

The Business of Theatre

By Marion Combs



How can thinking of educational theatre productions as a small business help students?

Theatre educators frequently are asked to take on the direct fiscal and managerial responsibility for their theatre production program; with the larger programs operating on budgets upwards of six figures. Tapping into effective practices of small business leaders can help to make this job easier while providing resources for training students, attracting, and training volunteers and ensuring sustainability.

Why It Matters

One of the most important, but least addressed topics in K – 12 theatre education is the “business of theatre”—producing, marketing, managing, administration, and associated activities. School theatre programs are often without the expertise of a designated producer or general manager, usually the overall financial and managerial functions for a production, a season or an ongoing program fall to the theatre educator in charge, often with very little support. In response to this need, with the support of a grant from the MackIntosh Foundation, the Educational Theatre Association (EdTA), has created a series of mini courses and a tool kit to help provide needed information for educators who are asked to manage the business of school based theatre; a vital educational tool and community service.

Things to Consider

The overwhelming emphasis in K – 12 theatre education is performance, and secondarily, technical theatre. Middle Grades and High School theatre teachers basically have no curricular units on the business of theatre, and consequently, there is frequently limited subject matter expertise among teachers and students. Students are rarely exposed to issues of production, management, and finance. Further compounding this knowledge and experiential gap is the fact that the major associations and unions do not often have programs about the business of theatre that are directed toward teenagers. The lack of information and curriculum not only leaves teachers unsupported, but their students are missing out on a valuable school to work pathway and a richer understanding of the creative industries.

The Educational Theatre Association celebrates the huge successes of our member teachers and theatre educators everywhere, who yearly manage productions serving over 50 million audience members, according to a recent EdTA survey. In support of the tremendous value of the work that they do, EdTA has created resources specifically aimed at the management of theatre programs. The EdTA “Business of Theatre” resources highlight the basics of managing a theatre program across three important areas:

- Program Management
- Producing and Development
- Marketing

The resources include a series of short informational case studies like this one as a companion to a set of courses. Case studies are designed to be clear, succinct, professional briefs that get right to the point and offer timely information which can be used immediately. The companion courses housed on the EdTA learning center at [Theatre Educator Pro](#), are coupled with video interviews from the field offering tips and advice from both industry professionals and classroom educators. Together, these two resources are designed to assist theatre teachers in their efforts to ensure sustainable programs while building the financial prowess and career understandings of generations to come.

Recommended Actions

- **Develop strategies** for yourself, your students and your volunteers which support effective practice in the business of theatre.
- **Advocate** for yourself for professional learning opportunities about managing and operating a theatre program.
- **Make school to work connections** for your students by exposing them to the many and varied jobs in the theatre and entertainment industries at all levels- professional, regional, community based and so on.
- **Consider creating a curriculum** to train students in the skills needed to manage a theatre program.
- **Encourage** student designers, stage managers and marketing volunteers to participate in the International Thespian Awards of Excellence program at a state or national level.

Links and Resources

The Educational Theatre Association

www.schooltheatre.org

Theatre Educator Pro online learning center

<http://learn.schooltheatre.org>

About the Author

"Business of Theatre Introduction" is written by Marion Combs, Educational Theatre Association, Director of Development. Mr. Combs' experience encompasses executive-level performance in all facets of institutional advancement, fund development, organizational communication, educational administration, board development, strategic planning, facilities planning and development, team building and training, and budget planning and management.

Additional Credits

EdTA's Business of Theatre Steering Committee Members

- Sarah Jane Arnegger, iHeart Radio Broadway
- Jason Goldstein, Booktix
- Andrew Kuhlman, Stages, St. Louis
- Meredith Lucio, Producer
- David R. Scott, Disney Theatrical Productions
- Cory Wilkerson, EdTA Education Manager

More in This Series

Program Management

- *Leading the Team*
- *Running a Theatre Program for Klutzes*
- *Budgeting for Your Show and Your Season*
- *Building a Booster Group*

Producing & Development

- *What does a Producer Do?*
- *Contracts and Licensing*
- *Doing the "Rights" Thing*
- *Fundraising*

Marketing

- *Marketing your Show*
- *Marketing your Program*
- *Leveraging the EdTA Brand*
- *Developing your Audiences*