

Snapshot Survey—Fall 2010: Online Ticket Sales and Contributions

By Christopher Shuff and Ilana B. Rose

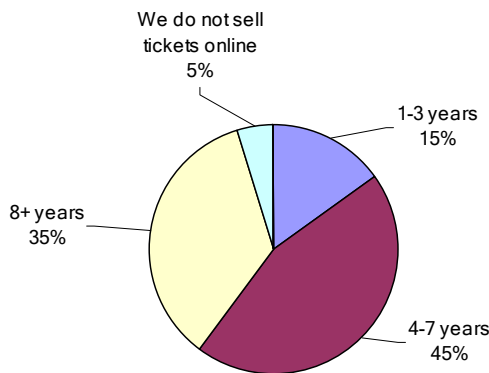
The growing importance of technology in marketing and fundraising is a frequent topic of interest in TCG meetings, teleconferences and email requests. In our latest Snapshot Survey, we gathered data on the extent to which theatres are selling tickets and receiving contributions online. Findings from the 125 participating theatres are below. Please note that participants only completed portions of the survey that applied to them; percentages reported are based on the number of respondents, which are noted in parentheses. There may be slight discrepancies in totals due to rounding.

► What are your theatre’s annual expenses? (125 theatres)

Budget Group	Annual Expenses	# of Participants
Budget Group 1	\$50,000 - \$499,999	18
Budget Group 2	\$500,000 - \$999,999	27
Budget Group 3	\$1,000,000 - \$2,999,999	32
Budget Group 4	\$3,000,000 - \$4,999,999	17
Budget Group 5	\$5,000,000 - \$9,999,999	16
Budget Group 6	\$10,000,000 and above	15

Online Ticket Sales

► How long has your theatre been selling tickets online? (125 theatres)



► Of your total tickets sold, what percentage are sold online? (119 theatres)

	All	Budget Group 1 (14)	Budget Group 2 (25)	Budget Group 3 (32)	Budget Group 4 (17)	Budget Group 5 (16)	Budget Group 6 (15)
Average	34%	38%	47%	34%	28%	19%	30%
Median	27%	35%	40%	27%	25%	15%	28%

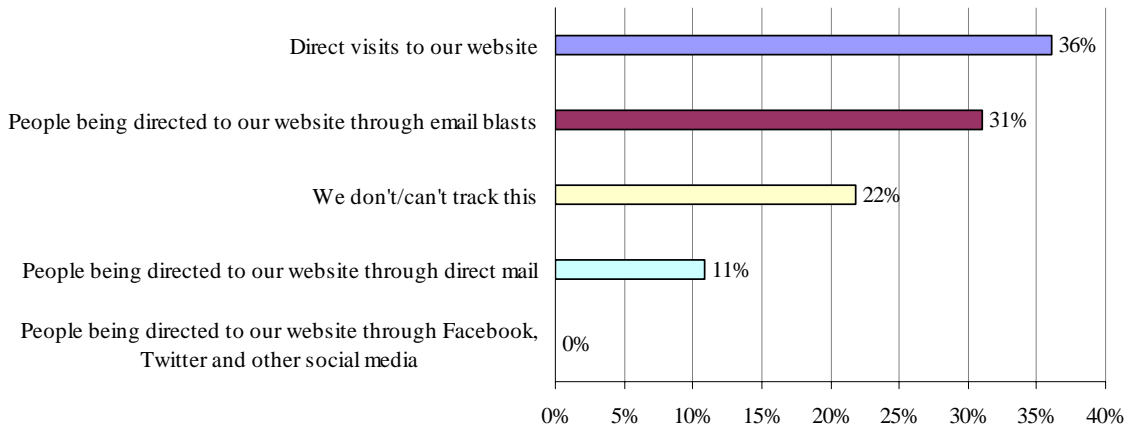
► Of your single tickets sold, what percentage are sold online? (119 theatres)

	All	Budget Group 1 (14)	Budget Group 2 (25)	Budget Group 3 (32)	Budget Group 4 (17)	Budget Group 5 (16)	Budget Group 6 (15)
Average	42%	44%	51%	41%	37%	36%	41%
Median	39%	43%	41%	37%	35%	35%	40%

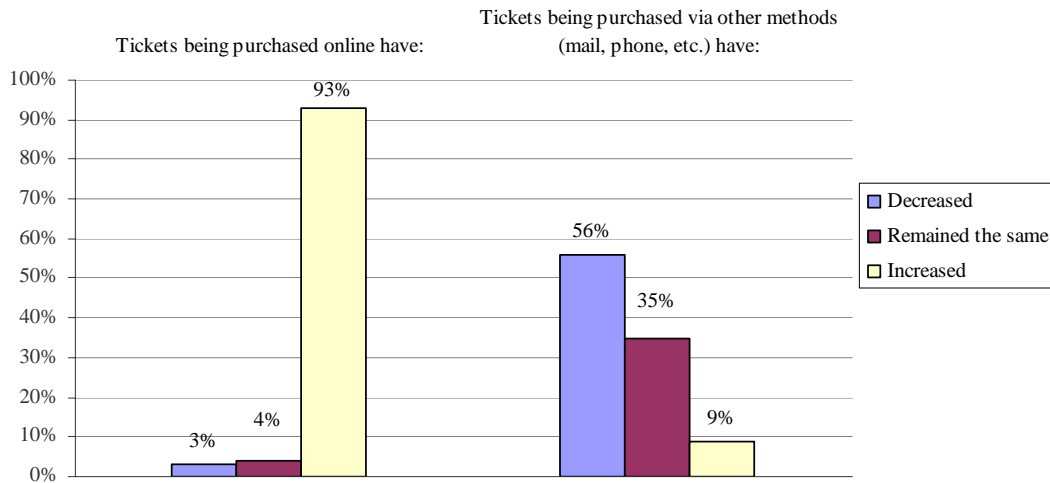
► **What percentage of your subscriptions/memberships (packages) are sold online?** (104 theatres)

	All	Budget Group 1 (10)	Budget Group 2 (20)	Budget Group 3 (28)	Budget Group 4 (15)	Budget Group 5 (16)	Budget Group 6 (15)
Average	18%	20%	28%	14%	13%	11%	21%
Median	10%	10%	25%	5%	5%	5%	15%

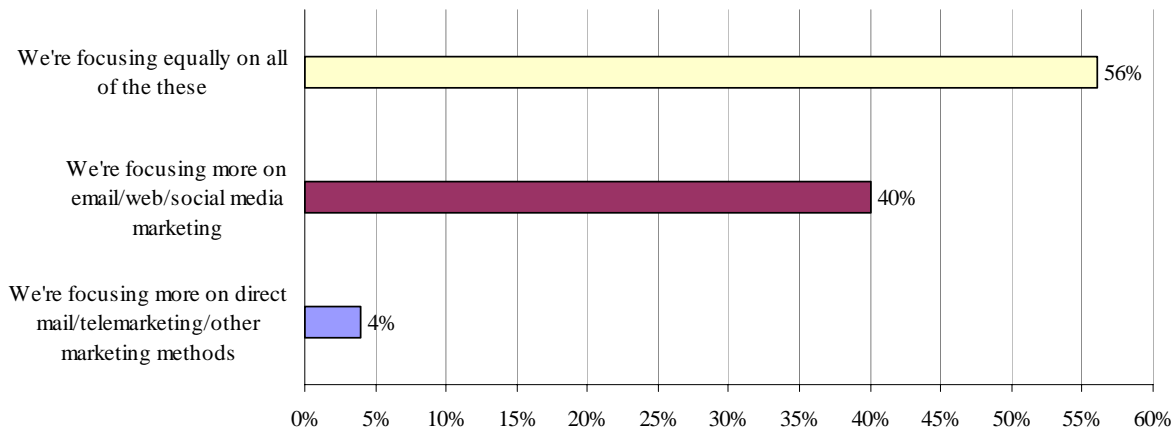
► **In your estimation, what is the primary route by which your online tickets are being sold?** (119 theatres)



► **Over time at your theatre, what has been the trend in how tickets are being purchased?** (119 theatres)



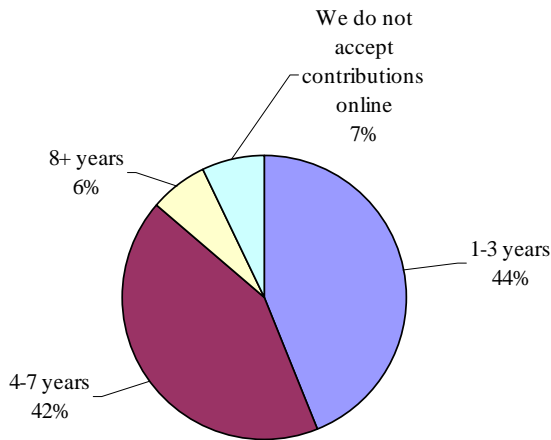
► **How would you characterize your current strategy for selling tickets?** (125 theatres)



ONLINE CONTRIBUTIONS

Please note: For this survey, participants were asked to only report on individual contributions given towards operations/annual funds and to exclude individual contributions towards capital/special campaigns.

► **How long have you been accepting individual contributions online?** (125 theatres)



► **Of your total individual contributions (dollars), what percentage are given online?** (116 theatres)

	All	Budget Group 1 (15)	Budget Group 2 (24)	Budget Group 3 (29)	Budget Group 4 (17)	Budget Group 5 (16)	Budget Group 6 (15)
Average	12%	13%	23%	9%	6%	3%	14%
Median	5%	5%	12%	5%	4%	2%	5%

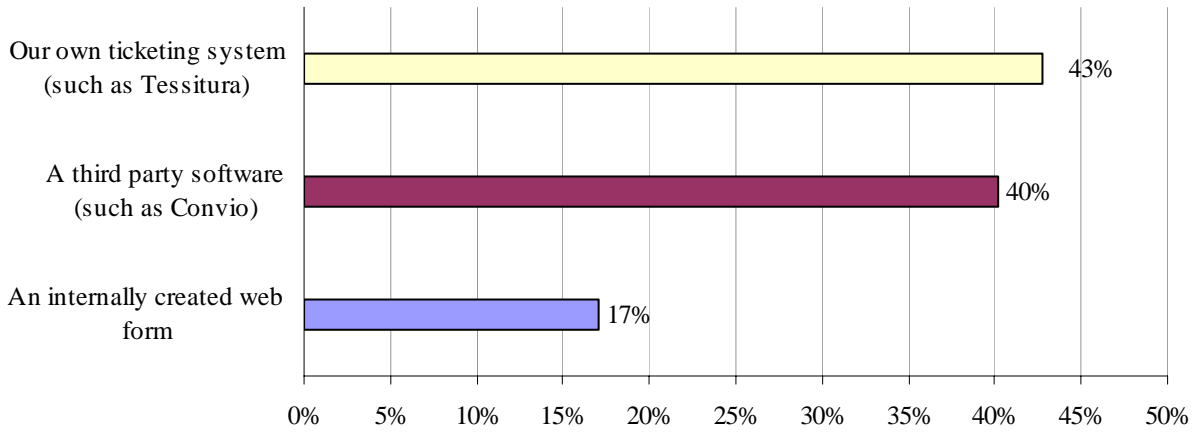
► **What amount was your average online contributions in your most recently completed season?** (116 theatres)

	All	Budget Group 1 (15)	Budget Group 2 (24)	Budget Group 3 (29)	Budget Group 4 (17)	Budget Group 5 (16)	Budget Group 6 (15)
Average	\$122	\$45	\$65	\$95	\$137	\$129	\$322
Median	\$90	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$127	\$88	\$141

► **What amount was your average contribution from all other sources (mail, phone, etc.) in your most recently completed season?** (116 theatres)

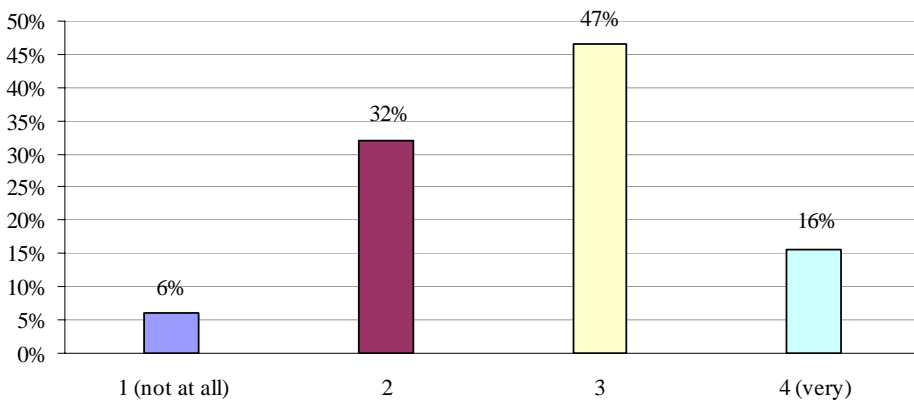
	All	Budget Group 1 (15)	Budget Group 2 (24)	Budget Group 3 (29)	Budget Group 4 (17)	Budget Group 5 (16)	Budget Group 6 (15)
Average	\$392	\$160	\$189	\$513	\$432	\$498	\$554
Median	\$229	\$100	\$113	\$250	\$234	\$347	\$401

► **How are your online donations processed?** (116 theatres)

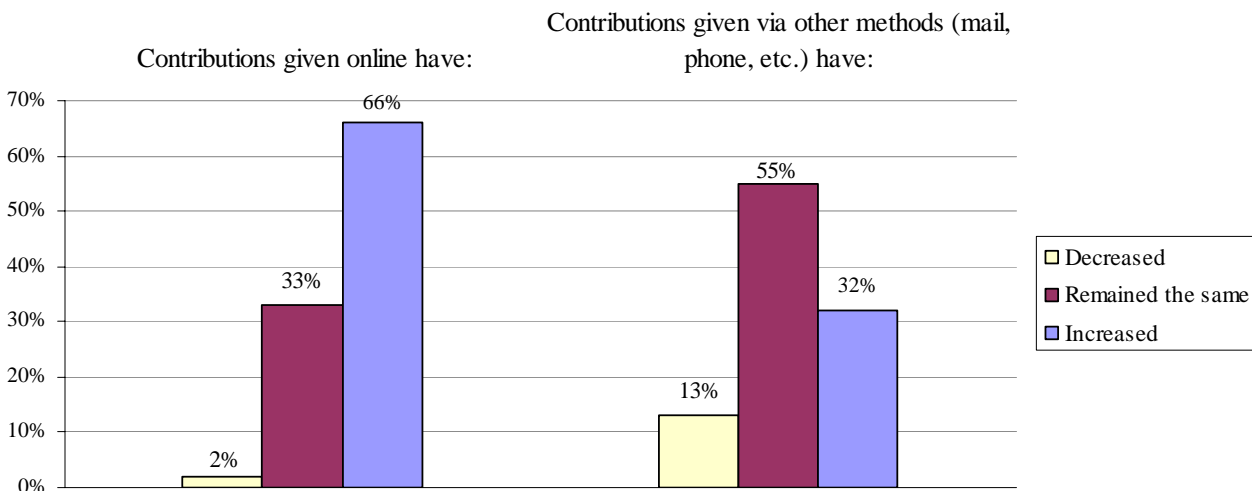


Participants were asked to specify the systems/software that they are using. The most reported answers were Network for Good, PayPal and Tessitura. Other responses included: Acceptiva, Archtics, AudienceView, Blackbaud NetCommunity, Choice, DonorPerfect, EasyWare, Echo Intuit through Action Potential website hosting, eProcessing, Events.org, FormSite, GiftWorks, GivingExpress, Greater Giving, Groundspring, iSeatz, JustGive, OvationTix, Paciolan, PatronManager, The Patron Edge, ProVenue, Raiser's Edge, SeatAdvisor Box Office, Theatre Manager, Theatremania, TicketTurtle, tix.com, Vendini, Wintix and Zen Cart.

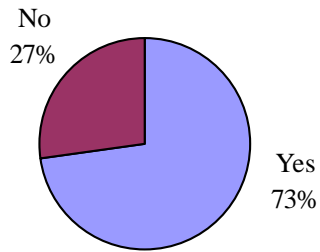
► **How “user-friendly” do you believe your current system is for people making online contributions?** (116 theatres)



► **Over time at your theatre, what has been the trend in how individual contributions are being made?** (116 theatres)

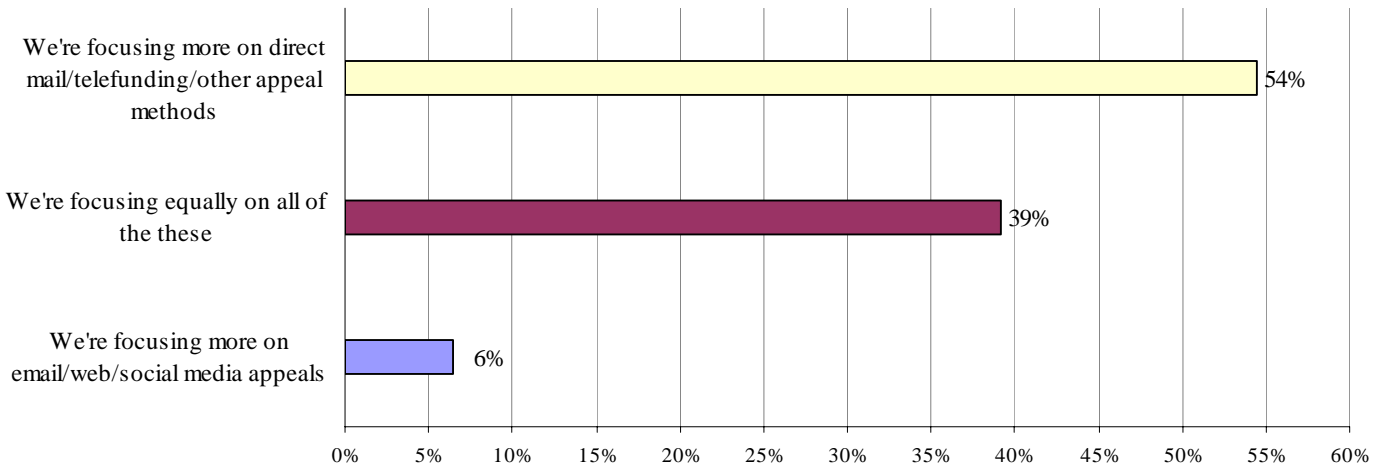


► **Do you send fundraising e-blasts (other than for capital/special campaigns)?** (125 theatres)

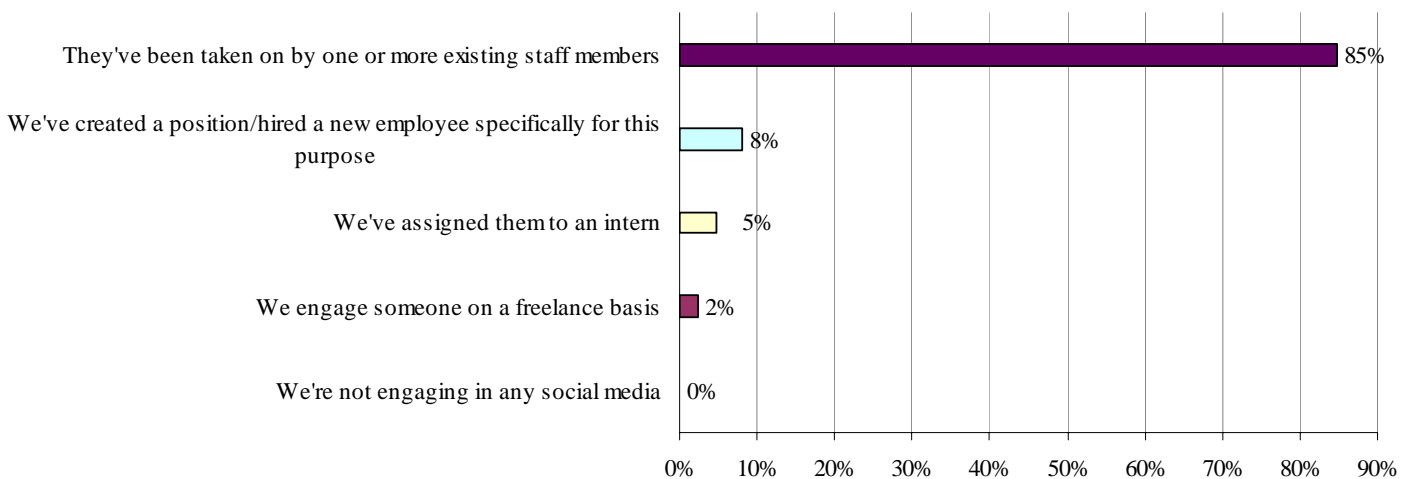


The average number of fundraising e-blasts sent per year is 6.

► **How would you characterize your current strategy for soliciting individual contributions (not including capital/special campaigns)?** (125 theatres)



► **Most organizations are engaging in some form of social media. How are those responsibilities primarily being handled by your theatre?** (125 theatres)



► **Participants were asked to share any effective strategies they are employing for generating and conducting online ticket sales.**

Theatres are using e-blasts, social media and their websites to offer online-only discounts, incentives and advance purchasing opportunities. Comments included:

- We have an online event called “Pay As You Will” for every mainstage production. The sale starts at 12:01am on the day of the show and tickets are only available online. Nearly 100% of the tickets for those performances are sold online.
- We have been trying more promotional codes that only apply online via email blasts, social media alerts and website postings/ads.
- Notices for events going on sale are done by email first. People who follow us on our social media hear about on-sale dates at the same time as people on our email list.
- We send follow-up emails to new patrons with offers for the next show. We run contests where people join our email list to enter to win; losers receive a discount offer.
- Tickets are \$2 cheaper when purchased online.
- We sometimes offer deals where the customer pays no service fee if they book online only.
- We make the online fees extremely low. We hope to eventually eliminate fees from online sales altogether to help people make the shift away from phone sales (which will continue to have fees attached).
- We offer special incentives to our email list, including pre-sales and discounts.
- If we need to fill a house, we’ll update information to say “only 20 seats left” or “almost sold out” and we ask the creative team to send out information via Facebook to their friends in addition to what we do in-house.
- e-blasts the week of the performance seem to be the most effective. The e-blast has a direct link to our ticket buying page and we typically see a 30%- 50% spike on the day the blasts go out. We time the blasts to go out on Tuesdays at 1pm to more effectively reach our audience.

Theatres are redesigning their websites, emails and printed materials to highlight online ticketing and push sales. They are streamlining the purchasing process, strategically bringing people to specific places on their sites and investing in new software to both simplify and enhance the purchasing process. Comments included:

- We’ve enhanced our online communications vehicles’ (website, email address, Facebook and Twitter pages) presence by including them on all print materials.
- Our banner is plastered on everything we do, directing people to our website and emphasizing its 24/7 availability and convenience.
- We have reduced the presence of our phone number on all printed materials and nearly tripled the size of the web address.
- We simplified our e-blast messaging, which has caused an increase in click-thrus.
- We include our website on all communications and make sure all emails have links directly to the “buy tickets” page for the respective production. We want to make sure that people go right to the purchase option rather than to our homepage to then search for the purchase page.
- Making our purchase path more user-friendly had a positive impact on online sales; we added a “select your own seats” module, moved the login later in the process and made promotional codes easier to use.
- By changing where our link on e-blasts takes a patron we have seen more tickets sold online. We used to have a link that took the patron to our Performance Page (and then a link on that page to our online ticketing software) and now we have a link that goes directly to our online ticketing software.
- We are looking into upgrading our website and technology to make the process smoother and more efficient, including print-at-home tickets and select-your-own seat technologies.
- We offer real-time ticketing, with a “view from seat” feature.
- We’ve made our website such a good source of information that all of people’s questions are answered and they can just buy their tickets online.
- For renewals, we actually set all of our current patrons up in an online database that they can access with a username and password we issue to simply renew online.
- We are working to make member renewal packages and special member/donor discount tickets available online for the first time.

Theatres are adding features to their websites and utilizing new media to bring their audiences “behind the scenes” and create a feeling of community. Comments included:

- We offer multimedia/engagement through photos, videos, podcasts and an iPhone App.
- We share day-to-day information about our shows, such as rehearsal photos.
- We’ve created a website “splash page,” encouraging visitors to join our email list to receive special offers and in-depth show information. We post video interviews with artists about specific shows; pull quotes from reviews and include them in e-blasts; and use social media/Twitter regularly, focusing on our shows and the theatre community.

Theatres are taking advantage of online advertising opportunities on other websites and they are seeking out partnerships with other organizations and businesses to promote online ticket sales. Comments included:

- Our two strongest initiatives have involved utilizing Google ad words, to pull in potential patrons while they’re searching or shopping online, and Facebook ads, which offer an online-only discount code and are

- directly linked to a sale page.
- We have a relationship with a local movie theatre that runs original content trailers for us, which seems to drive new audiences to our website.
- We've used a blend of targeted e-blast, online-only

sales and partnerships with other not-for-profit organizations to push web traffic. We partner with third parties for promotions and advertise on websites like z-vents.

► **Participants were asked to share any effective strategies they are employing for generating and conducting online contributions. In general, theatres seem to be having more success generating online ticket sales and are still developing effective ways to generate online contributions.**

Theatres are integrating donating opportunities into the online ticket purchasing process and ticket-related communication. Comments included:

- We are adding a donation page between the “click to buy tickets” and “process your order” pages.
- We make it easy for people to add a few dollars to their ticket purchases.
- We have added a \$1 default donation amount to ticket sales that people can opt out of.
- We have a pop-up window at end of the ticket purchase asking for a donation.
- As an incentive to subscribers, we offer to waive their processing fee in exchange for a donation.
- A page pops up before patrons complete each ticket sale online offering the opportunity to make a donation, become a member and get a discount of 20% off all their ticket orders for a year.
- We are now starting to include donating opportunities in our ticket e-blasts.
- We include a link to online donating in the email that goes out from our box office reminding patrons about their upcoming tickets.

Theatres are utilizing e-blasts to solicit contributions and are adapting the tone of their communication to suit the new media. They are also being more strategic in tailoring their messaging and timing their appeals. Several theatres commented that e-blasts and social media are most successful as reinforcements to their direct mail and telemarketing efforts. Comments included:

- We send e-blasts as a direct follow-up to letters and other appeals and send them with increased frequency around year-end.
- Our appeals are targeted to specific demographics and the appeals are timed to a patron's experience.
- We're using social media/email for time-sensitive appeals.
- This year, we're using targeted email blasts to educate non-donor subscribers and recent single ticket buyers about the case for annual giving.
- We include a link to the donation part of the website in every solicitation letter and utilize social media sites and email solicitations.
- We are increasing the frequency of email blasts and researching effective methods of social media fundraising. Email blasts are increasingly segmented per donor levels and interest areas, and measures are being taken to gather as many donor email addresses as possible.
- We have incorporated humor into our online campaigns instead of using a "heart strings" approach.
- We're starting to show pictures and more detailed images to make the appeals more fun.
- We've tried emailing messages "from" artists involved in the production immediately upon that production's closing, but these have not proven successful. This year, we are going to experiment with a low ask tied to a specific need.

Theatres are investing in software and website improvements to attract and manage online contributions. Comments included:

- We've recently updated our webpage, integrating Tessitura.
- We are implementing a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database system.
- Plans are in place to include a "donate" button on each page of our website.
- We plan on building a separate online donation form on our website (outside of the single ticket/subscription purchase path), which we hope will make it easier for patrons to conduct contributions online.

Some theatres are exploring matching gift opportunities and partnerships with other organizations/websites. Comments included:

- A local foundation has created a Donor Bridge portal with all not-for-profits registered and they match the online donations on a once-a-year basis against a set amount of funds. This recently generated \$11,000 worth of online donations.
- We conduct an online matching gift challenge.
- We partner with charitable navigators and Groupon type sales methods where part of the proceeds go to charity.