
Best Practices for Producing

This section will discuss if an organization wants to make an online performance, what “best practices” or advice would you share with them with regards to: Producing (contracts, management, planning, ticket cost vs. free,etc).

The Know Your Audience section will bring up a few points that may not have answers or may be different from organization to organization. The topics that follow will discuss sub-section ideas with questions and possible solutions. This document is only meant to be a springboard for further discussion and help generate ideas as well as point out possible pitfalls.

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KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Thoughts for Moving Forward

The first thing that must be considered is, “Who is your audience?” This is going to help lead those in charge to discuss the Best Practices that need to be focussed on. There will be several sections following that will address certain issues and concerns that every organization will have to tackle in this new world we are making theatre in. At the time of this writing the majority of theatre being produced is in a digital medium. The majority of this white paper will address concerns for theatres producing content in this way.

Thoughts that are not addressed but should be up to the organisation include:

- What are the organization's limitations or constraints?
- Are aesthetic or directorial choices a limiting factor for hiring performers?
- Is a performer's technical access and/or proficiency required?
- How are you reaching your audience? Are they able to reach you?
- Is this a temporary step for the organization or a permanent change?

Some or all of these questions may be applicable to your organization but they all require consideration. The answers to these questions will help influence the topics that follow.

CONTRACTS

Existing Contracts

With most organizations on shut down, some may decide to cancel all contracts and start fresh. Some may consider buying out existing contracts to allow both organization and designer a chance to move forward with no restriction. Each contract and job should be looked at since no two contracts or organizations are the exact same. This can be difficult with companies that deal in contracts that are planned more than one season in advance (such as Opera).

Each organization must look at their existing contracts and decide how well they work for this new paradigm. Should contracts be renegotiated by being pushed back to the following season? Are some jobs being lost with a new digital space? Are multiple roles on the team able to be replaced by a new or different job?

LoRT or SAG-AFTRA

When you are creating new contracts for your team, it may be beneficial to look at both LoRT and SAG-AFTRA contracts to find what works best for your organization. If you are an organization that pays its performers both contracts may offer insights in a payment structure. Both sets of contracts have rules on how to deal with shows which are being broadcast more than once or have a proposed online permanence. This also covers things such as demo reels, personal use, and how rights for putting on shows must be handled.

MANAGEMENT

New Roles or Duties

(See Section 2.G *Changing roles in theatre (actors-as-lighting designers, etc)*)

Regular Meetings (Online)

With all the events that are making things challenging, it is easy for things to fall through the cracks. Organizations should maintain regular contact with all members of the team. This also includes the performers. With everyone working under new circumstances with changing responsibilities and duties, it is possible that people may feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable bringing topics to management's attention.

An increase in visibility is also good for morale, beyond mental health. It shows that there is an open communication for any change that may affect the group. Especially with regards to Covid and community health.

RIGHTS

Streaming and Broadcasting

Concerning the issue of show rights and broadcasting there is a great resource on the Concord Theatricals website on how to proceed with rights to *their* properties in a digital medium (found [here](#)). There are a lot of choices for an organization to decide upon. Not every group will allow their published work to be broadcast or streamed. Some may have certain stipulations on how it is broadcast. There is no clear answer on "can a stage show just be streamed" in this current age. Each show will need to be negotiated with whomever the rights owner is.

Also See Section 2.A *Platforms & choice of "mode"*

Also See Section 2.F *Audience engagement & attention & accessibility*

Residuals or Payments

With a digital medium we are moving into a realm that LoRT has been working with over the recent years, how do online versions of a performance affect performers and designers? According to a LoRT Contract (Found [here](#)) Section XXV Media Provisions, there are a lot of rules for how a Union and/or LoRT theatre must proceed. If you are not a member of either of those then your organization must decide on how to compensate those involved.

DESIGNERS OR CONSULTANTS

New Job Duties

See Section 2.G *Changing roles in theatre*

Location: Dispersed or Concentrated

With the planning of an online theatrical experience there is the question of location. This applies not only to the performers but also designers. If the organization is moving from a physical space to the new medium then most of the designers will already be within reasonable distance to one another as well as the resources they have used before. This can benefit the production as the designer will know the stock, have reasonable access to it, and possibly be able to transport any needed materials to the performer.

Designers who have worked together will have a common language for describing items or effects desired by the director. This allows concepts to be built or pulled quickly. They are also able to collaborate in a timely manner if something needs to be built.

If the designers are not located in one area, or if they are separate from the performers this will cause many compounding delays. From concept to rough builds, to shipping and adjustments, each step of the process will not take much more time. This also forces the design process to be laid out with extra care, hopefully getting it right the first time.

With the performer and designer unable to be in the same location we have new challenges. If the designer is having items delivered to the performer then both the performer and designer must be in communication for deliveries, setup, photos, possible returns, and receipt tracking. This is an extra burden on both designer and performer. If items are pulled from the performers own stock (clothing, lights, furniture, etc.) this can be a time intensive process as well. This also may cross into the realm of what is the performer's personal realm and what access does the show have to their personal life.

Regardless of where everyone is located, extra care must be taken to account for the extra time and labor being used. This is still the old problem of “Quality, Time, and Cost, pick two” is exacerbated and must be a serious discussion of priorities.

PLANNING

Time Zones & Availability

If we are in a world of dispersed company members a real-world problem is time. Designers and performers may be in a position where their collaboration takes place outside of normal hours of operation. A reasonable window of availability between the organization is something that must be negotiated near the start of the process. It may be good to decide what time the performance(s) will be done and use that as the anchor for when people should be available. Even with a set time there may be complications if anyone is +/- 3 hours from the rest of the team.

There must be a sensitivity to anyone who is located more than a few hours different from the majority of the group. Normal working hours (if there is such a thing), family time, personal time, as well as normal sleep schedules, are all considerations that need to be discussed and negotiated. Communication about schedule and availability changes should be a top priority.

Online or In Person

Is there a world where performances can be done while maintaining social distancing? There could also be a possibility of performers, possibly designers as well, living in a socially distant bubble. Similar to how touring companies or cruise ships deal with all people living on location or in an outside, yet still isolated, area. This is something that would need to be budgeted and have a lot of resources allocated to. If the area of performance is not a location separate from the living space then all elements from the theatre must be brought on site.

Some films have made deals with governments to allow filming on-site with strict quarantine guidelines in place. This includes the entire company being quarantined, isolated, and checked regularly. This may be a way of moving forward with in-person performances.

SHOW PLATFORMS AND SALES

What Is Your Format

See Section 2.A *Platforms & choice of “mode” (video vs. live event vs. play reading; transmedia)*

How To Pay For It All

Many theatres are struggling to find ways to monetize their current work. In a world where online entertainment is free we also find that once something is put into the ether it can never be truly contained. We can look to some examples from the current world to find how to make digital theatre sustainable.

Many platforms that allow live streaming have options of paid gifts (usually a coin or some sort of platform-specific currency) that can be directly sent from the viewer to the broadcaster. This form of tipping can be used to augment any live event, as well as talkbacks and non-theatrical moments.

There is also an option of subscription to a company. This would put pressure on an organization to reliably produce content on a set schedule. Whether this content is live, pre-recorded, or of a 'bonus feature' nature, this can be a lot for a small or independent organization to handle. This does give the benefit of regular income, and most theatres already are used to a subscriber base for their continued income. Most theatres also offer à la carte sales where shows can be purchased on a one-off basis.

Some organizations have made a success of tiered-subscription which has several benefits. It is far easier to add-on to an existing service than to attract a new customer. A tiered level of subscription can be sold in many different ways to different customers. Some will pay more for a service they find exclusive, while others may see it as a way to support the organization better. It also lets the patron decide what level of service works for them.

Some organizations have found that a "pay what you can" or "Pay what you like" model can work very well. This is an option for a good/service where there is no time-sensitive aspect to the event. If someone wishes to have access to something that has already been broadcast, something that is freely available and not able to be sold as-is, or something meant to be shared, asking for a donation is often the only way to monetize the service short of inserting ads.

PERFORMERS AS DESIGNERS

How Much is Too Much?

What is the job of a performer? Where is the line between a performer helping and a performer doing someone else's job? There is also a concern of imposing the process into the personal space of the performer. Directors may want more than a bedroom, office, or common area. There must be an established protocol for where the performance can be done and when the performer is allowed to say no.

Expertise and Resources

While many performers have had experience in areas of tech or design not all have. With the possibility of an entirely remote collaboration can we expect a performer to do all aspects of the design on their own? Spiking marks, setting up cameras, lighting, and furniture, or even curating and/or purchasing clothing.

Beyond the *what* of the job, is the *how*. How do these people execute the vision of the designers? With the resources performers have in their personal space there may be severe limitations to what can be done. If that's the case and resources have to be purchased, who does that fall on? Even intangibles such as how to use programs, inexperience with tools, or mental energy to learn all of these things is an issue that must be addressed.

Best Practices for Practicals:

Accessibility and Practical Concerns

This section will discuss if an organization wants to make an online performance, what “best practices” or advice would you share with them with regards to: Accessibility & practical considerations - how to use own space, green screen, etc.; collaborator access to resources, including private space, equipment, etc.; time zone challenges, care.

PERFORMERS AS DESIGNERS

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CONCERNS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

Questions on Performers and Recording

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS FOR THE PERFORMANCE

Accessibility for the Performer

Accessibility for the Designer/Collaborator

CONCERNS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

Questions on Performers and Recording

When we discuss accessibility we must be mindful of both the meaning of access to the performer’s space as well as concerns of discrimination. Not every performer may have access to the requested technology or be proficient in its use. Many performers may not have access to production level lighting or sound equipment. Who bears the burden of supplying this equipment to the performer?

We are also living in a time of social distancing and distant collaboration. The ability to have designers or coordinators on-site may not be possible. If it is possible, is it responsible?

- Where are the performance areas? Is this the performers personal space, a common area, outside, or a location?
- Who is working with the performer? Are they working alone? What is the role of a director? Designer? Cinematographer?

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- What is being used for the video? Whose resources? Who buys them? Who uses them?
 - Are those without resources, training, experience, or ability, being included? Does this fall under ADA or Discrimination (or other laws)?

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS FOR THE PERFORMANCE

Accessibility for the Performer

Here are concerns that producers should be aware of when they are casting performers. These are things that each performer may not have access to or feel comfortable with. The responsibility of Self Care is on the performer but the producer must make sure that there is an environment where performers can feel comfortable to request time or space from the project if it is being filmed in their personal spaces. The world of Private and Professional spaces has already been blurred and this new dynamic causes continued overlap.

- Use of own space
- Are Collaborators allowed in space
- Access to collaborator resources
- Green screen or other Tech.
- Equipment: Lighting, Cameras, Microphones, High Speed Internet
- Time zone challenges
- Self care

Accessibility for the Designer/Collaborator

The role of the Designer already requires people to wear many hats, in this new digital sphere we find ourselves. There are questions we must ask the organization about the role and responsibilities we put designers under. Here are some questions to begin conversations between the designers and the organization.

- Designer, collaborator, or consultant?
- Must Designers be local or dispersed?
- Collaborator access to resources, programs, training, budget
- Access to performance areas, including private space
- Equipment: Delivered, shipped, Purchasing, maintenance and repair

Thoughts for CMU SoD:

Accessibility and Practical Concerns

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QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

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ASD

- How do these topics relate to the CMU SoD?
- How can CMU School of Drama address concerns?
 - Is this a training tool for Directors and Managers?
- As an educational institution, what responsibilities does the school owe to the student body?
- How can classes at CMU in the time of Covid prepare students for the professional world?
- Are the new forms and directions of theatre here to stay?
 - Are we looking at a new way of performance?
 - What are those implications vs Theatre and Film?