

How can social media & mobile web tools help marketing communications strategies for the performing arts

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New technologies open a whole world of possibilities and strategies for the growth and the promotion of cultural organizations but, how can we use social media in our marketing communication strategies? All these matters and many more were discussed during the Tenso Professionals Meeting 2012.

For two days the professional audience had the opportunity to hear a panel of speakers working in classical music, museums and media industries. Project manager Elise Rouyer presented an in depth survey of Tenso members' presence on the social media as of May 2012. Taking into account that there are 13 choirs from 10 different countries in Tenso's network, the results are very varied. The conclusion is that all of them are present in Facebook and Twitter, though not equally active; presence on sharing sites like Picasa, Instagram or Pinterest varies, and none of the Tenso members runs a blog.

Presenting a quick *what's what in social media today*, Sébastien Magro, Digital Project Manager of the Musée du Quai Branly, made a general tour around the numerous web and mobile based technologies, tools, blogospheres and networking sites.

The first topic discussed was 'Examples of social media strategies'. A vibrant Jo Johnson, digital marketing manager of the London Symphony Orchestra, stated that the first step you have to take, especially in cultural institutions, is to break down the traditional barriers and get your manager to support digital initiatives. "This is difficult because working with social media takes up much time and bosses want immediate economic results, i.e., to sell more tickets. But they have to understand that we are working on social media strategies, not marketing..."

For Lukas Hellermann, project manager at musikFabrik, it all depends on the size of your organization. Since the German ensemble is a small group of 16 musicians, it is easy for them to get involved and participate actively offering their followers varied information: for example, they use Twitter to announce events and Facebook to involve or engage their audiences.

For both speakers, it is very clear that you have to know very well what you want to communicate before putting it in the social media. For example, they pointed out that they create different contents for Facebook and Twitter users. Both speakers emphasized "that there's no need to shout to your followers. We must be very gentle the way we address them because we are not selling them anything; we are communicating".

The speakers in the second panel went to the bottom of the fast development of mobile phones. The use of mobile devices has doubled almost every year. Cecile Martin, marketing director of Greencopper, a Canadian company that creates apps for the cultural market, talked about ways to engage audiences via the mobile web. Since we spend apparently more than 2 hours a day using our phones, Martin affirmed that 'we might as well get viral to get our audience to participate in our events'.

Mobile applications are to share, not to read; they are instant since they are integrated or embedded into the mobile device. Martin emphasized that what is really important is that cultural institutions must take into account, in their communication strategies, to create a mobile-friendly websites.

On Friday the conference moved to Palais Brongniart, where Musicorama, a lively fair of classical music was taking place. The subject of the day was how to reach audiences of contemporary music. One of the speakers was Tim Rutherford-Johnson who pointed out that, as a freelance writer, he receives little feedback when he works for a traditional printed newspaper; but with articles online, he receives many comments. "My experience is that in the world of contemporary music there is little critique and few discussions, since it's a very small world and we all know each other".

On the other hand the panellist made us aware that new technologies are not the same for all, especially for older composers (> 35-year) who tend to be more isolated since they are not in the habit of moving easily on the Internet. He mentioned another issue: you can have many followers on Twitter but it does not mean that they read your posts. "I have thousands of potential followers but, how many of them - outside the professional world of contemporary music - actually read my tweets?" It is a paradox. But of course, contemporary music doesn't fit in 140 characters... Rutherford-Johnson finished by saying: "I do not think that contemporary music will ever be hugely popular as it requires much effort. I think rather of opening doors to approach future audiences".

Luc Hossepied, communication manager of Ensemble Intercontemporain, spoke about how he learned from their blog 'Musique to reaction' that it was not sufficient to speak to the audience in a simple way to get them to react on the blog. "The blog didn't work because at the end we understood that the readers were not writing because they didn't feel knowledgeable enough to discuss contemporary music." After three years they closed the blog. From this experience, Luc learned that the Internet may help to broaden general awareness of contemporary music, which may eventually lead to readers going to concert halls; but the direct chain of cause and effect is hard to find. However, Hossepied is optimistic and sees in social media the future. He puts his money on Facebook and specialized online magazines, since - if it comes to the bottom - digital media enable you to publicize your work with a far smaller budget than traditional (printed) media.

Lukas Hellermann of Ensemble musikFabrik confirmed that it is easier and cheaper that musicians write for their own digital platform, since it is very expensive to have content of high quality produced by outsiders. He also raised a doubt. Obviously a musician can record a concert with his smartphone but does that mean he will post it on the Internet?

The fourth topic discussed were digital innovations in the cultural sector. Rachel Coldicutt, founder of Culture Hacks and co-founder of Maker's Guild, related how they released 'Twitterdämmerung', the first opera composed by more than 900 people's tweets and represented in the Royal Opera House of London. The Twitter Opera was a big success since the libretto was created by young people not necessarily interested in opera music. As Coldicutt pointed out, the idea was very simple and very economical. Culture Hacks also works in other innovative low cost platforms like Tumblr, that allows to publish videos, texts, images ... without the need to create your own editorial content.

Coldicutt proposed a dilemma: "Can we make technology the way we make art? Or should we make technology part of it... Ultimately our work in social media is addressing an audience which is not necessarily interested in the world of music and having them listen to you".

For Roei Amit, Deputy Director in charge of Digital and Multimedia NMR - Grand Palais, things are not so simple in the cultural world because the widespread use of social media has changed the rules of the game. On the one hand the public does not want to just sit at a concert in front of an orchestra anymore; you have to speak to them in a different way. What is really important is to interact with your audience, surprise them, offer them something that interests them, capture their attention since there's a lot of information available on the network.

These phenomena have changed the traditional way of working and the challenge for cultural institutions has become how to provoke an encounter with their audiences and to make them participate. "Because let us not forget that this interaction represents content that is very

valuable in the digital world. Wikipedia and Obama's election campaign are the two history's most successful examples of crowdfunding. The rest of campaigns need lots of money and networking".

Composer and clarinettist Samuel Berthod spoke to us about his experience on the site www.kisskissbankbank.com, a platform where artists or musicians post information about their projects and receive (financial) help from anonymous contributors: "It's you that has to move to attract your followers to put money in your project. This way, even people that you don't know or that have never heard your music, can feel they take part in the creation of a work of art".

The last topic of Tenso Professionals Meeting 2012 was blogs, seen from different perspectives. Lindsey Porter, press and PR Manager for Opera North, a company based in Leeds, opened the discussion. In April 2009, the press office of this British company created a blog that is by now receiving more than 2.500 daily visits. According to Porter, a blog helps to break down barriers and to create a glimpse of a certain magic behind the curtain of a theatre. There are many stories happening in an opera house so you should let people know about them, 'to create a buzz '.

They have also very successfully established Blogger events, where active bloggers are invited and treated as journalists. For example, they organized a Spanish night where they played the movie ' Hable con ella ' with a big party with Spanish music and *tapas*... "It had a lot of impact but really, I get more praise by my boss for a review in the Daily Mail than for an online article".

Whereas Opera North offers tickets and events to their bloggers, Ensemble musikFabrik has a different approach. Lukas Hellermann: "Bloggers are independent so it's very delicate to offer them something in return, they could see it as if we are trying to bribe them. I see it as a bit aggressive and we feel we might be attacking their freedom."

Paul Kilbey, reviews editor and marketing executive at Bachtrack, raised that his company offers a platform for fans of classic contemporary music to voluntarily write about their joint passion. That is, Bachtrack encourages amateur critics to share their experiences online, resulting in enthusiastic and mostly knowledgeable people writing reviews, for free. For some of us that raises the question: is it up to our professional standards to rely on (unpaid) volunteers to provide the content? To live through the music or to live off the music?

Finally, by Skype, Thomas Deneuille showed us how his academic project www.icareifyoulisten.com ended up as a blog. He explained that running a blog is a huge commitment, where you need to trust both the contributors and the audience. His blog is having so much success that Deneuille is thinking to hire an assistant and to move from the blog to a website. "I'm not a teenager and I want a more professional image. I will probably lose the tone and some of the audience but I still want the web to be fun and I'd love to keep the relationship with my readers ".

report by Gloria Zorrilla

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