

## **The Lowry: Building and engaging audiences through e-marketing**

This case study looks at how The Lowry uses e-marketing strategies to build and maintain a loyal audience base.

### **Background**

The Lowry houses two main theatres and studio space for performing arts, presenting a full range of drama, opera, ballet, dance, musicals, children's shows, popular music, jazz, folk and comedy. Gallery spaces show the works of LS Lowry alongside contemporary exhibitions.

The Lowry increases opportunities for social interaction within the community and is an exciting and stimulating venue for education, recreation and creativity.

### **Origins of project**

The Lowry's core values are: honesty and respect for everyone who works and uses The Lowry; sustainable relationships with their audience; and the continual aspiration to deliver the best, most innovative products to make sure visitors enjoy the Lowry experience.

As an organisation focussed on providing quality products and maintaining and building their customer base, The Lowry recognised the need to develop their brand and provide exciting content and facilities online as well as offline without compromising on the quality of the overall experience.

### **Objectives of the project**

The Lowry made a strategic decision to put technology and the potential it could release at the heart of their plans. Their digital strategy was designed to identify customer needs and offer new ways of encouraging them to engage with the organisation, through a 'holistic' e-marketing approach. without compromising on their own core values Through the strategy, the organisation aims:

- To meet and exceed the expectations of their audience
- To engage and interact with their audience
- To generate ticket sales, corporate bookings, catering and shop sales
- To maintain loyalty with existing customers and attract potential new ones

### **Process**

The Lowry's e-marketing strategy has so far comprised of two phases, with the third in development:

- Phase 1 – Open the Door
- Phase 2 – Enrich, Engage and Excite
- Phase 3 – To generate ticket sales, corporate bookings, catering and shop sales.

#### *Phase 1: Open the door*

Open the Door was The Lowry's first phase in identifying the needs and expectations of their customers and an introduction to their online services. The Lowry initially implemented Open the Door hand in hand with their offline marketing process. Their key marketing material (brochures, flyers, posters and so on) were replicated on the website

as a way of mirroring the offline marketing schedule. The website also provided access to a lot of content and background about the organisation.

### *Phase 2: Enrich, Engage and Excite*

Following the successful launch of the first phase, Enrich, Engage and Excite adopted a more commercial approach. Several facilities were added to the website, including the ability to book tickets online, make purchases in the online gift shop, and encourage communication through the user preferences facility 'My Lowry'.

Site users can register on 'My Lowry' to receive priority notice of new performances, book tickets before they are on general sale and receive a regular newsletter. This approach ensures an element of exclusivity for all interested customers, offers them added value in ensuring subscribers are always the first to know about new shows and maximises the opportunities to generate more ticket sales in every genre. When signing up to the service, users are asked select their interests and preferred method of contact; this allows the organisation to tailor marketing communications exactly to customers' needs. Offline materials also carry references to the website and My Lowry where possible.

Upgrades to the website and integration with the ENTA box office system means that The Lowry are able to obtain real time statistics on member numbers, preferences and ticket sales.

The Lowry's marketing team is careful to implement changes to the website only when staff believe they will fully adhere to the core values of the organisation. Prioritising visitor expectations whilst also remaining consistent with the aims of The Lowry is often a balancing act, and has to be carefully considered at every stage. Their strategy so far has proved fruitful.

To meet the demand for improved communications, The Lowry's E-Marketing manager has developed a private staff intranet, with content such as staff job roles and minutes from meetings. This ensures that staff are able to access online facilities as part of a recognised need to update communications methods through online methods.

### **Resource implications**

The main impact in terms of resources to implement the e-marketing strategy is increasing demand on human resources, as the e-marketing strategy takes up an increasing proportion of staff time. There is only one marketing manager dedicated to e-marketing at present. To ensure the continual development of the site, more resources will eventually be needed.

### **Outcomes**

The organisation are keen to develop their online activity. Their methods so far have proved successful, and concerns now are to find ways to provide a more personal and engaging experience for its audience.

Since the end of 2002, 'My Lowry' has grown from 1000 members to 97000 members (67000 of whom chose to be contacted by email) ensuring potential sales continue to grow.

Average online ticket sales have risen from 19% to 31% in the same period, which was helped by the addition of seating plan booking on the website.

Online shop sales have generated £16k (financial year 2006-7), and this is set to increase with the introduction of a new retail manager. Sales from the online shop are up 79 this year, and conference referrals have grown by 149% since last year.

15% of enquiries for weddings and corporate functions are now placed online.

In 2006/07, 16,000 of online bookers were first time bookers.

### **Next steps**

Phase 3 of the e-marketing strategy is currently in development. The Lowry aims to find new ways of personally engaging and interacting with its audience. One of their key plans is brand re-evaluation - the organisation is currently working with social and market research agency QA Research in York on a questionnaire for Lowry customers, inviting feedback for what they would like to see on the site.

The Lowry Board have approved further plans for the website and see online activity as the way forward. The Lowry continue to look at development strategies and ways to engage and interact further with visitors.

As a further development possibility, The Lowry are looking at setting up links to micro sites. There is currently a link from the King Cotton page on the Lowry website to a micro site, which uses a rich mix of digital media (video interviews, music clips and so on) to provide detailed information on the show, including cast and costumes.