

**AUCKLAND  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**

**new producers' pack  
2010**



# new producers' pack 2010

## Contents

Thanks	2
The creative producer	3
Some useful websites	3
Starting out	4
Overview of the process	5
Look after your team	6
Money	8
Successfully securing grants and funding	8
Securing sponsorship	10
Budgeting	11
Box-office and ticketing	12
Marketing	14
Media	16
Venue	18
Health and safety	20
Encouraging diversity	21
The future	21
Appendix One: Introduction to Common Legal Structures	22
Appendix Two: Sample budget	24

This pack, brought to you by Auckland Theatre Company, is a compilation of **frequently asked questions** and **commonly made mistakes** that we have all made and don't want to make again. Practitioners and arts advocates with a range of experience and skills have contributed to this pack. While it was initially written as a guide for theatre producers, it should be equally useful to producers of all performing arts mediums, including dance, opera, musical theatre, stand-up comedy and others.

**Please feel free to copy this pack – it is a resource for everyone.**

## Special thanks

**to all those who contributed to this pack including:** Sarah Peters, Oliver Driver, Silo Theatre, Penny Ashton, BATS, Simon Prast, Shelley Kirton, Shelley Geenty, Heather Lee, Nicky Nicolaou, Elisabeth Vaneveld, Justin Lewis, Reuben Pollock, Tamar Munch, Paul Minifie, Lex Matheson, Ross Joblin, Veronica Barton, Eden Phillips, Murray Nathan, Colin Mitchell, Frith Walker, Andrew Malmo, Lauren Hughes, Michelle Lafferty, Amber McWilliams, Lynne Cardy & housewife [raymon].



### and also to:

Creative Communities Auckland for their generous support, and websites & organisations that assist in distributing this pack.

**THANK YOU.**

**Feel free to call us for advice or to exchange ideas.**

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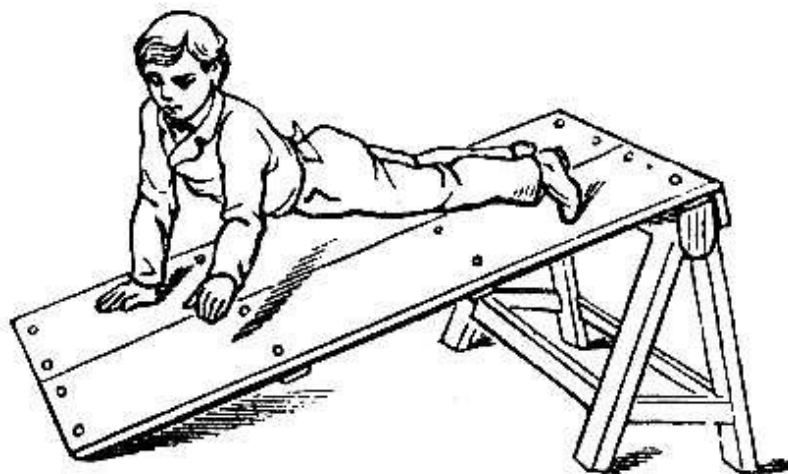
# The creative producer

The role of producer is a **creative** role. Producers are responsible for choosing the work to be performed and co-ordinating the production's planning and implementation. Producers control the financial and administrative co-ordination of the production, and have the final say about whether the performance ultimately gets put on. Producers should also be aware of the marketing implications of every decision they make. This starts at the very beginning with selection of the show, identification of the desired audience, choice of venue, and setting the ticket prices.

The producer's key role is **building and maintaining relationships** with all those involved, both within and outside the production team. Conflict resolution and chaos management skills are a necessity!

**“There is no one way to do anything. Producing is a creative role and your initiative will set your work apart.”**

**Lauren Hughes, producer for Red Leap Theatre Company**



## Some useful websites...

[www.evanz.co.nz](http://www.evanz.co.nz) – Entertainment Venues Association of New Zealand

[www.pannz.org.nz](http://www.pannz.org.nz) – Performing Arts Network of New Zealand

[www.etnz.org](http://www.etnz.org) – Entertainment Technology New Zealand

[www.creativenz.govt.nz](http://www.creativenz.govt.nz) – Creative New Zealand

[www.tradenz.govt.nz](http://www.tradenz.govt.nz) – Trade New Zealand

[www.thebigidea.co.nz](http://www.thebigidea.co.nz) – an online community of creative industries

[www.onstage.co.nz](http://www.onstage.co.nz) - NZ Amateur Dramatics

# Starting out

When you first start it can be helpful to ask yourself the question:  
**Why am I doing this?**

Have a clear ambition for the project and for yourself. Are you doing it because you have something to say? Furthering your own opportunities to be involved in theatre? Seeking exposure of your own work? Aiming to make money?

Choose a work that you feel excited about bringing to an audience, that suits the people who will be involved, and that is relevant to your chosen audience. It helps to ask around and spend some time investigating your options before selecting or devising a script or work for performance.

## **NEW WORK**

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Many producers start off by co-ordinating the production of new work.

There is a tendency to put new work on 'raw' – you can be left struggling with the work and have a disappointing response. Have a professional approach to the development of new work - think about workshoping and gaining feedback on works-in-progress well before the final staging process. Be aware that putting on a work that you haven't fully developed will open it up for criticism.

New productions are often smaller/closer – this kind of work is personal work, so make it personal for your team and audience. Work like this results in its own unique kinds of stress and rewards.

## **SECURING RIGHTS**

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If you are performing an existing work or including excerpts from an existing work (script, music, etc) it is the producer's responsibility to secure all rights related to the use of that work.

For info on securing rights to New Zealand play scripts, contact:

**Playmarket ([www.playmarket.org.nz](http://www.playmarket.org.nz))**

For info on securing rights to international play scripts, contact:

**Play Bureau ([www.playbureau.com](http://www.playbureau.com))**

For info on music licensing, contact:

**APRA ([www.apra.co.nz](http://www.apra.co.nz))**

these are the days of miracle  
and wonder



this is the long distance call

# Overview of the process

## **Prepare a comprehensive timeline.**

Theatre takes time. You will need to prioritise to avoid a bottleneck of things to do. It's important to be organised and put things down on paper. There are a lot of things you can prepare well in advance. Basic requirements like booking a venue sometimes need to be done up to a year before – look ahead and get yourself pencilled in.

## **Check the programming.**

Look at what other events are on before and during the time you are looking at scheduling your performance. Think about the impact these events might have on your ability to attract an audience – and a crew!

## **Make sure you have an adequate infrastructure.**

You need a phone, computer and a printer. Access to a photocopier, scanner and fax is also helpful.

## **Hold regular production meetings.**

Even if you only have a small production team, regular planning and troubleshooting meetings are essential. These need to be led and facilitated, and contributed to by everyone. People should prepare for meetings and have things to discuss – setting an agenda helps people know what needs to be covered and encourages preparation. Discuss everything - no matter how minuscule.

## **Remember that theatre is a collective effort.**

Try and create a co-operative creative environment that focuses on consultation and collaboration. Ask for favours, rather than demand things. Treat the people you are working with respectfully. There is no need to consistently put yourself at the top of the food chain; lots of people are giving up their time for you and this should be appreciated.

Clearly delineate the tasks that need to be done. Share the load – it's not a good idea for an actor or someone with other responsibilities to take on producing duties. You need a dedicated production team. Depending on your resources, the size of your team will vary. Here are some key roles:

**PRODUCER:** Responsible for budgets, sponsorship, venue management, updating timelines & production schedules and liaising with the entire team.

**ACTOR:** The person on the stage performing.

**PRODUCTION MANAGER:** Co-ordinates designers, set building, packing in/out, technical management, and running budgets for these areas.

**MARKETING MANAGER:** Promotes and markets your performance.

**SET DESIGNER:** Responsible for the design of the set, including adequate plans and models to facilitate the construction of the set.

**WARDROBE:** Co-ordinates the acquisition and/or construction of costumes (and possibly design, if the set designer is not taking responsibility for this).

**LIGHTING DESIGNER:** Designs the lighting states for the show.

**LIGHTING OPERATOR:** Operates the lighting board - and is also integral to the process of rigging, focusing and plotting the lights for the show.

**SOUND DESIGNER:** Designs the soundscape and is responsible for locating and compiling all sound, as well as the layout of the sound system.

**DIRECTOR:** Leads the artistic development of the production.

**PUBLICIST:** Liaises between the media and Marketing Manager. Identifies the media focus for the show, and networks with media and publishing sector.

**STAGE MANAGER:** Is the backstop for everything: managing rehearsals, backstage, and stage area; managing the crew, actors and venue during the performance season; preparing and implementing rehearsal schedules, props tables, cue sheets and actors' calls.

# Look after your team

Most of them are likely to be volunteers. They are probably involved because they love the performing arts and want further experience or an opportunity to gain skills. Be aware of the problems of working in a non-professional environment, especially people's availability. It can be difficult to demand people's time, so it is important to create an environment that they want to be part of. If you can, try and budget in professional fees for your key team members. Even if these are just a token gesture it contributes to your position as professionals.

## **Your team will vary depending on your needs and resources.**

Determine what **personnel** you need and choose the right people for the job. If you and your team members are doing things for the first time, remember that this can be a valuable learning opportunity. All members of the team are responsible for finding out more about their job and gaining the required skills and resources to do the best job they can.

## **Cast for reliability and delegate tasks to people you trust.**

Be prepared for the (inevitable) day that a team member will have a conflict of interest. Do your homework: check out potential cast and crew by talking to people who have worked with them before.

## **Have a problem-solving approach.**

Effective crisis and chaos management is the major test for a producer. Be prepared to step up and take responsibility for finding solutions. This doesn't mean you have to personally solve every problem: tasks can and should be delegated, but the buck stops with you.

## **Ask for help.**

It is better to ask stupid questions than to make stupid mistakes. Try and establish a relationship with a professional production company or those with experience; people are generally very supportive and helpful. Also remember you don't need to get to know everyone in the industry immediately - being a producer is about creating a track record.

**“I have never asked anyone, at any level, for help and been refused.”**

**Justin Lewis, producer for Indian Ink Theatre Company**

## **Have a professional manner.**

Be professional, especially when dealing with sponsors and businesses. Be strong and follow the 'code of business'. Ring people back, be on time, and dress appropriately. Always do what you say you will do.

## **Have realistic expectations.**

It's hard! You will survive the creative process by being focused and open. Being a producer can be a thankless job and often one person has to take on the bulk of the workload. It is a steep learning curve, so don't be afraid to seek support.

## **Look after yourself.**

Prepare for an enormous workload. Take care of your mind and body.

**“From the cleaner to the grandest of them all – everyone needs to appreciate the joint vision”.**

**Paul Minifie, director of the Maidment Theatre**

Aside from good relations there are **other things** you may need to take into account when looking after your cast and crew.

- If they are receiving fees, how much are they worth, and how are they being paid?
- Do they have contracts? Have each job's requirements on paper.
- Do they need travel assistance or accommodation?
- While rehearsing, does your team have access to amenities (toilets, showers, coffee-making facilities, car parks, a phone, etc)?
- Are they comfortable while rehearsing and performing (e.g. are there heaters or fans and seating in the rehearsal space and green room)?

Get the creative team **prepared in advance** (with scripts, design briefs, concept outlines, etc) and make the crew aware of the technical requirements of the production well ahead of time.

The **human touch** is important – visit the cast and crew in the theatre during the run, and give them a card or gift on opening night. Other perks can include closing night parties and complimentary tickets.

Be **up front** with your actors and crew. Make them aware of what is expected of them and of their necessary commitment over the rehearsal and production period (especially in the final rehearsal period).

**Listen more than you speak.  
Inform yourself before you act.**

# Money

Be a **tight miser!**

Put **profit back into the show** – aim to break even rather than make money.

Be **realistic** about costs. Get quotes before putting together a budget – it is easy to underestimate costs.

If you don't **ask**, you don't get! You need to have initiative. Don't take rejection personally. Be prepared to keep trying new avenues.

Make yourself familiar with **accounts management and budgeting**, or find someone who can help you.

To apply for funding and to book venues, you may need to provide bank **account details**. If you can, your production team should establish an account or use an umbrella account, rather than using a personal account (see *Appendix One*).

**Don't assume anything**. Be clear about everything to do with money. People don't like to talk about money, but you need to. You must be clear about costs, payments, quotes, expenditure, etc.

Have **high production standards and aim toward income** for you and your team.

## Successfully securing grants and funding

Approach the Arts funding branch of your local council and search databases at your local library (such as FundView) to find out about what **funding opportunities** are available to you. Also find out about other funding sources such as philanthropic grants, pub charity grants and Trust grants.

**Read the criteria** and be clear about how your production meets the requirements of the funding body. Contact them to make sure. It's always a good idea to check how much information you should provide.

Give yourself a **fake deadline** one week before the funding application is due to make sure you have it completed in time.

Always **fill out their forms**. Most application forms are templates for databases, so any additional information you provide can be difficult for the funding organisation to incorporate into their files.

If you can't write well, **get someone else to help you** prepare proposals for funding.

Be **professional** in your approach.

Make sure your application **embodies the work** and your ambitions for the production. It should be clear and positive.

**Proof-read** carefully and **check** your calculations (twice!).

Always **ask for a specific amount**. Let the funding body know what other funds are already secured for the project, and what funding is awaiting decisions.

**Keep copies** of your completed application for your own records.

**Contact the funders** and talk about your application before you submit it – they will probably help, as they are often advocates for the arts.

If you are unsuccessful, see how you can **improve** your application for next time and don't become despondent. Find out if the project has a chance if the case is re-developed, or whether it will never be eligible. Ask for feedback and LISTEN to it.

If you can't get funding, consider getting support to **develop** the project rather than putting it on with limited resources. Venues and theatre companies often offer opportunities to develop work. Development processes include workshops, play-readings, preview performances and feedback sessions.

When you are mounting work with community grants or similar funding, make sure you **invite** the funding providers along to see the performance, even if they haven't funded your production. Send them an invitation and follow it up to ensure they have a representative who sees the show.

Understand what your **obligations** are to the sponsor/funding body. Make sure that you can and do fulfil these. Most funding bodies will require a detailed **report**, with final budgets, within a few months of the end of the project. This is also a good chance to give **feedback** to your funding providers on the success of your show and your future goals.

### **The onus is on you to let people know about your work.**

If you are part of a company or collective that has long-term goals, there are several things you can do that will help. These include registering your company for **GST**, and becoming registered as a **non-profit or charitable organisation**. If you are likely to incur large losses then you might like to establish yourself as a limited liability company with charitable status or as a trust. Having charitable status can increase your eligibility for a range of grants. Spend time in the industry before deciding how you are going to set up a production company. Seek financial and legal advice to see what steps you can take to provide your company with a strong foundation.

(For more information, see *Appendix One – Introduction to Common Legal Structures*.)

# Securing sponsorship

**Start early.** You will get rejections. Be persistent.

Sponsorship is about **establishing relationships**. Very rarely do new producers establish a cash sponsorship deal on their first production. Often too much time and hope is invested in trying to strike 'the dream sponsorship deal'; this time may be better spent forming a positive relationship with current or potential sponsors. Start small and gradually build up your sponsorship foundation. Look at developing relationships for the future: invite potential sponsors along to the show.

Remember, **different sponsors have different interests**. It is not just about branding. Many sponsors gain nothing from attaching their brand to your production - it's more often PR or a philanthropic gesture. Some companies are primarily interested in receiving free tickets or corporate hospitality. Every sponsor is going to see different opportunities in a relationship with your organisation – try to work out how you can best meet their need.

## **Under-promise and over-deliver.**

Divide your focus into two areas: **CONTRA** and **CASH**. Establish a list of your needs: hospitality needs, cast needs, production-based needs. Product (contra) is easier to secure than cash. Contra can help reduce your costs. You may be able to get a wine sponsor for your opening night, or some free costumes, set or props.

Approach companies that have a **link** with your production or your production's target audience. It is easier to gain interest from companies whose products/services are reflected in your show. Read through the script looking for links to products and brands.

Big business is often located offshore. Go for smaller, **appropriate sponsors**. Trying for something a little obscure can pay off.

Start with who and what you know. **Use your contacts**. Prepare a list of your needs and ask all your cast and crew members if they know of any contacts in those areas. Get the names and contact numbers of any friends, family or associates who are involved in organisations that could sponsor you. Follow them up.

**Research** your sponsor options. Gather information on existing businesses – try the Yellow Pages and Citizens Advice Bureau as well as Google! Get accurate contact details: try to find out who is the best person to send the proposal to, and address it to them by name. Marketing, Sponsorship, Brand and General Managers are usually the best people to target.

Send a **written proposal** first. Think big and make it look professional. Phrase your letter and proposal in terms of money and benefits. It may help to have a list of bullet points outlining what the sponsors are getting for their money: for example, logo placement on 500 posters and 2000 programmes, foyer displays, signage at the venue, naming rights on hospitality facilities, ads, posters and flyers, etc. Make this list as extensive and specific as you can. Make the benefits specifically tailored to reflect the level of support/finance the sponsor is providing.

**Follow up** your written proposal with a phone call. Be confident and continue to follow up until you have a definite answer.

**Approach all options** - you never know who may say YES. You might be lucky enough to be in a position to negotiate the best deal.

**Bonuses for sponsors** can include complimentary tickets for the sponsors and their most valued clients, mention in media interviews, and marketing/sponsorship deals such as competitions or radio ticket give-aways.

Always aim for a **synergy** between the sponsor's target market and your audience. The products or services of the sponsor should ideally be aimed at the kind of people you think will be attending your show.

Think about selling **ads** in the programme to help pay for the printing costs. Consider offering free ads in the programme to your sponsors.

## Budgeting

Your budget needs to be **detailed** and include an outline of ALL of your potential costs. It should be a 'true' budget. It's a good idea to build in some contingency costs to provide some 'fat' for the project. Always round figures up. Get quotes in writing.

**“Successful budgeting is prudent and realistic. Don't be tempted to make your budget balance by cutting costs and increasing your expected box office returns – that's a recipe for failure.”**

**Andrew Malmo, producer for Okareka Dance Company**

Establish a **cut-off point** where you review your income, revise your budgets and see whether or not your project is indeed viable. Only make the show that you can afford to make. Ask: do you want to make this show or do you want to postpone until you have more resources available?

You should **not be reliant** on funds that may not come through. You need to have some **funds available up-front** to cover costs such as deposits for your venue hire, etc. Deposits are usually non-refundable.

You may decide to have a **co-op structure** whereby any profits are distributed to the co-op members. Make sure you are clear beforehand about how the money will be distributed and who will be responsible for the distribution of profits. You may like to consider giving a share to each of the actors, crew and production team as well as an assigned share to the company to be reinvested for future projects. Also, and perhaps more importantly, you need to decide who will be responsible for any financial loss. Put all agreements in writing.

Don't be overly ambitious when you **forecast your takings** – people often have mismatched expectations. Venues such as BATS recommend you budget for around a 30-40% house. Creative New Zealand recommends 45%.

(See *Appendix Two* for a sample budget template.)

# Box office & ticketing

**Plan your pre-sales well.** Some shows may sell a lot of tickets on the door; however, it is always good to encourage bookings and presales, as this helps you see how sales are tracking earlier in the process. Keep your tickets at a reasonable price, comparable to similar productions. Establish a **clear policy** on the distribution of complimentary tickets and discounted tickets and stick to it. Make sure Box Office staff are also clear about this policy.

## OPERATING YOUR OWN BOX OFFICE

If you are running your own booking system (rather than using a venue box office or ticketing agent as below) make sure there is a clear system in place. Patrons need to be able to ring up or go to a place where they can reserve and/or pay for their tickets. You may choose to have the tickets paid for in advance or 'on the door'. Either way, you need to have a float with plenty of the right change. If there are no EFTPOS or ATM facilities available, it's important to make your patrons aware, so that they have cash to pay for their tickets.

Your **booking database** should include the patron's name, number of tickets and a contact phone number.

You may decide to **print your own** tickets. Elaborate and expensive printed tickets are an unnecessary expense. You may like to use rolls of pre-printed tickets of different colours. It helps to have different tickets for various price categories (full price, concession, complimentary, etc). Numbered tickets are a good idea – they help you calculate the size of the house each night and keep track of bookings.

If you are **running your own box office**, cash up after each performance, make sure your float has the right change, and keep an accurate record of the ticket sales and takings for each night. Some venues will require you to keep ticket stubs, or exact records of the audience numbers each night in order to meet OSH regulations.

## WORKING WITH A VENUE BOX OFFICE OR TICKETING AGENT

Some venues are the sole ticketing agent for all events at the venue, so you are required to use their box office. They may charge a ticketing fee or keep a percentage of each ticket sold – check the venue contract for the details. Your audience may also be charged a booking fee when they book their tickets. Let your audience know if there is a booking fee.

**Private agents** like iTicket or Ticketek also charge your audience a booking fee in addition to the ticket price. Be aware of the costs involved in working with a ticketing agent and factor these into your budget. Some venues have an established relationship with a particular private agent; it's a good idea to check with the venue before investigating private options.

Make sure you are aware of the **opening hours** of the box office or ticketing agents - and communicate this to your potential audience.

If you are arranging bookings through an external outlet make sure you **follow up** the service they are offering you and your audience. Provide them with a blurb about the show that they can read over the phone. Ring up as if you were a member of the public and do spot checks to ensure that they have the correct information on your show.

Establish a **good relationship** with the ticketing staff who are working on your behalf. Keep in regular contact and show your appreciation for the service that they are providing.

**Talk to the venue staff** and ask exactly what info they need.

The **information** the box office needs to know includes:

- When you want bookings to open
- Ticket information (that is, what should be printed on the ticket: company name, show title, author, sponsors, etc)
- Ticket prices - you need to confirm all price categories:
  - Full price
  - Senior citizens
  - Students (with ID)
  - Children ( ) yrs and under
  - Groups ( ) or more
  - Others (sponsors, schools etc)
- Performance dates and times
- Brief description of the content (including an advisory if there's any content that may offend – e.g. nudity)
- Approximate running time
- Interval length
- Contact details for further public inquiries (i.e. the publicist)

Some theatres provide **show reports** (summaries of the box office) – make sure the venue knows where you want these sent.

Think about **compiling an audience database** - an analysis of the kinds of people that are coming to your show, e.g. age, background, location. If you can capture contact details too, so much the better! This can be useful for marketing future work.

## **FRONT OF HOUSE**

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Is the theatre open for the audience to enter before the show? When are the doors going to be open? Make the theatre welcoming – is there adequate seating and space in the foyer if you are not going to open the theatre doors?

Have **welcoming, helpful and diplomatic** staff. Be clear about the protocols for selling and collecting tickets, starting the show, admitting or denying entry to latecomers, calling intervals and reserving seating. You may need to provide your own theatre attendants, wine stewards, fire wardens, etc – work with your venue early to establish what personnel you will need to provide.

Decide how **programmes** are going to be distributed at the venue and whether they are going to be for sale, by koha or free.

Maintain a **comfortable and clean foyer and auditorium**.

Are the **audience** made aware of **appropriate behaviour** and protocol? That is, do they know that they need to turn off their cellphones, and that there is to be no smoking/eating/drinking (as per the venue's requirements) in the theatre? Make sure there is appropriate signage to let patrons know the rules. Front-of house staff should also be briefed and able to provide this information.

# Marketing

Marketing decisions begin at the very start of your production process. Identifying your desired audience, selecting what show to put on, your venue and your performance dates and times are all fundamental marketing decisions.

The key questions you should ask yourself are:

**Who do I want to inform?**  
**How will I reach them?**

Everything you do will come out of the answers to these questions.

Marketing is perhaps the most overlooked area when preparing a production. Remember that good word of mouth is your best friend. It's important that you believe in the project. It's hard to market things that you don't think are good!!

## DESIGN AND PRINTING

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Some of your biggest costs come in the form of the design and printing of publicity and marketing material, including posters, flyers, ads and programmes. **Shop around!**

A good money-saver is to **find a friend** who can design these for you (all you need is someone who knows programs like Photoshop).

Printing costs vary. **Get quotes from a range of companies.** Ask about a discount if the printing company has their logo on the poster.

Ideally print publicity should be prepared 2-3 months in advance for distribution. You need to have your posters out for the public to see. It may take several weeks to have your posters and flyers printed so **think ahead.** Make sure that you get all your venue and sponsor details and logos correct. Triple-check the dates, times and booking details. For archival purposes, it's a good idea to put the YEAR on your marketing material.

### Flyers

Flyers are useful. Make them distinctive, informative and pithy. Include the show title, venue, dates, times, booking information, 'tagline' and the show's unique selling points. Think about including more information on the flyers: introductions to work/company/cast, a synopsis, and so on. It's good to distribute the flyers yourself to cafes, information centres and libraries. Get them everywhere you can!

### Posters

You need to **capture the imagination** with your poster publicity - use a clear image and eye-catching colours. Spot colour, two colour or four colour posters are effective; full colour can be very expensive. Again, make sure the poster **clearly** displays the show title, venue, dates, times, booking information and 'tagline' - it needs to be big enough to read easily! You may choose to paste up the posters yourself; make sure to check with your local council first on where you are allowed to paste or pin up posters or you may get fined. If you are pleasant you may be able to get posters put up in shop windows or notice boards. Take your own cellotape/blutack/tacks and put them up yourself. If you are getting a professional poster distributor to paste

up your posters (professional placement may be necessary for pasting on main streets) then provide enough posters for them to do a few runs. Ask for a site list and check the sites regularly to ensure your posters are clearly displayed.

### **Electronic marketing**

Email campaigns are a cost-effective way to distribute information about your show to lots of people. Be aware, however, that there is legislation banning unsolicited email. Get people to sign up to email notifications through your website, or collect email addresses as part of a special promotion. Always include an “unsubscribe” option so people know how to ask to being taken off your email list.

Social marketing can have a big impact for minimal. Investigate creating your event on Facebook or other such sharing sites; you can invite your contacts to join the page, or RSVP to the event. Encourage cast and crew to post comments and share images or teaser video footage to keep the “buzz” going around the page. However, keep an eye on the page to ensure that the content is appropriate and represents the project in a positive way.

Venues may offer **other publicity opportunities** including: newsletters (hard copy or electronic), mail out databases, sandwich boards, notice boards, websites, displays, programmes and flyer stands. If you are part of a festival or a theatre season, make the most of the publicity opportunities they offer, such as festival programmes and posters – and make sure your deals for sponsorship don’t clash with those of the festival or venue.

Think about what you can offer to **schools or community groups**. Discounts or special performances for relevant groups can encourage a wider interest in your production and a larger audience.

## **OPENING NIGHT**

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This is a **huge planning exercise** and preparation needs to be detailed. Try, if you can, to have wine, juice and food on opening night. Communicate with the venue staff – especially if there is going to be alcohol on-site (you may need to get a temporary liquor license), catering, or deliveries to the venue. Send out invitations to press, sponsors, the arts sector, the mayor, reviewers, etc. Talk to people about who you should invite. Remember to include people who have helped you. Limit the numbers of tickets to your cast for opening night. Make your invitation appealing or gimmicky. Follow up people so that they RSVP. You will probably have a number of people who will decline the invitation or not show up, so make sure you have a waiting list and some “fillers” on hand so that you can have a full house on opening night.



# Media

## MEDIA LIAISON - The role of the Publicist

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### Develop a strategy

Prepare a list of media outlets, including print, radio, and television. Beside each, write a brief summary of what their focus is (e.g. local news, women, Maori, youth). A key feature of good publicity is **matching up story ideas** to specific media outlets. Select which outlets are suited to your production and think about what angle each might feature. Identify a specific story angle for each publication. Decide who in the show will cover it – for instance, will there be an interview with one of the cast or crew?

Prepare a comprehensive **publicity timeline** detailing media deadlines, interview dates and publication dates. Make sure each of your media events are spaced in a way that maximises their effect. Aim for saturation. Be aware of deadlines - monthly magazines and event guides can have deadlines up to two months out. Think about the following questions:

- What is your production about? (Be clear about what your production is about and what makes it unique.)
- Who are your target audience?
- What can you do to enhance a wider audience?
- Who are the media you wish to contact? (Look at newsagents to see publications available. Research circulation figures and ratings.)
- What will you present them with? (e.g. a media release, photos, giveaways, complimentary tickets)

When attempting to get newspaper or magazine articles, try and contact the **Arts Editor or Entertainment Reporter**. When ‘pitching’ your production, consider what is newsworthy. Remember you are getting free publicity, so the angle/story you are pitching needs to be of interest to the publication’s readership.

Investigate whether newspaper or magazine **advertisements** are necessary for your production’s publicity. Ask about package deals or how you can qualify for discounted rates. Remember that you may need to have an effective ad designed especially for this purpose.

**Proof-read. Have several people look over your copy to check the information, grammar and spelling. Proof-read lots!**

### Media Releases

These should be around one page in length. A good media release usually has a big title with a good tagline, an interesting quote, and an overall paragraph outlining the production and an introduction to the actors. Use lots of descriptive words – make it pithy, simple, and truthful. Avoid jargon. Clearly label it with ‘media release’, and include details, e.g. times, dates, prices, venue, where to book. Include the name and contact details of your publicist at the bottom.

### Reviews

A review can be good publicity and quotes can be used in promotional material for future productions. Invite reviewers personally or through the Arts/Entertainment Editor. There is no guarantee, however, that the show will get reviewed or the review will get published. Reviews can also get heavily edited before publication – you might like to ask for an unedited copy of the review for your files. Most importantly, don’t let a bad review get you down!

## **Photos**

Make sure you get a few different shots because some publications like to have exclusive photos or a choice of pictures. Some publications may request a photo shoot with their own photographer. For your own pics, set up a publicity shoot with a friend who has a decent eye and camera. Make sure digital photos are taken at high resolution so they reproduce well. Pics should reflect the tone of the show. Look at examples of photos in newspapers and magazines. Go for tightly framed shots. Colour is better (it is cheaper to reprint and can be changed to black and white easily on a computer). Choose the best photos and get a few prints made (with stickers on the back with details including title, dates of the show, people in the photo.) E-mail small copies of the shots to your publicity contacts; you can send them high res images or prints later if they request it. Include the photographer's name and request a photo credit if the photo is published.

## **Media contacts**

People who work in the media sector tend to move around a lot. Look at the AC Nielson Database at your local library and inside the latest magazines and newspapers for up-to-date contact details. Phone first and then send your information pack. Be confident and pleasant. Keep following up until you get a definite 'yes' or 'no' answer – don't give up or get disillusioned. Give your media contacts free tickets to opening night. You are their host and should meet them to make it more personal.

## **Media interviews**

When arranging interviews with performers, the media should contact the publicist, rather than contacting the actors directly. Meet your performers before the interview to brief them, and stay for the interview. They need to 'talk up' the production, and know the show's history, content and dates. They also need to know the name of the journalist/ DJ/ presenter and what angle to take. Don't be put off by being asked the same questions; be relaxed with a good sense of humour. Don't say anything negative. Listen. Speak clearly and enthusiastically.

Other publicity avenues you may explore include mail outs, on-street promotion and websites. Be imaginative.

**“It is critical to keep yourself up to date with media and opportunities to market to your audience. Read, research and tailor all of your material and you'll be ahead of the game”.**

**Michelle Lafferty, publicist and independent producer**

# Venue

Find out what you **need**, not what you THINK you need. When selecting a venue be clear about your requirements.

- Does it match the profile of your expected audience?
- Is it in a location that is accessible to your chosen audience?
- How many people does it seat?
- What are the AV/sound/lighting capabilities of the venue? (What equipment does it have – lamps, bars, cabling, speakers, lighting and sound desks, masking, rigging points, power points? What are the acoustics like? Is there a lot of external noise audible?)
- Does it have the facilities you need? (Adequate stage size, adjustable seating, dressing rooms, green room, box office facilities, backstage facilities?)
- What staff does it have?
- Does the venue have adequate signage and is it easy to find? (A few temporary signs or ushers can help in this regard!)
- Is there adequate parking?
- Is there wheelchair access?

## MANAGING UNUSUAL SPACES

If you are putting on a production in a non-performance space - outside or in a building that normally isn't used for performances - you need to carefully think about the following factors:

- Resource consent for outdoor events
- Security of the space and your equipment
- Administering tickets and handling cash
- Seating/audience containment
- The weather - and contingency plans if it rains/snows/hails
- Lighting and sound requirements (be aware of the dangers of using electricity outside)
- Any procedures that need to be put in place to bring audience members, your creative team and your equipment to and from the venue (Are there unique transport requirements? If the show is outside and finishes after dark, is there adequate light to pack out and for audience to find their way to their cars?)

## BOOKING A VENUE

Think carefully about the **dates and times** you select for your performances before you book.

**How many** performances are you going to schedule? (When you book remember to allow plenty of time to pack in and out. Ask someone experienced if you're not sure how long things will take, as it's easy to underestimate. This is really important!)

When you fill in a booking form, **be prepared** and have all your information and questions at hand. Be aware of the terms and conditions of hire. **This is a contract:** you need to be confident about what you are signing! It is vital to read the contract thoroughly – take it away and look at it carefully. Contracts contain a lot of information that is both important and useful. This information needs to be shared – designers, builders, production managers, box office staff and stage managers all need to understand and agree with what is contained in the contract.

## **MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VENUE**

**Take care of the facilities.**

**Keep the venue clean and secure.**

- When booking, provide the venue with all the basic information about your show: show title, playwright/creator, the core production team, the length of the performance, the performance start time, whether there is an interval and when the interval comes in the performance (some venues demand an interval).
- Is there a venue rep present all the time (including late night pack-ins, etc) and how much do they charge for their time?
- How do you gain access to the building? (Are there specific security issues, alarms, keys?)
- Ascertain whether the venue receives discounts on equipment hire, advertising, etc and if you can receive these discounts also.
- Check for any restrictions on the hours you are allowed the theatre.
- Be aware of the venue's requirements regarding the use of their logos, bromides, selected fonts and contact details.
- Don't be afraid to question the venue. Expect professionalism.
- Establish a co-operative relationship with the venue and its staff.

## **TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT**

Make sure your technical team are familiar with the theatre plan. Ensure they have access to a stage plan, plan of the lighting grid, etc.

The venue will come with a certain amount of gear, so ask for a technical inventory. Check what is covered and organise what additional equipment you will need. Ask the venue or other groups who they recommend if you need to hire gear. Make sure your technical crew know how to operate the equipment you plan to use.

## **PACKING IN AND OUT**

Remember **this takes a lot of time** – you need to work this into your schedule. Take into account packing in the set, rigging lights, focusing lights, plotting lights, rigging and checking sound equipment, etc.

Schedule **technical rehearsals and dress rehearsals**. How many of these do you need and how much time is required?

Organise **packing out** and rubbish removal. You will probably have to pack out immediately after the closing night performance finishes. Make sure you have a pack out team and an appropriate vehicle if you need to remove the set and rubbish.

Leave the venue in a **good state** and theatres will want you back!

Sometimes venues provide **trained technical staff** – be aware they may charge extra for their time. Make the most of their expertise to get familiar with the venue and its equipment and facilities. Most of these people are employed for general maintenance and venue management – they are likely to charge extra if you need them to operate your lighting board or help pack-in, etc.

# Health and Safety

Arrange for a person from the venue to meet with the cast and crew and give you a **briefing** about the venue.

Be aware of venue security and understand the **fire evacuation plan**.

Nominate who is responsible for the identification and elimination of the potential **hazards** facing your team and audience – some theatres provide trained staff.

Be aware of the **physical and emotional stress** that can affect you and your team throughout the preparation and performance process. Look after yourself and each other. Do what you can to stay happy and healthy. Ensure you schedule (and take!) sufficient breaks so that people can eat properly and take a bit of time out.

Be aware of **OSH** guidelines. Aim to **reduce the risks**. Prepare a risk assessment that is relevant to your production and venue.

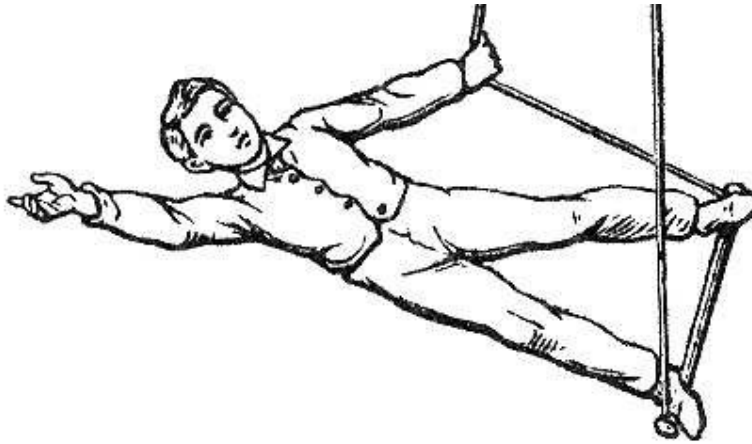
For information online see:

[www.osh.dol.govt.nz](http://www.osh.dol.govt.nz)

[www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz)

[www.nzism.co.nz](http://www.nzism.co.nz) (NZ Institute of Safety Management)

Also there is a guide available that outlines good practice in the theatre environment: **Guidelines for Safe Working Practices in the New Zealand Theatre and Entertainment Industry**. It is available to download from the ETNZ website: [www.etnz.org](http://www.etnz.org)



nothing is more striking and more sustained in the whole of human evolution than the increase in brain size on the one hand and, on the other, towards cultural activities, cultural mastery and indeed utter dependence upon culture to survive

## Encouraging diversity

It's important to have an awareness and appreciation of social and cultural diversity. Work together and network with other production companies and arts organisations. Maintain a wider scope than those of traditional western theatre perspectives. Be sensitive and open-minded. Seek a variety of input and advice.

## The future

Generating word of mouth and warmth toward your production company will create momentum. Aim toward a process of expansion with an eye toward future projects.

**“Think strategically in everything you do. A producer's job is to enable a project, to create opportunity for that project, to maximise the potential of the work in the immediate season and beyond.”**

**Lauren Hughes, producer for Red Leap Theatre Company**

Meet with your team and have a post-production review to assess your successes and failures. Remember, you can revise your production in response to criticism and restage it later.

Archive clippings, posters, programmes and resources from the production. Capture information on who attends your show to create a profile of your audience.

Being a producer is all about building relationships. Everyone you work with is going to carry an impression of you - make it a positive one! The New Zealand industry is relatively small, so if you have a good reputation, you will be offered work. It's important not to burn bridges. Remember, you're only as good as your last show. Get to know the industry (and let the industry get to know you).

Producers are a rarity. This is a specialised job and so, by and large, other producers will be supportive. The role is not glamorous – it receives no applause at the end of the production. Yet without you, often the show won't go on. Be proud of what you achieve. You've earned it.

# Appendix One

## INTRODUCTION TO COMMON LEGAL STRUCTURES

Eden Phillips

Below is a quick summary of the benefits of establishing a legal structure for your theatre group, and some of the options you should consider.<sup>1</sup> You should consult a lawyer and/or accountant for advice and assistance before making any final decisions. –

### Advantages of legal structure

Tax advantages – certain trusts, companies, and incorporated societies established for charitable purposes can be granted tax exemption by the Inland Revenue Department (IRD), which means your theatre group will not have to pay tax on your income.

Protection from liability – generally speaking, a company structure will protect you and the members of your theatre organisation from personal liability. Otherwise you will be personally liable for any debts you incur during productions, even if such debts are the result of circumstances beyond your control.

Assists in funding – some donor organisations are reluctant to provide sponsorship to individuals, preferring to sponsor a charitable trust or company established for charitable purposes.

Professionalism – creating a firm legal foundation before you meet investors or sponsors will help with credibility and legitimacy when meeting potential investors or sponsors.

Branding – settling on a firm legal footing gives you a registered name to begin building a brand/reputation around.

Team building/morale – a solid legal foundation provides a rallying point for members, helping to provide cohesion for your theatre group.

### Types of legal structure

The following are some common types of legal entities used by theatre groups. Often more than one type of entity is used to maximize protection for participants, while minimising tax exposure. These few paragraphs are offered only as an introduction to some common legal structures. As stated above, advice should be sought from a lawyer and/or accountant before proceeding.

#### **Trust**

Trusts are simple to set up, requiring a trust deed which is executed and witnessed by all the trustees, then lodged with the Companies Office. Trusts may be granted tax exemption from IRD if established for charitable purposes.<sup>2</sup> Two or three trustees are preferable, and although they are personally liable for debts of the trust, generally they will be indemnified by the trust, (which means the trust will pay any debts that they incur while exercising their duties as trustees).

Some people dislike trusts because there is a risk of losing control of the trust. However, loss of control will only occur if the trust deed is defective. Trustees of a charitable trust cannot profit from the trust. If they do, the trust will lose tax exemption status. However, trustees can be paid at market rates for work they do on behalf of the trust.

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<sup>1</sup> No liability is accepted by Auckland Theatre Company or the author of this document for the accuracy of the information contained herein.

<sup>2</sup> The IRD website provides a wealth of useful information about charitable purposes and other legal entities discussed in this document; see: [www.ird.govt.nz](http://www.ird.govt.nz)

## **Company**

Companies can be set up online at [www.companies.govt.nz](http://www.companies.govt.nz), and the online library at that site provides useful background information about other entities mentioned here, as well as providing downloadable forms for incorporation. Companies are considered at law to be separate legal persons, and in this respect, companies have the advantage of protecting shareholders and directors from personal liability. This means that if your production ends up with big debts, then the company risks insolvency and may be struck off the companies register, but you and the members of your theatre group will not be personally liable for the production debts, (unless you have acted negligently, or illegally).

Of all the legal entities mentioned here, companies are generally the safest with respect to personal liability, although they do involve more administration and maintenance for their upkeep. Companies can also be granted tax exemption by IRD if the purposes in their constitutions are charitable. A charitable company can offer the best of both worlds – limited liability and tax exemption.

## **Incorporated Society**

Incorporated societies are essentially a midway between sole trading and a registered company. Section 4 of the Incorporated Societies Act states that all incorporated societies must have 15 members or more and not be established for pecuniary gain. Although I have been informed there are ways around this 15 member requirement, there seems little purpose when a trust or company can essentially serve the same function.

Members of an incorporated society are not protected from personally liability in the same way as a limited liability company. Tax exemption is possible if purposes are charitable and members can be remunerated at market rates for services rendered to the society.

## **Loss Attributing Qualifying Companies**

Providing certain conditions are met, shareholders and directors can elect that their company become a loss attributing qualifying company (LAQC). Applications should be made to IRD, form IR436.<sup>3</sup> Losses incurred by the LAQC can be passed on to the shareholders of that company so as to reduce their personal tax liability. This opens up some interesting possibilities, especially in view of the fact that, unfortunately, the theatre business is all too frequently a loss making one.

LAQCs have not been favourites of IRD since they were badly abused by film producers during the 1980s and 1990s. LAQCs can also be dangerous when used in conjunction with tax exempt entities as there is arguably personal benefit to shareholders via tax credits.

## **SUMMARY**

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Various combinations of the above entities might be best depending on your plans, requirements, and expectations. As your company grows and develops, you may need to change your legal structure to accommodate new circumstances.

As a general guide, a charitable trust is a good start, as long as you do not expect to make considerable losses. If you are expecting losses, you will have to look at the more difficult options of a limited liability company, and possibly LAQC. If on the other hand you are expecting to make a good profit (please, be realistic here), you should make sure you obtain tax exemption status, or you risk losing a large chunk of that profit in the form of income tax.

Also, remember to notify IRD once you have established your legal structure, and register for GST where appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> For further information see: <http://www.ird.govt.nz/business-info/starting/howoperating/company.html>

# Appendix Two

## Sample budget

This is by no means comprehensive! Use this as a guide, but always get advice.

	Budgeted	Actual cost
Venue capacity (number of seats available)	0	0
Number of performances	0	0
Predicted attendance (% of venue capacity)	%	%
Average ticket price	\$	\$

<b>INCOME</b>		
Projected box office income (venue capacity x number of performances x % attendance x average ticket price)	\$	\$
Grant income	\$	\$
Cash sponsorship	\$	\$
Contra (value of in-kind goods/services)	\$	\$
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
<b>Artistic</b>		
Producer	\$	\$
Director	\$	\$
Assistant Director	\$	\$
Performers	\$	\$
Composer	\$	\$
Musical Director	\$	\$
Musicians	\$	\$
Choreographer	\$	\$
Writer	\$	\$
Set Designer	\$	\$
Costume Designer	\$	\$
Lighting Designer	\$	\$
Sound Designer	\$	\$
<b>Total Artists Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>Intellectual Property</b>		
Royalties for playwright	\$	\$
Royalties for music/audio	\$	\$
<b>Total Intellectual Property</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>Production Labour</b>		
Production Manager	\$	\$
Stage Manager	\$	\$
Assistant Stage Manager	\$	\$
Props Buyer / Maker	\$	\$
Lighting Operator	\$	\$
Sound Operator	\$	\$
Additonal LX operators (e.g. follow spot)	\$	\$
Mechanist	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$

<b>Total Production Labour</b>	\$	\$
<b>Production Costs</b>		
Pack in / pack out costs	\$	\$
Set (materials and build)	\$	\$
Wardrobe (materials plus making/sourcing)	\$	\$
Wardrobe (cleaning/repair)	\$	\$
Props	\$	\$
LX, AV & SFX equipment	\$	\$
Stage Manager sundries	\$	\$
Freight and Storage	\$	\$
Audition costs	\$	\$
Photography	\$	\$
Photocopying	\$	\$
Rehearsal venue hire	\$	\$
<b>Total Production Costs</b>	\$	\$
<b>Travel &amp; Accommodation</b>		
Flights	\$	\$
Transportation	\$	\$
Accommodation	\$	\$
Per diems	\$	\$
<b>Travel &amp; Accommodation</b>	\$	\$
<b>Venue</b>		
Venue hire	\$	\$
Front of House staff	\$	\$
Venue labour (techs/bar)	\$	\$
<b>Total Venue cost</b>	\$	\$
<b>Ticketing</b>		
Box office charges	\$	\$
Credit card fees	\$	\$
<b>Total Ticketing expenses</b>	\$	\$
<b>Marketing</b>		
Marketing manager	\$	\$
Publicist	\$	\$
Poster/flyer printing	\$	\$
Graphic design	\$	\$
Print advertising	\$	\$
Radio & TV advertising	\$	\$
Distribution	\$	\$
General marketing	\$	\$
<b>Total Marketing</b>	\$	\$
<b>Hosting</b>		
Opening night function	\$	\$
Closing night function	\$	\$
Sponsor events	\$	\$
<b>Total Development</b>	\$	\$
<b>Contingency</b>		
Suggested contingency = 5% of total expenses	\$	\$
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	\$	\$
<b>PROFIT / LOSS</b>	\$	\$

