

Grove Theatre
Customer Forum Minutes
Wednesday 6th July 2011 10.30am



Leisure Connection Staff Present;

Jo Ditch – General Manager
Claire McFauld – Sales and Marketing Manager
Teresa Jones – Education Manager
Tracey Glover – Sales and Function Assistant
(NB staff comments noted by initials)

JD thanked all for attending the forum and welcomed all customers to the theatre. Since the last forum in April, the Grove Theatre have been busy with back to back shows in April and May – including 2 West End tours in May (Joseph and Blood Brothers), had a successful run of cinema screenings over the Easter holidays, held successful education workshops, launched children's parties at the theatre – which have taken off very well, hosted the theatre's very first wedding fayre and have had many successful community hire's performing in the theatre over the last few months.

The theatre is currently in the process of signing off the new brochure, which runs from Aug 11 – Jan 12 and has a mixture of drama, ballet, opera (JD commented that Ellen Kent the Opera producer is returning to the theatre) and musicals. The venue is also working on a new marketing strategy to hopefully include a new website and new ticketing system.

TJ gave a brief update on our current summer youth project, The Likes of Us – performances occurring over 12-14th August with rehearsals happening 2 weeks prior to this.

CM spoke briefly about Grove Music Fest. CM explained that we are working with the community to bring a musical event to Dunstable which enables bands and artist to perform in front of hundreds of people on West End sized stage.

Outstanding Points from April's Forum:

- 1) Brown signs advertising the theatre – these are still being chased and no new update at present
- 2) Answer machine for Box Office – this has been looked into and is proving difficult to put in place with our current ticketing and phone systems for box office. Hopefully this may be one of the improvements with a new ticketing system.
- 3) New friends membership scheme – this has now been launched and the venue has had a great response about the new packages from current and new friends.

- 4) Easier booking online (can't pick seats) – proposed new website has this function, all information is being presented to our board on Friday 8th July.

New Customer Comments:

- 1) Customer Comment – Does the theatre advertise in the notice boards on the gates to priory gardens and on the notice boards in the Quadrant?

JD – Dunstable Town Council notice boards are controlled by the council, we pass on print to the council to place in their boards which they do regularly.

CM – The council put our print in the boards on rotation with their own print which they use the boards for so we can't be in them all the time.

Cllr Young commented that the shop window for the old motorist centre is now available – we can advertise in their.

CM and Cllr Young agreed to arrange a date to meet and discuss the options available.

- 2) Customer Comment – Why doesn't the Theatre use local radio for advertisement?

JD – Dunstable doesn't currently have a local radio station as Heart FM is becoming centralised to Milton Keynes. It transmits to numerous towns acting as their local radio station but it is not the same as when Chiltern Radio existed. We use BBC Three Counties when we can – this radio station does not permit adverts as it is a BBC radio station but we do have lots of press coverage through interviews on BBC Three Counties.

- 3) Customer Comment – Earlier this year you had Luton Light perform here with 'Singing' in the Rain'. Are they coming back?

JD – Yes we are having Luton Light return to us next year in 2012. They have booked in 2 week long shows with us next year.

The venue's hirer's are growing year on year and the rulings of the council discount have loosened slightly so now more can have the opportunity to use our venue.

- 4) Customer Comment – When is your next film season, and when will you be advertising for it?

JD – we will be announcing this week our film programme for August and September which includes the new Harry Potter film, Cars 2, The Inbetweeners, Mr. Poppers Penguins and many more.

- 5) Customer Comment – Are the Films Successful?

JD – we have had a difficult journey with our films as we are programming good films but we don't always get the footfall we would expect for such good films.

CM – we are doing lots of campaigning for our films to ensure that the lots of print is being distributed especially for the films in August and September now they have been confirmed and released.

6) Customer Comment – Is it possible to have films on a weekly basis as they can be a habit thing, i.e. every Wednesday etc like it used to be?

JD – this is something we have looked into but it is not always possible to block out a certain day each week as the programming of shows comes first and film has to fit around theatre programming as this is part of the contract with the council.

There will also be a difficulty in booking new releases for one screening as most of the distributors expect venues to show the film for an 'x' amount of screenings. Therefore we would have to programme older films which don't populate a high footfall of customers.

7) Customer Comment – Are the drama and plays improving?

JD - we have trialed split week dramas as week long dramas were not proving to be very successful. The split dramas have been slightly more successful but still not what the theatre had anticipated in terms of occupancy. The producers of The Ghost of Mrs Muir will be returning next year. The theatre are also going to trial one night dramas which you will see in the forthcoming programme.

The Grove won't stop programming drama but it is getting tricky from a producers point of view and the theatres as both sides are aware that customers regionally appear to not be attending drama's as frequently as other genres.

The Grove is working together with producers to create the best deal for them and the theatre in order for drama to continue in our programme.

8) Customer Comment – Are the theatre's pantomimes doing well?

JD – When looking back at sales across our previous pantomimes, our last pantomime Aladdin did struggle on some of the dates, especially when the heavy snow was around. We discovered in conversation with other theatres that they had similar problems.

This year the theatre has 'pre-empted' dramatic changes in weather conditions and has made the decision to move performances to earlier performance times, so that they will finish earlier and will not deter people from coming to visit the venue.

We also have a new ticket offer across certain shows (blunderbore offer), which provides cheaper tickets for attendees on certain dates, making the show's more accessible to a wider reach of people

JD – this year we have more advanced tickets sales for Jack than any other pantomime at the theatre, with schools performances filling up quickly, so all in all it's looking very positive for this years panto.

9) Customer Comment – Last year when I came to see Aladdin, it was after the snow and the footpath was dangerous. When I mentioned to your staff they were not very helpful.

JD – apologies that you did not find the member of staff that you spoke to helpful. The pathways around the theatre are the responsibility of a third party company called Space Care. Theatre staff were passed incorrect information about this situation at the time coupled with the fact this problem arose over the holiday period and staff who we needed to contact were unavailable. The theatre aim's to ensure motions are set in place before the pantomime this year to ensure this doesn't happen again.

10) Customer Comment – Where does the stairs by Door B go down too?

JD – when the stalls seating is retracted to create a flat floor in the auditorium, these are the stairs that customers take to enter this space. The doors at the bottom of the stairs are locked when not in use.

11) Customer Comment – Do you advertise in Eaton Bray and Edlesborough as friends of mine who live there do not know what you have on. The Edlesborough fete attracts the whole village – this would be a perfect place to have a stand.

CM – we have external distributors (Cause and Effect) who take the theatres brochures and print out to various places in the area, these should be one places that drop off's are coordinated too so I will check to ensure they haven't been missed off the route and if not we will add them to our circulation list.

12) Customer Comment – The Groves website crashes my home computer and most of the time you cannot see the shows in the calendar or what's on guide.

CM – Sometimes the browser in which you are viewing the page can effect what you see online. I would recommend viewing the site in Firefox. Website's 'crashing' can be down to culmination of factors including low broadband width, errors from the hosting site, not having the most up to date version of your web browser etc.

The theatre as mentioned previously is looking into a new website and we should know in due course if the venue us to have a re-commissioned website, however all this feedback is very helpful in getting a new website and thank you for your comments.

13) Customer Comment – Why are the forums at these times?

JD – the forums are on varied dates/times. We alter between an evening, morning, weekday and weekend date so that everyone has an opportunity to attend one if they wish.

14) Customer Comment – why do you not give more notice on Facebook and twitter for shows? Late updates for shows implies to me you are not sold out.

CM – Good social media marketing rules advise all sectors to not to use Facebook and Twitter as a selling tool but instead use it to build relationships for the business and not transactions. The reason to why people are ‘on’ our Facebook is different to why people are ‘on’ our website. Our social media strategy is working well for us and as a result of building good strong links and conversations with our audiences has meant that Facebook is currently our 5th referral site to our website and our numbers on both Facebook and twitter are growing daily.

Thank you for your comments ref trying for last minute sales – this is useful information. We update daily about what we have happening in the theatre and isn’t always directly linked to encourage bookings.

JD – Thanked customers for attending the forum today and their feedback. Customer Forums are just one way of being able to contact the Grove Theatre with feedback, everyone is able to contact the Grove Theatre via phone, email and letters.

-Ends-

Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 5th October 6.30pm