

Customer Forum Minutes

Saturday 5 October 2013 – 10.30am

Leisure Connection Staff Present

Jo Ditch – General Manager

Adrian Gilmartin – Sales and Marketing Manager

Becca Henry – Sales and Marketing Assistant

JD Recap

- This customer forum was held in the lower foyer of the theatre as Grove Academy was running in the upper foyer. This brand new, part time, performing arts school launched on 21st Sept and runs on Saturday mornings, making use of many of the areas within the theatre including the upper foyer and the function room, as well as the auditorium.
- Other recent activities run by our education department include the Grove Theatre Summer Musical Project 2013. This year's production of West Side Story was very successful and saw the highest intake of young people involved in the project. The rights have already been secured for the 2014 project for Stephen Sondheim's **Into The Woods**.
- Over the last season we have shown 64 films. In particular the children's film titles have sold well. In the upcoming January and February Film Season we are looking at programming three screenings a day to provide a bit more of an option to our customers.
- Through September the Grove Theatre placed host to two large conferences. Both Superdrug and Savers held their Christmas launch conferences here, inviting all store managers and assistant store managers from around the country to Dunstable.
- We have had sixteen shows over the last period. Films have taken precedent over the summer as most product stops touring over the summer period. By screening films during this period we can ensure we do not go dark and remain an entertainment venue during the longer evenings.
- The marketing team have been working towards the next season which includes a variety of genres including operas from Ellen Kent, dramas from Immersion Theatre and London Classic Theatre and comedy from the likes of Sarah Millican, Rich Hall and Paul Chowdhry, as well as ballet from Ballet Theatre UK and the return of our Easter pantomime, with Alice in Wonderland.
- Jo Ditch is in continued talks with producers for the second half of 2014 into 2015.
- Over the coming months there will be a definite increase in promotional material advertising our Christmas pantomime, Dick Whittington. The marketing activity this year will be much stronger with radio adverts, billboards, bus rears and lampposts banners, amongst other things.
- We have recently gone through quite a few personnel changes with Natasha Ingall, our Deputy General Manager, and Karen Windley, our Education and PR Assistant returning from maternity leave. There have also been internal promotions with Adrian Gilmartin moving into the role of Sales and Marketing Manager, while Becca Henry took his place as the Sales and Marketing Assistant. Una Anderson recently joined the team as Head of Front

of House, while Pauline Maxwell-King has stepped into the new position of Head of Events and Functions.

Customer Comments

Was financial year 2013 a profitable year?

Yes it was. Over the course of the year we have seen a definite increase in the amount of interest in the films we screen. Financial year 2013 was also profitable, however, thanks to secondary income from events such as the two large conferences mentioned above. The growth of the education department with the launch of Grove Academy has also brought in more income.

We have also been able to identify, through analysing our data, that there are some segments in which we lack, i.e. the 18-24 year old bracket, which we aim to develop over the coming financial year.

Is there any more news on the screening of theatre shows?

We have been in discussions with the Royal Opera House, who want to include the Grove Theatre in their Autumn programming. Unfortunately, time has to be taken in securing the technology. We aim to be set up and running in time for the Royal Opera House's spring season. The next step after this is to work on screening the National Theatre's performances.

How successful was Panto Factor?

Panto Factor was very successful. Although the winner this year is from London, it was lovely to see the people of Dunstable behind him on the night giving them his support. We are also proud to say that the role of Dick Whittington's cat has been given to a local lady, while the role of Ship's Captain has been specifically written into the script after the producers were so impressed by a local dancer at the open dance auditions.

How far in advance do you know your film programming?

The next film season will be the January and February Film Season which we programme around the Oscar nominations. For this reason we programme later for this season in order to get a better understanding of the Box Office takings for the potential Oscar nomination titles.

Why was there an offer placed on the Sandi Toksvig show?

Ultimately the decision to run an offer lies with the producer. On this occasion the producer felt that an offer would help raised awareness of the production.

On average, how well are films attended?

Obviously each title is very different, as we often find with genre. Children's films often have high sales. On a yearly average, attendance is approximately 400 people for one screening.

The customer forums could be better advertised

We currently advertise each customer forum on our website and social media pages, as well as on the display board near Box Office in our foyer. A press release is also sent out each time although coverage of this can not be guaranteed. It is important to remember that the customer forums are just one for customers to give us feedback. They can also drop us an email, ring through to our admin line or fill out a customer comments card found by the display board in our foyer.

Forum closed: 11.50am

Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 16 January – 10.30am