**Google Mentoring Report: The Company, Project Arts Centre and Rough Magic**

**Aim**

The Company, Project Arts Centre and Rough Magic had all applied separately for the Google mentoring scheme. However, we each received a call from Arts Audiences to ask whether we would be interested in working jointly on a trial idea, where the three organisations would work as a group. Naturally we all leapt at the chance, and began a project with the aim of looking at how production companies and venues can work together to maximise audience benefit from digital marketing for our shows.

**Getting Started**

Our Google mentor was Paul Carton and he and the rest of the Google team lead us through a series of sessions on Adwords, Analytics, YouTube, Google+, as well as some more general discussions. We also spent some additional time with Paul looking at areas more specific to the needs of our group. The product sessions we particularly useful for Brian (The Company) and Clare (Rough Magic) as both of us aren’t marketing specialists and so we were less familiar the products and techniques being taught.

**The Company**

For the Company we were coming to the Google mentoring scheme with a clean slate. Finding ourselves in downtime after finishing two productions we wanted to develop a new website and learn the tools Google had on offer to make our online content up to the standard of other professional theatre companies.

We are currently designing our new website and are using an image heavy interface, very little text and keeping the pages to a minimum. Selling tickets is the priority when in production and therefore we are incorporating on the homepage the option for the user to buy tickets to our current production, i.e direct link to the selling site. A mailing list was something we wanted to make prominent so that one time users could be kept informed on upcoming productions and therefore our new website features a subscribe link on the home page as well. After learning that a high volume of users are now using mobile devices to browse and buy tickets, the website will also be mobile friendly.

With Google Analytics the opportunity to track how users interact with our new website and tailoring accordingly is something that we’re planning to make full use of. Having already streamlined our YouTube account and removed excess content, the plan is to sync our YouTube and Google+ account so accessibility is made easy through the website.

The insights we learnt from from the Google mentoring scheme in how to shape our website are invaluable to us and will be of huge benefit in deciding how we treat online content in the future. The one downside experienced is that seeing as we weren’t working towards a production, the knowledge of AdWords is still quite limited. It is one thing to learn and research in theory, and another to put in practice. Saying that, the mentorship on a whole is something I would still encourage to an individual or company to undertake in between productions.

**Project Arts Centre**

As a registered charity Project Arts Centre was aware of the Google Grants programme which gives charities access to free advertising on Google Adwords. We applied for and were approved to the scheme yet setting up and managing the account with limited time resources seemed like a mammoth task. The capabilities of Adwords are incredible but understanding and setting up your first campaign can seem daunting when you have little time and lots to do.

As part of the Google mentoring scheme we wanted to focus specifically on how to get the most out of this opportunity and really understand how to run successful campaigns. Having someone to guide us through the initial stages of setting up an account and our first campaign was particularly helpful. Once we were familiar with how to navigate our way around the system, the regulations and requirements of Google in relation to using a grant and good practice for advertisements, and how to use the tools available within Adwords the fear was removed and maintaining our ads became a simple task which we can easily manage with a small amount of regular maintenance.

We now have a number of campaigns running all with very strategic targets and objectives. Some have been more successful than others, but the benefit of using Adwords is that if it isn’t working you can change it easily and quickly until you find something that does. Talking through the objectives of our ads in advance of setting them up helped us to create more focused campaigns. The more specific you can be in understanding what your ad needs to achieve and who you are trying to target the more likely you are to run a successful campaign. Using Google Analytics, also covered as part of the mentoring, we are able to track the journey of the customers who click on our ads to ascertain how successful the ad has been and if we are actually delivering what that customer wants once they arrive to our ad landing pages.

The added benefit for us as a venue is that we can use this grant to benefit the companies and artists we work with to help promote their shows while simultaneously working on a brand campaign to improve the online profile of our own organisation. Google Adwords is simple but it is getting started that can be difficult and this is where we found the help of our mentor Paul invaluable.

**Rough Magic**

Rough Magic came to the project with some clear goals. I wanted to set up and start using an AdWords account, start using our Analytics account more effectively, and more broadly, begin to develop a coherent overall online strategy for Rough Magic which would function year round.

The AdWords sessions with the Google mentors were really useful and informative and so setting up an AdWords account seemed simple enough. However, Rough Magic fell into a loop hole of the Irish system whereby although we’re a non-profit organisation, we are not currently a registered charity and so weren’t eligible to apply for a Google Grant to fund this. Thankfully Project came to the rescue and agreed to let me use their Google Grant account. This was invaluable as it meant that I could experiment with AdWords without incurring a cost. Once this had been arranged, it only left a month for me to run the campaign for our current show ‘Jezebel’, but Project have kindly agreed to let me use their account again for our upcoming production of ‘Digging for Fire’, which has given me an opportunity to run a longer campaign and track our success more effectively.

In addition to the goals outlined above, one of the big questions I wanted to interrogate was: how does Rough Magic build a strong online presence when we are performing at a variety of different venues, and are reliant on each venue’s website for sales? Through the different sessions with our mentor Paul and the rest of the Google team, it became clear to me that, if our primary aim is to make a sale, we should be driving people to Project’s website, rather than channeling them through our own. As I’m sure other production companies will sympathise, this was a hard pill to swallow, especially when you’ve spent a lot of time working on your own website, but it’s something that I’ve begun to put in place across all areas of my marketing campaigns and I look forward to continuing to monitor its impact during ‘Digging for Fire’. I’ve also begun to make the information on Rough Magic’s website different to that on Project’s so that people coming to one from the other are getting a different experience.

As a group one difficulty we came across was that at present it’s not possible to track people arriving to Project’s website all the way through to making a sale. However, Project are in the process of developing a new website which will have this facility and so I’m excited about the more detailed information we’ll be able to collect once that is up and running.

One of the most important benefits from the mentoring scheme was actually offline! Working closely with Project’s marketing team has had a positive effect on our relationship across all aspects of producing a show at the venue. We’ve been communicating more effectively and exchanging more information, such as more detailed box office reports and Analytics reports. At Paul’s advice, with ‘Jezebel’ we also divided our approach: I focused on getting existing Rough Magic fans to the show and Project focused on getting new customers. I hope that our experience of working together will be of benefit to other companies coming into Project in the future.

Overall, I found the scheme a very positive experience. It’s made me aware of the importance of taking some time each week to monitor our online activity. I think I’ve only scratched the surface, but I look forward to continuing this work throughout the year, focusing both on when we’re in production and when we’re not. Going forward, I plan to continue using AdWords, Analytics and You Tube, regularly checking our performance across all these platforms, and to look into Google+ and its benefits more closely. I also plan to look into making more changes to Rough Magic’s website in order to reflect what I’ve learnt from the mentoring scheme as well as from our Analytics account. Finally, I plan to keep working closely with Project and to continue to build our relationship.

**Conclusion**

Overall, Google Mentoring has been a very positive experience for the three companies. The sessions have heightened our awareness of the importance of continually monitoring our online activity and how we respond to the engagement by users and customers. All three partners have benefited from working together, enjoying sharing our experiences and syncing our online marketing efforts. This experience has highlighted the need for such a collaborative, transparent and focused relationship between venue and company at all times.

As we had each applied to the programme separately and with slightly different aims, one of the main challenges we faced was how to find ways to marry our individual goals with those of the group. In this, we felt we were only partly successful. Looking back, it would have been beneficial to spend more time at the start clarifying the group’s targets and finding ways for these to work alongside our individual concerns. We would also recommend assigning some additional time for some 1:1 mentoring as well as for the group to discuss the different ways to put what had been learnt into practice.

For Project Arts Centre, the scheme has provided key insights with which to analyse and develop our online presence particularly in the context of developing our new website, to maximise user-engagement. Similarly, through participating on the scheme, the relationship between company and venue is stronger as we both have a greater understanding of how to linking together on online efforts, particularly in relation to Adwords Campaigns, in order to focus our efforts on ticket sales. With budgetary constraints, it is extremely useful to avail of the Google Grant and use this particularly to enhance online presence, monitoring the success of campaigns and reacting to the engagement.

Ultimately, through applying what we have learnt from the Google Mentoring Scheme, we are all committed to making a continued investment in our online presence; recognising what works and what doesn’t and making steps to improve the experience of each user who interacts with us. Participation in the scheme has given us a great many beneficial insights which will continue to inform our online strategies for months and years to come!

Huge thanks to Arts Audiences for making this project possible, to our mentor Paul Carton and to the rest of the Google team.

**Brian Bennett - The Company**

**Melanie Wright, Kate O’Sullivan and Conall O Riain - Project Arts Centre**

**Clare Robertson - Rough Magic**