

# THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING, PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THEATRE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The thrust of this paper is to highlight the role of Advertising, Publicity and Public Relations in Theatre Management in Nigeria. The paper notes that the usage of these marketing communication tools in theatre management can bring huge financial success to any organization. Using the National Theatre, Lagos and the Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication, University of Benin as examples, the study opines that media advertising is not properly patronized due to the huge cost. It is noticed that they depend more on the use of posters and publicity to market their productions and facilities. To curb this lapse, it is suggested that the National Theatre can enter into barter agreement with media houses that can use their facilities free and in return carry their media advertisement. Also an Integrated Marketing Department should be established; and they should be aggressive in their marketing. It is also suggested that the Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication, University of Benin, should strengthen its direct marketing tactics which is in form of carnival procession. It is noticed that it is no longer done with the usual verve and enthusiasm by the students. <sup>1</sup>The paper finally suggests the combination of advertising, publicity and public relations, plus other marketing tools in the promotional activities of theatres in Nigeria. This will elicit more patronage and financial success.*

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of good management to the success of every organization cannot be overemphasized. Good management is very expedient to the financial success of any organization, be it public, private, profit or non – profit making organization. Consequently, it is widely believed that theatre management is extremely important to any theatre organization. It is important at this stage to ask what is theatre and theatre management. According to Diakpomrere (2001:47)

When we speak of theatre, we refer to any structure or group of people (even non – professionals) existing primarily for the preparation/ presentation of theatrical performances – dance, music, song, etc – to audience for purpose of entertainment, education, information, enlightenment And other such goals.

Furthermore, Diakpomrere sees theatre management “as the deliberate and purposeful application of management principles and strategies to theatrical procedures

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and operations in orders to achieve optimum results” (2001: 54). Similarly, Nwamuo (1986:2) asserts that:

Theatre administration is the art and science of planning, staffing, organizing, motivating, directing and controlling human and material resources in the arts of the theatre, and their interaction in order to attain the predetermined objectives of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profit.

However, this study is mainly concerned with the last part of the definition “... to attain the predetermined objectives of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profit.” In theatre management, various tools are used to achieve the functions of “guaranteeing satisfaction, having full house and maximizing profit.” Such tools include Advertising, Publicity and Public Relations. The aim of this study is to appraise the roles of advertising, publicity and public relations in theatre management. This will be studied in relation to the National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria and the Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication, University of Benin, Benin – City, Nigeria (an educational theatre)

### **WHAT ARE ADVERTISING, PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS?**

According to Arens (1999:7):

Advertising is the structured and composed non – personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media.

Encyclopedia Americana (1997:113) posits that advertising is “the techniques and practices used to bring products, services, opinions, or causes to public notice for the purpose of persuading the public to respond in a certain way toward what is advertised.”

Considering a more indigenous definition, the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) in their Code of Advertising Practice (1998:2) defined advertising as “a form of communication through the media about products, services or ideas paid for by an identified sponsor.”

Taking a critical look at all the definitions above, the points made include: that advertisement must be paid for by an identified sponsor and that the aim of advertising is

to disseminate information, ideas, etc, about goods or services and to persuade people to take action by patronizing the goods and services advertised.

The function of advertising is well captured by the AIDA formula according to Bel – Molokwu (2000). AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. He posits that the aim of every advertisement is to create awareness about products and services, which in turn elicits the interest of potential customers hence; a desire to acquire the product is stirred. This finally leads to action. Action means acquiring the product or services by potential customers.

Furthermore, Publicity is a concept that has been misconstrued by many people, even scholars. It is often mistaken to be public relations or even advertising. We shall attempt to make the clarification. Adegoke (2001:13) views publicity as: “the placing of stories in the mass media; this activity does not amount, per se, to public relations.” He concludes that publicity is a tool of public relations. A definition that we consider more business oriented was proffered in the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) lecture series (2000). It goes thus: “the non – personal stimulation of demand for a product or services by placing news about it in various media and not paid for by an identified sponsor.”

Consequently, it is deduced that the aim of publicity is to create awareness through the media by placing news information about an organization and its products and services. The major characteristic of publicity that differentiates it from other marketing tools is that it may not be paid for by an identified sponsor. Furthermore, according to Shimp (2000: 606):

A public relations, or PR, is an organizational activity involved with fostering goodwill between a company and its various publics. PR efforts are aimed at various corporate constituencies, including employees, suppliers, stockholders, government, the public, labour groups, action groups and consumers.

According to Black (1989: 3 – 4)

Of all current definitions the best is the Mexican statement signed by representatives of more than 30 national

and regional public relations associations in Mexican City on 11 August 1978. It stated that Public Relations practice is the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization's leadership, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organization's and the public interest.

Furthermore, according to Lloyd as cited in Adegoke (2001:1), "Public Relations (PR) practice is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics."

From this paper's perspective, Public Relations serves mainly to create an understanding between an organization and its publics; thereby creating awareness for its goods or services. A public relations campaign takes various forms. It can be through the sponsorship of programmes beneficial to the community hosting the organization or through the award of scholarships; or through any project that fosters a better understanding between an organization and its publics.

Having taken a critical look at Advertising, Publicity and Public Relations, we believe that it will be right to say that they are interrelated. They are all elements of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). The major difference between them is that Advertising and Public Relations is paid for, while Publicity is free. However, there are some new schools of thought that publicity is no longer free because of the advent of "Brown Envelope" in the media. The fact remains that the three concepts complement each other in marketing communications.

## **THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING, PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THEATRE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA.**

The aim of every well-managed theatre is to draw the audience to the theatre, and there are various means through which this can be achieved. Some of the most prominent means of achieving a "full house" in theatre is through Advertising, Publicity and Public Relations.

The role of advertising in the theatre management is to create awareness about theatrical production or the availability of space and other equipment for hire. When the awareness is created, the target audience is persuaded to patronize the theatre. In terms of

publicity, news stories can be written about an upcoming production in the theatre and sent to the media for publication. Also feature stories can be written about the facilities or equipment at a theatre and published in the media. As earlier stated, the aim of public relations is to create an understanding between an organization and its publics. A theatre establishment (like National Theatre, Lagos) could create a rapport with the host community by organizing free workshops for kids and budding actors and dancers. This singular act can enhance the patronage of the theatre by the public.

At this juncture, let us relate these roles to theatres in Nigeria, which in the context of this paper include the National Theatre, Lagos and the Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication, University of Benin, Benin City. The National Theatre has a Resident Theatre Troupe (National Troupe) and also has spaces to hire out for events. Obviously, the National Theatre would do well if it makes use of Advertising, Publicity and Public Relations if it wants to be a financial success.

With the benefit of hind sight, the National Theatre makes use of these marketing tools and more. But the question is to what extent? We discovered that the National Theatre does limited media advertisement due to the huge cost of advertising in the media. As such, most times it depends heavily on publicity. It must be noted that advertising is one of the most potent, if not the most potent of all the marketing tools. As such the National Theatre not making much use of advertising will definitely affect their success. The National Theatre produce theatrical performances that demand patronage from the audience and they also have magnificent facilities that could be rented out to individuals and corporate bodies; as such, publicity alone cannot guarantee them financial success in their activities.

Another form of advertising that the National Theatre depends on most times is the printing of posters and handbills. This is not out of place because it has its role to play in marketing, but the fact is that its reach cannot be compared to advertising through the electronic media.

On another plane, let us evaluate how Advertising, Publicity and Public Relations are applied in the managing of University of Benin educational theatre managed by the Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication of the University. As expected the

department produces theatrical performances such as drama, dance, opera, music, etc. The aim of these productions is to showcase the activities of the department and also as part of the training of their students. The department makes use of advertising to create awareness about their productions. However, rarely do they make use of media advertisement. They make use of posters and handbills. They also carry out what may be called direct marketing in form of carnival-like processions. This is what is most times wrongly termed publicity in the department. We believe that it is a form of advertising, which involves word of mouth. They arrange a carnival procession where they will be singing and dancing round the campus distributing handbills and announcing the date and time of performances.

Furthermore, on few occasions, they apply publicity during theatrical performances. This is achieved with the help of their ex – students who work in media houses. The date and time of their performance can be read as a news item or at times mentioned in between programmes by the duty continuity announcer (DCA). There is very limited public relations activity in the department. The only activity that can be likened to public relations is the Community Theatre programme which is annually embarked on by the department. From observations made, the aim of the Community Theatre Practice is to satisfy the requirements of a course, not to draw audience to the theatre.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

This paper concludes that Advertising, Publicity and Public Relations are marketing tools that are very important to the financial success of every theatre organization. To buttress this assertion, Bel – Molokwu (2000:2) opines thus: “Because of its salient role in marketing, advertising is viewed as a key marketing support and an inevitable arm of any enterprise that aims at being successful.” They play the major role of creating awareness and attracting patronage and audience to the theatre. Consequently, special attention should be made to foster the usage of these marketing tools in any theatre organization.

As it relates to the National Theatre, Lagos, this study suggests that the management of the theatre should pay much emphasis on the use of media advertising to

sell their productions and facilities to the public. The National Theatre should establish a marketing department to be headed by a marketing communication expert. They should employ hard – sell marketing which should be very aggressive in nature. Although media advertising could be expensive, it also has huge rewards. The managements should try to understand the importance of marketing communications to the survival of the National Theatre.

Also the management of the National Theatre can produce brochures that can be distributed to corporate bodies such as banks and hotels. This can create awareness about the facilities available at the National Theatre. These suggestions about advertising do not mean that the use of publicity and public relations should be jettisoned. In fact, they should be strengthened. A combination of these tools would rack in huge financial success for the theatre.

To reduce the cost of media advertising, the management of the National Theatre can enter into barter agreement with media houses. The media houses can be made to carry the National Theatre advertisements without cash payments. In return, the media houses can make use of their facilities for events free of charge. At the end of the year, the accounts of both bodies would be reconciled.

Furthermore, we suggest that the direct marketing carnival like procession practiced in the University of Benin Theatre Arts and Mass Communication Department should be encouraged. This is because we noticed that it is fast losing the verve with which it was carried out in the past. Also the department should strive for have more cordial relationship with its graduates so that it will continue to enjoy media coverage of its activities. Finally we suggest the combination of advertising, publicity and public relations and other marketing tools in the promotional activities of any theatre in Nigeria. This will elicit more patronage and huge financial success.

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