting edge dance take carefully calculated risks based on the available background information about the company, choreographer, dancers and music. They don't consistently prefer 'adventurous' events, though – they are just as likely to choose something mainstream (but not too 'tacky').



7. The most important method of communicating with existing and potential dance audiences is your season brochure. Big, distinctive pictures sell tickets. These pictures need to convey character, emotion and vitality.
8. Audiences use the season brochure to shortlist events in their mind. They lead busy lives so they often don't book immediately in case they are not free on that night. Direct mail is important because it reminds people to take action and buy their tickets. It also gives you an opportunity to give the people attending dance more often than once a year the detailed information about the company, creative team and choreographers that they need.
9. Even existing attenders feel intimidated by dance. The way we write about dance reinforces this feeling. They simply don't understand what we're getting at. Phrases that we take for granted like 'new work' leave them perplexed – what does it mean? Don't just name-drop; explain why it's worth seeing a particular choreographer's work. Describe what each piece is about and what it will be like to watch. Audiences are particular scathing about the way we hype dance events. They tell us firmly that they don't believe words like *stupefying*, *electric*, *dramatic*, and *never to be forgotten*. They want us to tell them exactly why the piece will astonish them.
10. Most dance bookers tend to stick to one dance style – ballet, or traditional dance or tap. The only common denominator we found was ballet on ice!
11. We need to rethink how we label contemporary dance. Audiences see a huge difference between what they prefer to call 'modern ballet' with high production values, lighting, costumes and settings (Rambert Dance Company, for example), and smaller scale work that doesn't provide them with 'the whole thing'. Many people we would think of as contemporary dance attenders don't understand that this sort of dance is about ideas, not visual spectacle. This means that you will have much more success in persuading attenders of adventurous theatre, music and the contemporary visual arts to cross over to smaller scale contemporary dance. Even they want to know what the piece is 'about' – i.e. what message the creative team is trying to get across to them.
12. Ticket price only plays a role in the decision to attend for very frequent arts attenders who have to make a choice between a number of events they are interested in. Even then, the events they choose are not those with the lowest price, but those where they thought they would get most for their money. Their attitude to price is ambiguous and a low ticket price often signals that the event is high risk. Bring a Friend for Free offers and money back guarantees are much more effective than discounts as they reduce the risk of attendance without sending the wrong signals.

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Twelve Top Tips for Bigger Audiences for your Dance Company

1. The number of people who say they are dance enthusiasts is relatively small – however, many more people are interested in attending dance events on an occasional basis. Build a relationship with the frequent dance attenders so that they don't feel as though they have seen everything your company has to offer. You will certainly lose these audiences if you perform the same piece too often in mixed programmes.
2. The venue's audience is your audience. Only 10% of dance bookers attend nothing but dance. People are at least twice as likely to book dance more than once a year if they also book for other types of event at the venue at above average frequency.
3. The way to build audiences is to focus on all the people who attend a wide range of events at each venue you visit. They will incidentally choose dance if it looks particularly interesting. Even for contemporary dance, they are just as likely to be over 35 as under 35 and they live within 30 minutes of the venue (45 minutes in rural areas).
4. Audiences choose what dance to see by looking for an aspect that seems familiar or links with their previous experience. Unfortunately, attenders don't remember the names of the companies they have seen, let alone the choreographers or dancers. We need to work on building recognition of our companies and communicating consistent brand values so that audiences can confidently predict what type of dance they perform. One useful idea is creating a visual presence at venues between visits, perhaps with generic posters.
5. In particular, contemporary dance companies need to ensure audiences associate their style of work with ideas, issues and emotional content. Many existing and potential audiences believe that contemporary choreographers are deliberately obscure so we need to present them as approachable and human.
6. Even frequent attenders of ballet and contemporary dance feel uncomfortable talking about dance and are worried that they will seem stupid or ignorant. This makes them very careful about what they choose to see and anxious about bringing someone with them. The way we write about dance reinforces this feeling. Most of the time we drastically over-estimate the understanding and knowledge of existing, let alone potential, audiences. Provide reassurance by giving them the information they need in a clear and straightforward way. Even frequent attenders of cutting edge dance take carefully calculated risks based on the available background information about the company, choreographer, dancers and music.
7. Audiences simply don't understand what we're getting at. Phrases that we take for granted like 'new work' leave them perplexed – what does it mean? Don't just name-drop; explain why it's worth seeing a particular choreographer's work. Describe what each piece is about and what it will be like to watch. Audiences are particularly scathing about the way we hype dance events. They tell us firmly that



they don't believe words like *stupefying*, *electric*, *dramatic*, and *never to be forgotten*. They want us to tell them exactly why the piece will astonish them.

8. The most important method of communicating with existing and potential dance audiences is the venue's season brochure. We often don't provide the venue with effective images and copy. Pictures that are distinctive and convey character, emotion and vitality sell tickets. Copy should focus on telling a non-expert audience what the show is about and what it is like to watch. We need to ensure we tell them about what audiences refer to as 'the whole thing' – the combination of music, visually attractive sets and costumes, the emotional impact of the piece and the skill and physicality of the dancers.
9. Three out of four dance bookers only want to see dance every now and then – that's less often than once a year. So most of the time venues are sending direct mail to the wrong people. Persuade them to mail all those who bought tickets for two or more dance events in the past 12 months – but they will only make up around one in four of your audience. Then mail everyone who did not buy tickets for dance in the past 12 months but did buy the year before that. Don't forget, though, that you also need to mail those 'incidentals' who attend a range of events at the venue but haven't yet got round to seeing dance. Persuade them that they want to see 'something different' by focusing on an aspect of the content.
10. We need to rethink how we label contemporary dance. Audiences see a huge difference between what they prefer to call 'modern ballet' with high production values, lighting, costumes and settings (Rambert Dance Company, for example), and smaller scale work that doesn't provide them with 'the whole thing'. Many people we would think of as contemporary dance attenders don't understand that this sort of dance is about ideas, not visual spectacle. This means that you will have much more success in persuading attenders of adventurous theatre, music and the contemporary visual arts to cross over to smaller scale contemporary dance. But even they want to know what the piece is 'about' – i.e. what message the creative team is trying to get across to them.
11. Building long term relationships with venues can develop audiences but only if you give the venue lots of marketing support and offers them programmes that are obviously different year on year.
12. Ticket price only plays a role in the decision to attend for very frequent arts attenders who have to make a choice between a number of events they are interested in. Even then, the events they choose are not those with the lowest price, but those they think they will give them most for their money. Many feel that dance offers poor value because the shows can be so short. Audiences' attitude to price is ambiguous and a low ticket price often signals that the event is high risk. Bring a Friend for Free offers and money back guarantees are much more effective than discounts as they reduce the risk of attendance without sending the wrong signals.

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