

Client: PlayMakers Repertory Company

- **Problem:** For many years now, it has been informally observed and confirmed by audience survey data that an overwhelming majority of PlayMakers' attendees and subscribers identify as Caucasian and above the age of 50. It has been a long-standing aspiration of PlayMakers to figure out ways to diversify its audience base and generally make theatre attendance a more popular aspect of local culture and nightlife.
 - **Research Question:** How can PlayMakers reach and appeal to a younger and more diverse population, particularly within the UNC student body?
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Research Plan:

To answer my RQ, I have designed the following research plan:

Method 1: Secondary/Syndicated/Digital Analytics

To begin my research, I would like to first gain a better understanding of the demographics within existing theatre audiences in the United States as a whole. In order to do this, I would analyze statistics found through secondary data sources such as journalistic articles and research reports from industry websites (The Broadway League, National Endowment for the Arts, etc.) as well as syndicated research from databases such as Simmons and Statista. I would search specifically for information regarding identity factors such as age, ethnicity and gender as well as lifestyle factors such as income, relationship and family status, and education level. Through these searches, I'd want to find out which demographic groups are attending live theatre at the highest and lowest frequencies in order to recognize how identity and lifestyle factors may impact one's ability to attend theatre performances. I would like to use these findings to inform my creation of future survey and focus group questions to specify my research, identifying which demographic groups within the Chapel Hill area attend PlayMakers shows at the highest and lowest frequencies. The findings from my secondary research may highly inform the results of my primary research as I may find that factors such as income may universally impact one's level of theater attendance. Overall, it would be my hope that the findings from the secondary research would provide a strong foundation for further research into which demographics PlayMakers should devote more energy to in terms of representation and marketing outreach.

Method 2: Participant Observation

Before I could answer my initial research question, I would first need to analyze the current demographics present in PlayMakers' attendees personally. The best way to do this would be to observe the lobby of the Joan H. Gillings Center for Dramatic Art (where PlayMakers productions are performed) in the hour prior to a performance, paying close attention to the guests as they arrive, as well as immediately after the performance as guests leave. I would want to observe both an evening performance on a Saturday and a matinee on a Sunday to see which type of performance certain demographics appear more in, as a matinee may appeal to an older crowd that doesn't enjoy being out late, while an evening performance may draw more young students with busy day schedules. Even if such a trend does not appear, observing two types of performances has the potential to provide other insights currently unforeseen. Choosing weekend dates to observe is mostly due to a higher amount of ticket sales on weekends, providing more people to study. In the hour in which guests arrive prior to the performance, I would take note of the following behaviors: arrival time, style of dress, who guests attend with, interactions with fellow guests, engagement with lobby exhibits supplemental to the production or advertisements on lobby monitors, purchases made from concessions, etc. I would also note of individuals who blatantly express attitudes of excitement, boredom, joy, or sadness, as well as those that appear emotionally neutral. In the moments following the end of the performance, I would pay close attention to the moods expressed by the guests as they exit the theater, taking note of who appears to have enjoyed or disliked the performance, as well as any other attitude or behavior that indicates a guest's level of satisfaction. In connecting those behaviors and attitudes to the demographic groups that perform them in the highest concentrations, insights could be gathered on guest experience and satisfaction level primarily with the facility and potentially the production itself. Data would be organized and subsequently analyzed through a breakdown of the behaviors listed above as they are most often observed in various demographic groups (Ex. Caucasian Females 18-24: attend with a friends, arrive closer to performance time, purchase a snack before entering theater, leave promptly following performance)

Method 3: Survey

In the survey portion of the research, my first battery of questions would include broader questions pertaining to habits and preferences in entertainment followed by a second battery asking about local nightlife activities, moving on to a final battery asking more specific questions about the respondent's experiences with and perceptions of PlayMakers as a theatre company. The survey would end with demographic questions in order to provide more concrete data on trends amongst various groups. I would order my question topics in this way to prompt the respondents to begin creating associations between entertainment, Chapel Hill nightlife and PlayMakers, with the hope to begin establishing PlayMakers as a viable nightlife entertainment option. The various measures I

would include in the survey would range from matrix tables, multiple selection boxes and linear scales, to reflect respondents' frequency in which they choose certain entertainment sources, preferred venues and values, and perceptions of PlayMakers. A sample survey can be found [here](#).

The data I'd hope to receive from the survey would show which sources of media and entertainment appeal the most to respondents as well as what entertainment platforms and services they use most frequently. Additionally, I want to find out what kind of resources (time, money, etc.) respondents are willing to spend to enjoy their favorite entertainment sources. In regards to nightlife, I'd like to similarly find out what respondents look for when choosing to visit local restaurants, bars, and clubs. Through analyzation of the data, I would hope to find insights that would help inform PlayMakers' efforts to improve and innovate guest experience and create partnerships with local businesses to make theatre attendance a more popular option for nightlife in Chapel Hill.

The sample of the survey would be composed of 500+ UNC students to better gauge what college students are looking for in entertainment and nightlife in Chapel Hill. The survey would initially be distributed to students through the entire drama department, but particularly in introductory Drama courses such as DRAM 115 and 116 that often include younger students with both major and minor interest in the performing arts. Working with the professors within the department, extra credit may be offered to students willing to complete the exam through a link on Sakai. Students in these classes are often required to see PlayMakers shows as a part of their class, so being able to hear their preferences and opinions on PlayMakers would be extremely helpful in understanding the mindset of the UNC student population in regards to theatre attendance. Additionally, the survey would be distributed through the general Outlook student listserv database, offering the chance to win free show tickets as an incentive to take the survey. This particular survey would not include copy or concept testing, as the purpose of the survey is only to gauge the general interests and experiences of consumers in the 18-24 age group.

Method 4: Focus Groups

For the focus group portion of the research plan, I would want to conduct two separate focus groups, one with a random selection of UNC students and another with exclusively students of color. With the randomized sample group, my goal would be to primarily to better understand student attitudes towards PlayMakers and theatre attendance in general, whereas with the group comprised of students of color, I'd like for the participants to give feedback on PlayMakers' current efforts at representation in their shows as well as suggestions for how PlayMakers could improve and appeal to more ethnically diverse audiences, whether by show selection, casting, or other initiatives. Both group discussions would be held in a conference room in the Center for Dramatic Art for about 30-45 minutes, to provide convenience in location and time commitment for

students. The first battery of questions would pertain to their preferred entertainment sources as well as their most recent live theatre experience and relationship with theatre in general. The second battery of questions would ask the participants about their experiences at PlayMakers and their perceptions of it as a theater.

The sample question map is as follows:

1.1: What sources of entertainment are your go-to's?

- [Netflix, Youtube, sports]
 - **Why are those your go-to's?**
 - [all are accessible on my phone, makes it easy to watch]
 - **What other qualities are appealing to you in regards to what you choose for your entertainment?**

1.2 :How many of you have had a live theatre experience in the last 6 months? What was it?

- [Show and production type, ex. Pauper Players' Bonnie & Clyde]
 - **Why did you choose to go see that show?**
 - [I like seeing musicals and my friend was in it]
 - **Is attending student theatre a common occurrence for you?**
 - [Yes, they're fun but also very accessible]
 - **What makes them accessible?**
 - [Tickets are cheap and the theater is always closeby]
 - **Tell me more about your experience seeing that show.**

1.3: What are your thoughts on live theatre in general?

- [Ex. I like it, but it really depends on the show]
 - **What kind of shows appeal to you?**
 - [Musicals, but mostly new ones]
 - **What's most appealing about musicals?**
 - [Musicals are more exciting than plays]
 - **Why are musicals more exciting than plays?**
 - [More upbeat, stories are easier to follow]
 - **What other preferences do you have in regards to what types of theatre productions you enjoy?**

2.1: How many of you have ever seen a show at PlayMakers Repertory Company?

If so, why did you attend?

- [Required to for a class]
 - **What was your experience like overall?**
 - [Show was really good, theater is nice]

- **What were the best and worst parts of your experience?**
 - [Best was the performance, worst was being surrounded by old people]
 - **What could PlayMakers do to improve guest experience?**

2.2: What kind of people do you think go to PlayMakers regularly?

- [older crowd]
 - **Why do you think that is?**
 - [retired and bored, looking for things to do]
 - **Why do you think PlayMakers appeals to that demographic?**
 - [everyone wants to be dazzled]
 - **What other appeals do you think are present for PlayMakers?**

2.3: What could PlayMakers do to appeal to students on UNC's campus?

- [more mainstream shows]
 - **Why would that be more appealing?**
 - [familiarity is comforting]
 - **What other types of shows or improvements could PlayMakers explore?**
 - [student-only nights, more provocative shows]
 - **Tell me more about what would appeal to student demographics.**

For the focus group featuring only students of color, a third battery of questions would go as follows:

3.1: Do you feel as if you see yourself represented in PlayMakers productions?

- [Somewhat, but not a lot]
 - **What kind of productions do you think you'd relate to/be interested in seeing?**
 - [shows with good social commentary or light-hearted ones]
 - **Tell me why those genres would be appealing to you.**

3.2: From what you've seen today, or in the past, how well do you think PlayMakers represents diverse characters and narratives in its productions in general?

- [seems to be trying, could always use more]
 - **In what ways could PlayMakers improve upon their efforts at representation?**
 - [color blind casting, choosing shows with POC as main characters]

3.3: What could PlayMakers do to reach more diverse audiences and encourage more people to attend performances?

- [form relationships with cultural groups on campus, explore theatre with cultural roots]

- **Why do you think those efforts would be helpful?**
 - [Shows that PlayMakers actually cares about diversity and inclusion]
 - **How would that impact your perceptions of PlayMakers?**

By listening back to a recording of the group conversations, I would pull certain quotes and discussion topics that to formulate insights on how students feel about theatre and PlayMakers (shows, marketing, diversity, etc.) While I don't think an IDI would be as helpful in this particular research plan, if I were to conduct IDIs for PlayMakers, I would select individuals that had just seen a show at PlayMakers and design questions that would go more in depth into their personal experience to gauge what PlayMakers is doing well and what needs improvement in regards to guests feeling welcome in the space, satisfied with the performance quality and content, and leaving wanting to come back again.

Conclusion

Through evaluating existing research on theatre audience demographics, unpacking PlayMakers' current audience clientele through observation, and conducting surveys and focus groups gauging the desires and opinions of current UNC students, PlayMakers' would hopefully be able to better understand how they can appeal to a younger and more diverse audience in Chapel Hill with the hope of developing innovative ways to become more integrated in local culture as a popular nightlife destination to enjoy the performing arts.