THE SHIFTING SANDS
OF DEMAND: TRENDS
IN CULTURAL
PARTICIPATION

Scottsdale Cultural Council
February 22, 2007
Alan Brown

Outline

1. Changing Cultural Climate
2. Changing Consumer Behaviors
3. Changing Patterns of Participation
The Changing Cultural Climate

The Shifting Sands of Demand: Trends in Cultural Participation

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Fantasy is Reality; Fiction is Fact

- Virtual lives
  - Online personas, virtual gaming
  - “Massively multi-player online role playing games”
- Celebrity culture
  - Celebrities have filled the symbolic void left by real cultural role models
  - Reality TV is fiction
- Rise of the gaming industry
  - The ultimate fantasy destination: Las Vegas
  - Lotteries - giant jackpots
- “The Daily Me” – filtering out what you disagree with
  - Newsstrope.com
- Backlash: Search for authenticity, realness
  - Can cultural facilities become intermediary spaces where the virtual and real worlds meet?
Demand for more stimulation

- Younger consumers are acclimated to multi-sensory engagement
  - Watching, hearing and reading simultaneously
  - Lighting at popular music concerts
- Experience learning, interactivity and edutainment
- Higher satisfaction thresholds
  - Expectation for immediate rewards and validation
Proliferation of Choice

- Overwhelming number of leisure options in some markets
  - Glut of information about options
- Challenges our cognitive abilities
  - Cognitive chunking is the brain’s response
  - Decision paralysis is likely
- Particularly troubling for arts groups with many diverse program offerings
- Implies greater need for “filters”
  - Unbiased recommendations, “guide to use”
  - “Ironically, customers don’t want choice, they just want exactly what they want.” - B. Joseph Pine
Diffusion of Cultural Tastes

- Fragmentation and diversification of tastes, both narrowing and broadening
  - Cross-cultural influences
- Enabled by advances in technology
  - Global distribution at the speed of light
  - Example: Impact of the download phenomenon on music preferences worldwide
- The net effect is rapid aesthetic development
  - More people enjoy more different kinds of art
Definitional Boundaries Around the Art Forms have Blurred

### NEA: What was the last “classical music” concert that you attended?

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<th>DISCIPLINE</th>
<th>NAME OF PERFORMANCE/PERFORMER</th>
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<td>THE MUSIC MAN</td>
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<td>CHRISTMAS MUSIC</td>
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<td>ORGAN RECITAL, BACH PRIMARILY</td>
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NEA: What was the last “opera” that you attended?

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<td>CINDERELLA</td>
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<td>PHANTOM OF THE OPERA</td>
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<td>MADAME BUTTERFLY</td>
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<td>Opera</td>
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Source: NEA 1997 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts
Verbatim responses to open-ended questions
Excerpts only

Definitional Boundaries Around the Art Forms have Blurred

- Consumers experience art along a continuum from “popular” to “high art”
  - What is dance?
  - What is classical music?
  - Whose definition matters?
- Rapid “remixing” of art, re-purposing of content
  - Slash fiction
- Consumers don’t put us in the boxes we put ourselves into
- Decreasing relevance of institutions that use a narrow or rigid definition of art
Concerto for Turntable, with DJ Radar at Carnegie Hall, Oct. 2, 2005

Evolution of Cultural Norms

- From “snob” to “omnivore”  
  - Richard Peterson, Vanderbilt University
- Shift in ideal: from fine arts sophisticate to world cultural citizen  
  - A new kind of cosmopolitanism  
  - Desire to make sense of the complicated world we live in
- Increased access to the art and artists of diverse cultures
- Inevitable move towards one highly interconnected mosaic of global cultures
Changing Consumer Behaviors

The Shifting Sands of Demand: Trends in Cultural Participation

Come on, do something.
Shortened planning horizons

- Decline of advance commitment
  - Exceptions are highly desirable products, when scarcity is an issue
- Increased premium on flexibility, as lives get more complicated
  - Keeping options open until the last minute
- Enabled by the availability of “perfect information” online
- Evidenced in later and later sales patterns for arts presenters
  - Inconsistent with subscription marketing

PURCHASE DECISION TIMEFRAME

“Typically, how far in advance do you plan leisure activities like going out to live performances?”
Some consumers don’t want to play the hierarchy game

- Each cultural institution values its biggest spenders/donors the most; perks abound
- Not everyone wants to “get married” to every institution in their community
  - Can we just date?
- Will people pay a premium for buying late?
- How can we facilitate and encourage infrequent use and late buying?
  - Cooperative marketing solutions are implied

Increased demand for convenience

- Low threshold for opting out
  - Attractive, convenient alternatives
- Less willingness to drive, fight traffic
  - More at-home entertainment options
- Slow shift in population away from arts facilities in urban centers
- One response is venue diversification
- Looking forward, the challenge is being relevant to people in a range of settings
The new calculus of risk and reward

- Less willingness to take risks, more willingness to pay large sums for a guaranteed “home run” experience
  - Evidenced by blockbuster phenomenon
  - Super-premium price points on Broadway
- Consistent with a pervasive trend towards “trading up”
- The rise of VIP culture or “the massification of luxury”
  - Creating the reality or illusion of exclusivity, status, prestige
  - The more everything becomes accessible, the more some people want to be separate
- Suggests demand for value-added, premium arts experiences

Migration toward electronic info. acquisition
Increased reliance on word-of-mouth

- Reaction to glut of information online
- Lower consumption of traditional media
  - Fragmentation of the media
  - Proliferation of personal communications technologies
- Hunger for “unbiased” information
- Proliferation of online Word-of-Mouth tools
  - Peer-to-peer, viral marketing tactics
  - evites.com, ORBIT online invitation tool
  - Reminder services

The Online Social Networking Phenomenon

- Proliferation of online social spaces
  - MySpace.com, Friendster.com, Care2Connect.com, CrowdFactory.com, Tribe.net, LinkedIn.com, Gather.com
- To learn how arts groups are using these technologies, see TechSoup.org
- Concurrent rise in real life social networks
  - Book clubs, film clubs, play groups
  - The Cellular Church
Social network fundraising: www.ChipIn.com

Growing awareness that social context drives arts attendance

• Who do I want to spend time with?
• Absence of social context is a major barrier to participation
  - Examples: spousal taste discordance; new to the area
• People construct all sorts of social groups around arts experiences
  - Groups of co-workers, college alumni groups, church groups, small family groups, friendship groups
• We are in the business of creating social experiences for people, a part of which is art
• New emphasis on personal, direct selling
The rise of personal creative expression

• The tools of everyday creativity: the living arts
  - Gardening, cooking, decorating oneself, designing attractive living spaces, collecting art and objects, writing letters and diaries
• Mostly self-directed, home-based
• Add to this the user-generated content phenomenon
  - CafePress.com: “Shop, sell or create what’s on your mind”
  - Flickr.com: “Store, search, and share your photos”
  - YouTube.com: “Broadcast yourself”
• Off the radar map of most funders and arts institutions
  - A giant value disconnect
Trend towards more customized experiences

• Deeply embedded in today’s consumer environment
  - “Mass customization” or the “one-to-one future” in which every consumer gets unique treatment
• A generation of consumers are accustomed to getting what they want, when they want it, where they want it
  - iTunes, NetFlix, TiVo, digital cable, satellite radio
More demand for active engagement opportunities

- Consumers are demanding more intense, more meaningful experiences
  - We are entertaining a generation of experience learners
- Evidenced in higher rates of “personal participation”
  - The rise in amateur art making, art collecting (e.g., homemade music recordings)
  - Part of the “Pro-Am Revolution” (i.e., professional amateurs such as bloggers, astronomers)
- Art for a compressed, impersonal, anxious society
  - Technology has sped things up to the point where, paradoxically, everything is slowing down

Shift towards interpretation-rich arts experiences

- Overall trend towards engagement and “experience enhancement”
  - Slow, fitful innovation process
- Improving “readiness to receive”
  - Martha Graham company - introductory videos
  - Advance mailing of program notes, synopses
- More contextual programming
- Embedded interpretation
  - Audio guide content on cell phones
  - Supertitles at the Opera
  - Concert Companion at classical music concerts
Audience as Co-Author of Meaning

Art Mobs to Remix MoMA (With Your Help)

Art Mobs returns with a new project. Last year we hosted a gallery event at Marymount Manhattan College. Now we're focusing our attention on the Museum of Modern Art. We've produced [unofficial] audio guides for MoMA, and we're making them available as podcasts. We'd love for you to join in by sending us your own MoMA audio guides, which we'll gladly add to our podcast feed. Why should audio guides be proprietary? Help us hack the gallery experience, help us remix MoMA!

Summary

The Shifting Sands of Demand: Trends in Cultural Participation
Big Thoughts

- World cultural citizens
- Filters help people make choices
- Importance of social context
- Improving “readiness to receive”
- Creating intentionality
  - Empowering customers to design their own experiences
- Engagement, experience enhancement, intensity
- Making connections to personal creativity at home and at work

About the Speaker

Alan Brown is a leading researcher and management consultant in the nonprofit arts industry. As a principal of WolfBrown, his work focuses on understanding consumer demand for cultural experiences and on helping institutions, funded and agency, make informed decisions and respond to changing conditions. Prior to joining with Tom Wolf and Bill Keens as principal in WolfBrown, Alan served as principal of Alan S. Brown & Associates (2003 to 2006) and as President of Audience Insight LLC and Associate Principal of AMS Planning & Research Corp. (1990 to 2003), where he studied audiences, citizen and patterns of cultural participation in almost every major market in the U.S.

From 2000 to 2002, he directed the Classical Music Consumer Segmentation Study for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and 15 orchestras, the largest private study of classical music audiences ever undertaken in the U.S. In 2001, he designed and conducted The Values Study, a groundbreaking study of the motivations and values driving arts attendance and participation in the fields of dance, drama, classical music, and visual arts. Based on this work, Alan was called upon to design The Walker Foundation’s planning its donation campaigns for arts and cultural causes. A study of the benefits of arts activities conducted by RAND.


Within the past two years, Alan has directed proprietary studies for Disney Theatrical Productions, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Joyce Theater, the Mayo Health System, and the Crafty Chica, Carnival exit among others. Currently, he is leading a consortium of 15 major university presenters in a groundbreaking study of the values and motivations driving arts attendance and donation. In 2007, he will lead a study of culture engagement in two coastal regions of California for the James Irvine Foundation.

As AMS/Audience Insight, Alan has directed numerous strategic planning assignments and feasibility studies for major arts facilities and programs in New York, California, Florida, New Jersey, Texas, and Ohio, with a focus on operational planning and organizational design. As a facilitator, he has supported many broad meetings, retreats, expert panels, advisory roundtables, and public meetings. In 2005, he facilitated the annual senate of the Board, staff and music of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, POA. In 2005 led a series of regional roundtables on the future role of arts in society for the Interactions Center for the Arts. Currently, he is leading a public value study for the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, and for visible in Minneapolis.

Designing and evaluating collaborative marketing programs is another focus of Alan’s work. He assisted in the development of non-cooperative cultural marketing initiatives in Charlotte, Philadelphia, Boston and San Jose, and serves as a resource to foundations and arts agencies in this emerging business practice.

Prior to joining AMS in 1990, Alan served for five years as Executive Director of the Arts Alive Summer Festival, a multi-discipline performing arts presenter in Michigan. He holds degrees from the University of Michigan a Master of Business Administration, a Master of Music in Arts Administration and a Bachelor of Musical Arts in vocal performance. Also makes his home in Fairfield, Connecticut with a Yellow Labrador Retriever named Golden Brown.