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*The Effect of Internet on Communication in the Theatre Community*

As technology becomes exponentially more prevalent in daily life, people become more glued to their phones or computers as their lifeline to share a post, text a friend, do academic research, or google fun things to do for the weekend. It is arguably impossible to function in the modern world without using technology and the internet in some form or another. With the increasing output of technological advancements, the internet has dethroned all other means of sharing and retrieving information due to the simple accessibility of information via phones and computers in much of the world. This influx of information altered the means of communication of not only the social world, but the professional world. Theatre is one profession that relies on good communication for all of those involved, as well as those who support it. If there is ineffective communication between anyone involved, there is little done in creating and presenting theatre pieces. Unlike an office job, working in the theatre business means that people are spread throughout many different areas. They do not congregate in an office where it is easy to speak to one another in person each day. In order to contact those from miles away, the internet is the most convenient and efficient means of communicating. The recent increased use of the internet has greatly changed the communication within the professional theatre discourse community by allowing easy access to information distributed by those involved.

The theatre profession is somewhat of a vague term that encompasses a large group of people. Theatre is a vast discourse community which can include people from all over the world who span from actors to lighting designers to theatre critics. In an article written by Lucille Parkinson McCarthy titled "A Stanger in Strange Lands," a discourse community can be described as having "characteristic 'ways of speaking,' that is, accepted linguistic, intellectual,

and social conventions... [that accomplish] meaningful social functions for people” (234). In the case of theatre, those who are members use certain jargon that is only used in the theatre world as well as communicate in ways with one another to accomplish a particular objective. Directors may search for specific types of actors, theatre researchers may share their research in journals, or actors may advertise their new productions. There are many reasons for theatre professionals to communicate with one another in various ways. Josy Miller, a professional actress, theatre teacher at UC Davis, and theatre enthusiast, argues that those in the theatre community “all rely on one another in various ways as co-creators, so it benefits everyone to be in touch about opportunities” (Miller). For all of the needs of communication between members, the most effective way to reach an audience of one or many is through the internet.

The internet has vastly helped the theatre community by providing a way to easily find opportunities for jobs. Theatre professionals work on many projects over the course of their career. These jobs do not last forever, but each lasts usually a few months. Many careers offer stable pay due to an ongoing job. Theatre, however, is based on each production, so a theatre professional would be out of a job as soon as production ends. This means everyone in the community is regularly searching for new job opportunities. Constant job hunting is a lot of work, and the internet has simplified this for the theatre community by communicating job opportunities through list serves, blogs, personal internet-based outreach, and websites. Miller states that “amongst practitioners, communication is often targeting a) resources and professional development opportunities, and b) dissemination of performance literature (i.e. advertising)” (Miller). In her statements, she expresses how most of this is done by using internet to find these opportunities or promote oneself.

Since the theatre business is based on finding one opportunity after another, the internet allows access to search for posts of opportunity. Miller expresses the importance of list serves and websites which are designed to specifically notify professional theatre members of upcoming projects. She also stresses that “personal invitations to key contacts are the best, but group e-blasts to closer sets of industry contacts are very useful at keeping people abreast of what you are up to” (Miller) in order to maintain communication with those in the community to further opportunities. It may be overwhelming for a theatre professional to find great opportunities constantly, but Miller lists “Playbill.com, American Theatre Magazine, Americans for the Arts, Theatre Bay Area, bayareatheatrebums, Theatre Journal” (Miller) as just a handful of websites that are out there to help out those in the community. Joining many of these sites allows for a large influx of current theatre news and job opportunities. The use of email, texting, and other interpersonal internet connections also allow professionals to personally contact people of importance in the business. A single email to a director could open up a new job prospect.

Along with interpersonal online communication, more expansive internet usage is important in the field with online advertising. Advertising is an important communication aspect in the theatre profession because a show is only successful, economically and popularly, if it is seen by many people. However, it is hard to advertise to people who have no personal connections to those in a production without the use of internet distribution. Miller notes that “as any audience development manager will tell you, theaters are increasingly in competition with other media for audience presence and dollars” (Miller). This means it is vital for strong advertisement of a show in order to convince crowds to come support their work. Online advertisement is used to not only self-promote to friends and family, but also to extend theatre advertising to people who do not often attend productions. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other

social media are easy ways to self-promote new shows in order to gain audience attention. A single click of the “share” option on Facebook can send an advertisement to hundreds of people. Based on surveys and research on the topic, the Pew Research Center noted how “technology is increasing access to the arts by breaking geographic constraints” (*Overall Impact of Technology on Arts*). A production can be advertised to those who do not live in the area where it is being produced.

In addition to social media, advertising via video, such as YouTube, can extend the appreciation of theatre by allowing those who cannot physically see a show to watch from their computers. This still adds to the increase in popularity, and therefore, success of a show. Just as moviegoers watch trailers before paying to see the full film, posting clips of the show onto YouTube or Facebook can help entice people to attend. Furthermore, theatre researcher Sean McCarthy adds that “the comment section prompts dialogue about the media clip and may create a sense of community among viewers” (“Giving Sam a Second Life: Beckett’s Plays in the Age of Convergent Media,” 106). Within a single form of media, there are many ways to communicate about a theatre topic. The use of comments has brought about an interactive type of communication where viewers can actively become a part of the theatre experience.

Theatre production companies “have been able to decrease [their] budgets and increase revenue by utilizing online resources effectively” (*Overall Impact of Technology on Arts*). By extending the possible audiences by wide-scale internet advertising, more people attend shows which helps fund the theatre business. In a journal article about the new expansion of media usage in theatre promotion, author Sean McCarthy states that before wide-spread internet usage was popular, “a clear split existed between those who produced media and those who consumed it. Now, thanks to wireless networking and increasingly powerful and mobile computer devices,

a more fluid relationship between media and consumer exist” (*Giving Sam a Second Life: Beckett’s Plays in the Age of Convergent Media*, 103). The internet has given rise to a broader outreach to people in order to gain a larger audience. Before the use of internet, theatre goers would have to actively seek for shows to go see, or stumble upon other forms of advertisement such as flyers. There was no direct connection between the theatre professionals and theatre audiences. So after the internet became widely used, theatre promotions could be directed at audiences. They could be personally invited to shows or people could join sites to get information for shows. Through this direct communication with theatre supporters online, the theatre business has become more successful.

Though fairly new, Facebook is an important resource of communication in the theatre world. Websites help to connect those who do not know one another to information posted, but Facebook is a way to build social connections with others in the business as well as easily share information about shows to friends. According to Justin High, a young professional actress, there are many ways to promote a show including flyers posted in popular areas and word of mouth, but “Facebook is a huge way to advertise a show” (High). Though physical flyers or verbal messages are effective to a degree, they are not able to spread to as wide of an audience as an online promotion can. Since Facebook has become so popular, it is easy to get the attention of many with a personal post or public post to Facebook theatre pages. This can attract attention from many people at once, and promotion can cross farther geographic distances.

Facebook is also extremely useful for communication between members of a certain show. Justin High states that “most forms of communication used to be related through email, however social media sites such as Facebook are becoming more and more prevalent” (High). Emails are effective but make it difficult for conversations between many members at once.

Facebook has created a space for selected individuals of a common interest to come together to form a “closed group” page where information can be shared strictly among those added people. These closed groups on Facebook are frequently used by casts of shows to communicate and bond with one another. They are also useful “to ensure that people will be around when needed and told when they are not needed” (High).

Aside from social theatre communication, the internet also aids in the spread of academic research and recognition of theatre work. Though the theatre profession may be thought of mainly as staged dramas and musicals, it also has academic aspects that use the internet to share research and new findings in the community. Miller argues that “in terms of academia, much of our research operates similarly to other disciplines. We look to one another to introduce innovative concepts, critical stances and vocabularies to the field” (Miller). Theatre, like science, is researched and studied. Though they have different topics and types of experiments, theatre needs journal articles, books, and posts to share the information learned from the research, similarly to science professions. This research must be shared in a way to gain attention from those in the theatre world. Analogous to the other theatre communication needs, academic sharing is mainly done through internet publication. This allows for access to such by individuals from all over the world.

Spreading academic research has allowed people to communicate their advancements and insights into the field to continue to improve the work of theatre professionals, as well as theatre as a whole. Miller “cites journals in academic work, reads magazine articles and public record data reports for work as an arts admin, and loves posting updates about the work of her favorite artistic collaborators” (Miller). Access to academic discussions has improved her knowledge of

the ancient art and has let her teach the history of theatre to her students using public academic publications.

Theatre is a profession that cannot maintain itself without effective communication of all kinds. It takes communication between many different people within the business to create a working system to produce theatre works. With the use of internet, the communication between theatre professionals and to theatre supporters becomes profoundly more simple and convenient. The increased access and ease of this communication through the internet is continuing to provide a rising stabilization of the profession.

#### Works Cited

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