The Family Friendly Initiative

Imaginate has received funding from the Scottish Arts Council to run the Family Friendly Initiative over two years. The aim of the initiative is to improve children and families’ access to and participation in arts activities by encouraging and supporting Scottish arts venues to become more child and family friendly.

Definitions

Marketing
There are many definitions of marketing. The following gives the most clear and concise description of what you are aiming to achieve: ‘The ability to create and retain customers’.
Association of Arts Marketers

Family
A family is a group of two or more people - parents, grandparents, relatives, friends and children. To be inclusive as possible, you could use the phrase: ‘Suitable for children aged ??, their friends and families’

Getting started . . .
These guidelines offer arts venues advice on what can make the difference when marketing to families.

Whatever your resources, whether your venue is large or small, whether you have marketing staff or not, each family will have their own needs, and a range of expectations. There will be adults and children to consider: you’ll need a broad approach.

In the Arts Council of England study, Not for the Likes of You, consultants Morton Smyth Ltd., suggest a 7 stage approach when developing new audiences. These guidelines will borrow their headings and look at them from a family’s point of view.

1. Awareness
How your visitor learns about what is on offer, for example, passing by your venue on a bus, picking up a flyer or listening to a friend’s experience.

2. Choices and Decisions
The stage at which your visitor weighs up the options and what choosing your offer will mean, for example, the cost, the risk, travel options and will they fit in?

3. Journey
Your visitor’s experience of getting to and finding your venue.

4. Arrival
Your visitor’s experience of finding your building, the door, entering your space, and their sense of welcome and comfort.

5. Product
What you are offering to your visitor. How they engage with it. What it means to them and does for them. What they get out of it.

6. Departure
Your visitor’s experience of leaving. Whether they can find the exit. The kind of farewell they receive.

7. Memory
What your visitor takes away with them, tangible or intangible.

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These guidelines will focus on stage 2 of this approach.
Does your venue programme activities for children and their families? Once your venue makes the decision to offer events created and produced especially for children and their families, you’ll need to set out an appropriate plan of action to attract, retain and develop your family audience.

(For more on this see the Family Friendly Guidelines - Getting Started)

Children and young people have their own views about what they want to see and do, but until they reach a stage when they can organise themselves, an adult will be the decision maker. You need to think about what choosing your venue might mean to them.

Do you know what they want? Do they know what they want? It might be a case of you don’t know what you don’t know. Don’t worry... by developing ways of communicating with parents and carers, you’ll find out about their needs and expectations.

You could start by inviting families who already attend your venue to meetings. These offer an inexpensive and stimulating way of getting feedback about your programme, your venue and the effectiveness of your marketing activities.

Your families might have friends who don’t visit your venue, in which case you could find out about their perceptions, what motivates them to choose activities and events, and what might be inhibiting them from visiting your venue.

(For more information on consulting refer to the Family Friendly Guidelines - Consulting with Children and Young People)

Price isn’t always the deciding factor, but it is a major consideration, particularly for a group. Can you offer a family ticket? Do you charge for babies? Do you vary your price depending on the type of event or activity? What might affect perceptions of value? Is it the type of activity or length of the event? Will it keep everyone occupied for a reasonable length of time? Is it short, will there be other activities on offer? Is it seen as a treat, like a Christmas production, or is it seen as a regular Saturday morning activity?

Might adults have the perception that they are being penalised by being charged a higher ticket price? Have you considered reviewing your prices and offering one price for all?

If you are programming a number of events over a short period of time, or regularly over a season, do your prices encourage multiple visits? Could you offer a Family Membership with ticket offers, discounts on workshops, merchandise and publications, a loyalty card for the café, invitations to previews and free events?

Are these scheduled at ‘family friendly times’? Have you considered the impact that school term dates and holidays might have on a family schedule? Have you avoided meal and bed times? Try events at different times. Morning events might suit young children but perhaps not older ones who might have regular weekend commitments.

Is the length of performance suitable for the age of the child? Is there an interval? A good rule of thumb is, the younger the child the shorter the performance. For younger children, is an interval necessary, does it add to the performance or break concentration?

Highlight the benefits. Perhaps the event offers an alternative way to spend time with the children, somewhere new to meet friends and engage in new activities? Focus on the experiences on offer, rather than the usual facts about premieres and new adaptations.

Highlight added extras that enhance the experience, like story-telling and arts activities, the children’s menu in the café, or helpers in a crèche who can entertain younger siblings while the parent enjoys time with an older child.

Think about the title of the event, is it familiar, does it sound interesting? Can you use press quotes and audience comments to describe your event? Quotes from the director about the event offer an insight into the thinking behind it. Make sure that any images and descriptions are representative. Your audience might expect to see what is in the brochure on the stage. They might be disappointed if they don’t.

Is there audience participation, loud bangs or scary bits? Give as much information as possible to help adults prepare young children in advance.
Planning your campaign . . .

Make sure your marketing campaign is practical and achievable. Set yourself targets. Work well in advance. Families appreciate reasonable notice of main dates and events, even if they don’t make decisions until nearer the time. Often the length of your campaign will depend on the resources available to you.

linking up with others

Can you make contact with other organisations, schools and businesses with family connections? Can you share experiences and information, co-market and research with other arts organisations? Are you taking advantage of your venue’s location? If it’s on a busy street, is it well signed, have you put up displays?

whether special clothes are needed?

If the event is a workshop or class, let parents know if they need to provide special shoes or clothes.

should parents stay for the event?

Do you have a policy about unaccompanied children? Explain it in advance, either in literature or at point of sale.

how family friendly your venue is

Explain what this means and sell the benefits! Does the café offer a children’s menu? Can staff heat baby bottles and food? Are there high chairs, a place for pushchairs, outdoor areas for children to play, or a crèche? Think about the atmosphere you want to create.

the age of your audience

Families need to know in advance if an event is suitable. Your assessment will rest on whether you have successfully matched your event to the interests and stage of development of the children in the group, and to the tastes and expectations of the adults.

Successful children’s theatre is often created for a specific age range, for example, 3 to 5 year olds, 5 to 8 year olds. Some events are suitable for all, but these are rare. What will entertain a 5 year old will generally not suit an eleven year old.

Think about the content, whether violence is depicted or strong language used. Be clear from the start, in advance print and at the point of sale. Be sure to share venue policies with all staff so that they can be explained to customers in a clear and supportive way.

If you describe your activities in print, face to face, or using any other media, in a clear and direct style you will be accessible to everyone.

visiting companies and artists

The producers of your event will be your most important source of support and information. Find out about their ethos, the style of production or exhibition and their approach to audiences. Ask them for ideas and find out what has worked in other venues they have visited.

Invite the company or artist to visit your venue, show them the facilities, and share your ideas and plans with them.

Companies might produce a ‘marketing questionnaire’ asking you about your audiences, how much print you will need, what activities you will be initiating. Or a ‘marketing pack’ with information about the company or artist or event, examples of direct mail letters, press releases, images and text for your print. Some companies or artists produce background information for teachers that could be adapted for families.

Invite venue staff to see the show or exhibition before it comes to your venue. Is there any feedback from audiences, or copies of past press cuttings?

Keep talking to the visiting company or artist about how your campaign and ticket sales are progressing. Identify gaps before they become problems, pool resources and build on strengths. If you have a problem, share it! Whatever the fee arrangements, it is in everyone’s interests to develop audiences.
**how you can reach adult family members**

They are people, like us! They use the same information channels as other audiences. Most importantly, they meet and talk to other parents, relatives and carers, at work, in the playground, and at their own and children’s activities. Families tend to spread the news by word of mouth. They can become valuable ambassadors.

**creating mailing lists**

Direct mail is a cost effective and flexible marketing tool. Although you may not have a dedicated family mailing list, look through your ticket booking records to start one. Ask your sales staff to invite telephone enquirers, bookers and people coming into the venue to join it.

**family friendly print**

If you produce a seasonal or monthly brochure, is the information for families easy to find?

How about producing a family event leaflet to compliment your brochure that you can mail to families on a regular basis? Is there a generic family orientated publication produced by another organisation that you could put your information in?

Your visiting company or artist may also provide print; posters, leaflets, flyers or postcards. Make sure you are clear about how much you need and your plans to distribute it. Can you produce additional print to compliment it, for example, bookmarks for local bookshops and schools, or paper place mats for café tables?

**what families will want to know**

Really emphasise and sell the benefits and the experience on offer. What can they expect? How long will it last? What will it mean to them? How will they feel?

Give practical help and information - listing of events, dates, times, age suitability, content, pictures and images, ticket prices, offers and concessions, postal, on-line, telephone, in person booking details, venue and café opening times, directions on how to reach the venue and information on public transport.

**where you distribute your print**

Make sure that you distribute print to places visited by families, for example, sports centres, arts venues, visitor attractions and libraries. If your venue is in a small community you could use local shops and surgeries. Hand out leaflets to audiences as they leave other events, remembering other audience members might have children in their families. Liaise with local schools to put brochures in school bags.

**using the internet**

Can you include a family-friendly page on your web site with news, information and offers? Or an interactive element where children can enter competitions or send in their comments? Have you linked your web site to other arts, entertainment or tourism web sites that could list your venue’s details?

Can customers book on-line? Are you gathering email addresses so that you can send reminders and late offers? Remember the rules of data protection and ask permission to use postal and email addresses first.

**spreading news by word of mouth**

Families often hear about interesting events or places to visit from other families. To attract newcomers you could invite audience members to bring a friend or use their network in the community to pass on information. They will probably talk about the whole experience not just the core event. A bad experience in the café or a misunderstanding over whether or not latecomers are admitted will stay with them. Invest in customer care.

**how your family will go about booking tickets**

Visitors may drop into your venue, particularly if it’s on a busy street, or has a café, an interesting exterior display and an inviting entrance. Do you have someone on hand in the foyer to answer enquiries? Are all the venue staff trained and up to date to deal with enquiries? Do all staff get the opportunity to interact with customers and observe audiences? Can you involve them in making suggestions on how to improve your venue’s family-friendliness based on their experiences and observations?
The experience your family has from arrival to departure will influence their decision to return. The Family Friendly Initiative will be producing guidelines on 'Customer Care' to look at arrival and 'Programming for Families' to look at product. These will cover; welcome, facilities, staffing, signage, ideas for additional activities, merchandising, box office, and audience policies.

Local journalists are likely to be interested in family friendly events. Give them information for the 'what's on' section, and offer competitions and news through a local interest angle. Make sure the information you provide is accurate and age specific. If you hold a publicity photo call and want to include children, you must get permission from the parent or the school.

There are lots of other one off activities you could create around your event. The event itself will help generate ideas. You could make contact with local interest groups and clubs; link up with local businesses or sponsors to distribute print and offer tickets for staff with families; run an open day; reach families by developing relationships with schools; offer workshops and classes with professional performers; link up with libraries and offer competitions.

So, your campaign is working and families are on their way. How easy will it be to find your venue? Have you included information about the location and how to reach it in your print and on your web site? Is there a car park within walking distance? Does public transport stop nearby? Is the name visible on the outside of the building? Where's the door? Is it easy to get in with a push chair and a small child in tow?

The point of departure offers an excellent opportunity to find about more about your audience. Hand out information about forthcoming events, distribute questionnaires and invite your audiences to join the mailing list. A friendly member of staff on hand to say goodbye and open the door can make all the difference.

Can you give your audience a souvenir to take away with them, a poster, or programme, or activity sheet? Can they visit your web site and participate in any other activities linked to the performance they have seen?
**What next?**

They key to marketing to families is two way communication. Your campaign should aim to develop understanding and trust between staff members and audiences. Customers want to feel valued and informed before and during their visit.

Take time to reflect and look at your campaign. Gather as much information as you can to build a picture of what worked well - and what didn’t.

- **Box office and on-line ticket records, give an effective way of measuring how your family audiences are developing and where they are coming from.**

- **Ask your audiences. Give them questionnaires or meet with them to find out what you want to know.**

- **Encourage staff to share their impressions of what worked and what didn’t, with you and with each other.**

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**And finally . . .**

Family friendly venues have staff who are open and enthusiastic, engage with their audiences and learn from the experience.

The way you interact with your audiences and the quality of work you present will create your venue’s own unique ‘brand’, which will be trusted as long as it is consistent. It will enable you to bring your audiences along with you, presenting them with new events and experiences.

If your marketing campaign is focused and well planned, supported by audience research and consultation, and a team of staff who are committed and enthusiastic about what they are doing, it has an excellent chance of succeeding.

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**Useful publications and websites**

- **Scottish Arts Council audience research studies and marketing guides**
  www.scottishartsCouncil.org.uk

- **Not for the Likes of You report by Morton Smyth Ltd.**
  www.newaudiences.org.uk/feature.php?essential_audiences_20040601_1

- **Family Friendly Final Report, Arts About Manchester, 2001**
  www.aam.org.uk

- **The Family Friendly Initiative**
  www.family-friendly.net

- **Centres for Curiosity and Imagination:**
  www.curiosityandimagination.org.uk

- **Engage - The National association for gallery education:**
  www.engage.org

- **Macrobert WOW project:**
  www.macrobert.stir.ac.uk/wow

- **Audience development website:**
  www.audienceDevelopment.org

- **Children’s Museums website:**
  www.childrensmuseums.org

- **Hands on Europe:**
  www.hands-on-europe.net

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**The Family Friendly Initiative**

The Family Friendly Initiative is funded by the Scottish Arts Council to support and encourage arts venues in Scotland to be more child and family friendly through:

- Training, conferences and seminars throughout the year
- Advice and information on all aspects of being family friendly
- A website for free and up to date access to advice and details of events

Future Family Friendly Initiative Guidelines planned:

- **Family friendly services and facilities**
- **Family friendly customer care**
- **Programming for families**
- **Keeping your venue family friendly**

Visit the website at www.family-friendly.net