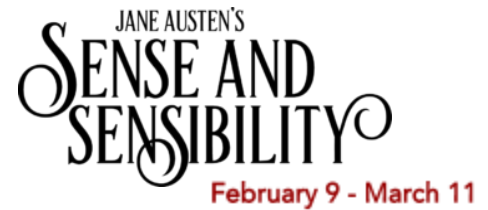


BARTER THEATRE MARKETING PLAN



OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Enriching Lives Through Extraordinary Theatre

Barter is a resident company of passionate professional artists and leaders dedicated to serving and enriching our region by creating live theatre in repertory; by providing a nurturing environment for all involved; by embracing and celebrating Appalachia; by being stewards of the legacy of Barter Theatre; by using theatre as a vehicle for education; and by providing audiences, both youth and adult, with an extraordinary and enlightening experience each and every time they engage with us.

S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS for BARTER THEATRE

Strength

- ★ Great Theater without the Great White Way
 - Barter is known for producing high-quality shows for their small town audiences. Visitors tend to rave about how surprised they were to find Broadway quality acting, singing, costuming, and production style at a non-Broadway cost.
- ★ Multiple Shows Running at the Same Time
 - Shows open at both the Gilliam Stage at Barter Theater and Barter Stage II on Main Street offer opportunities for visitors to see more than one show in a weekend visit.
- ★ Strong Yelp and TripAdvisor Reviews
 - #1 on Thing to Do in Abingdon & Certificate of Excellence, *TripAdvisor*
 - Almost all of the 'Terrible' reviews (only 1% of all) had direct responses from the PR team apologizing for negative experiences.

Weaknesses

- ★ Closed during the month of January, open Feb. - Dec.
 - Running this show as the opener of the Spring Season is not without risks. Building momentum within the Abingdon community is important for ticket sales, and the first show of the season can fly under the radar easily.
- ★ 'Cozy, Historic' Theater Leaves No Room for Modern Comfort
 - Most complaints listed on TripAdvisor and Yelp were those citing small, uncomfortable seats, poor acoustics/sound quality, seats that aren't staggered, steep isles, and other such grievances. Granted, a lot of these reviews came from ornery senior citizens, but if they're not comfortable during their theatre-going experience, they will definitely share it and they may not return.

Opportunities

- ★ Welcoming large groups
 - Barter is happy to accommodate church groups, senior citizen groups, school field trips, and much more. Special ticket rates are offered as well as actor talkbacks or a behind-the-scenes tour for a nominal charge. Contact information is available for their Group Sales Department online, but *Barter* should be reaching out to schools, churches, and special organizations to encourage groups to visit.

Threats

- ★ Abingdon Cinemall
 - 3 minutes down the street from Barter is the main movie theater in the area that features an arcade and free Saturday morning movies for kids. The theater regularly hosts special events such as sports and tv show premiere watch parties.
- ★ Live Music Scene
 - According to the Abingdon tourism website, visitors can "Jam with local musicians at Heartwood every other Thursday, or at Capo's Music Store on

Saturday nights." Sometimes, Barter is the host of live music, but whenever there's a theatrical performance running at Barter, there will probably always be a live concert somewhere else in town.

★ Alternative Live Theater Experiences

- Less than half an hour away from Barter is Theatre Bristol, a community theatre with a focus on family entertainment. Though not nearly as polished seeming as Barter, ticket prices for a Bristol show are much cheaper (\$20-50 vs. \$16.)

S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS for SENSE & SENSIBILITY

Strengths

★ Famous Author with Name Recognition

- Most everyone is at least vaguely familiar with the name Jane Austen and the quality of her literary work. Her books are known and beloved world wide, but even for non-super fans, Austen titles are recognizable and appealing.

Weaknesses

★ Romantic Comedies vs. Male Audiences

- It's no surprise that a story about the social and love lives of two young sisters in the Victorian era would not appeal to the majority of the male demographic. Especially in rural Virginia, certain social stigmas and cultural norms may deter men from wanting to see the show.

★ Negative Aspects of Reputation

- Despite being hailed as a classic piece of literature, stories like Sense & Sensibility aren't always considered to be the most exciting or entertaining. For some potential audience members, a title like S&S, though familiar, is considered to be boring and not worth a trip to the theater to see.

Opportunities

★ Educational Value of Source Material

- Sense & Sensibility, as a piece of classic literature, can easily be integrated into local classroom curriculums and be enjoyed by students theatrically after studying the original text. Shows like these appeal to educators and schools that want to give their students the opportunity to make greater connections with the material they learn.

Threats

★ Competition with Blockbuster Movies

- February and March of 2018 will see the release of major blockbusters at movie theaters. On Sense & Sensibility's opening weekend of Feb. 9, the anticipated romantic drama Fifty Shades Freed and the family comedy Peter Rabbit will hit the big screen. Throughout the rest of February and early March, more sure-to-be hits such as Black Panther and A Wrinkle in Time will premiere. For those seeking entertainment on those cold mid-winter weekends, the ease and cost-efficiency of a casual movie theater may be more attractive than a "stuffy" play adaption of a Jane Austen book.

★ Alternative Live Theater Experiences

- Theatre Bristol will be kicking off their 2018 season at roughly the same time Barter will. While they haven't yet announced their show line up, the two theaters will definitely be competing to have the more attractive winter production.

GOAL

Grow single ticket audiences by 20% overall while significantly increasing diversity.

After some research, I found that very few community groups exist for people of color locally around Barter. Normally, my plan would be to reach out to those groups in an effort to encourage them to come see shows at Barter. However, because they don't appear to exist, I have decided to tackle the diversity issue by reaching out to the non theatre-going population in the area to encourage them to seek out what Barter has to offer.

OBJECTIVE

Sold out Fri-Sun performances, weeknights at no less than 75% capacity, matinees at no less than 85% capacity.

BUDGET \$20,000

The limited budget inspired me to utilize cost-effective PR based tactics in promoting and generating anticipation for Barter's production of Sense and Sensibility.

STRATEGY

★ Connect More with the Abingdon Community as a Whole

○ **TACTIC 1: Opening Night Celebration Event**

- Right across Main Street from Barter Theatre is [The Martha Washington Inn & Spa](#), a beautiful venue built in the early 1800's, known for hosting weddings, conferences, and other special occasions. To continue the thrill of the premiere of Sense and Sensibility, guests will be invited to attend a reception following the show's Friday evening performance. Keeping with tradition, for the first performance of each production, patrons are not required to pay the full ticket price to attend a show; one can see the show for as little as \$1. Tickets to the Opening Night reception will be free to promote accessibility, but will be available for reserve online on a first come, first serve basis. Early reservation access will be given as an incentive to season subscribers. The event will be promoted in advance along with the marketing for the production. Guests will have the opportunity to have a drink, mingle with fellow theatre-goers, and interact with the cast. Promotional footage of the event would be posted on to the active YouTube channel.
- **Venue Costs:** Approx. \$9,000
Event Advertising Costs: \$2,000 - \$3,000

The Martha
The Martha Washington Inn & Spa

- **P Values:** Place & Promotion - The convenience in location of the inn relative to the theater makes it the perfect extension of the Austen era experience of the production. As a high profile promotional event, the reception will hopefully attract earned media attention and buzz in the Abingdon community.
- **TACTIC 2: Student Matinees**
 - See current info on Student Matinees [here](#)
 - Traditionally, schools are meant to contact Barter in order to schedule special matinee shows for large student groups. For Sense and Sensibility, I want to see Barter reach out to local middle and high schools to facilitate youth exposure to theatre. In addition to the free study guide resources offered to teachers online, groups could potentially participate in post-show discussions, backstage tours, and meet-and-greets with the cast. The goal here is to not only provide students with an educational opportunity to appreciate classic literature, but also to appreciate the art of theater. Due to generous sponsorships, students that otherwise may not get to see a show can have the opportunity to learn through theater. Additionally, some students may then share their positive experience with friends and family, prompting continued ticket sales.
 - **P Values: Processes** - Student matinees are unique in that they are shaped to fit the needs and interests of young minds. Not everyone will get to go backstage or participate in an audience talkback, so the educational lense in which this program exists makes it special.
- **TACTIC 3: Using Earned Media to Reach Potential Audiences**
 - A Barter production getting a great review in the local newspaper, the Bristol Herald Courier, is great publicity (such as this [review](#) for the recent production of The Music Man.) Barter often uses positive

quotes in show trailers and other promotional content. To generate excitement for Sense and Sensibility, I want to reach out to publications like the Courier as well as local television news stations to pitch feature stories that highlight the rehearsal process, costuming, and backstage life of our production. Interviews with the cast and creative team would help viewers/readers at home feel more genuinely connected with the production than with traditional persistent advertising.

- **P Values: Promotion and People** - Even though a fluff piece about the preparations for a new production at Barter is by nature meant to promote and create hype, in depth stories that highlight the hard work and dedication of the cast and crew create a sense of genuinity very few tactics can achieve. Consumers love when authenticity and truth are weaved into promotion.

- **TACTIC 4: Valentine's Day Date Night Special**

- Wednesday, February 14th - Partnering with local main street restaurant, The Tavern, Barter will offer a dinner & show package that allows couples to have a unique date



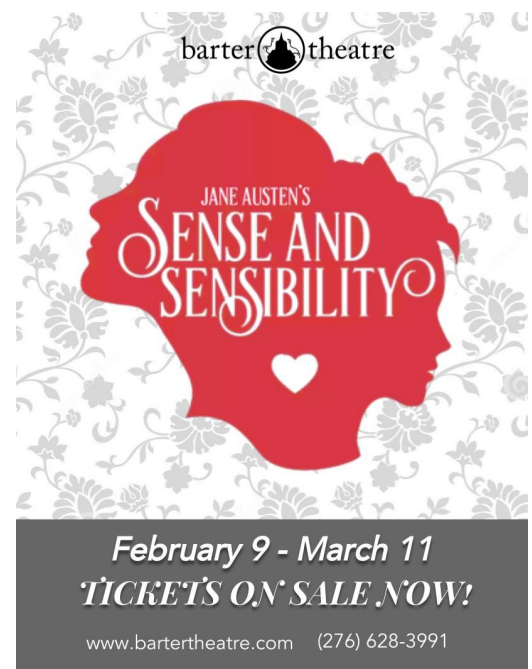
night experience for Valentine's Day. A special combination ticket will cover the cost of the 8:00 performance of Sense & Sensibility as well as a dinner at The Tavern. A selection of meal options will be available under a voucher included with show tickets. With traditions going back to the late 1700's the Tavern's romantic look and feel will help to set the tone for entering the world of Austen later in the evening at Barter. Additionally, a cocktail hour with an open bar will be hosted in the lobby of Barter Theater leading up to the

performance with the intention of giving couples an opportunity to enjoy a drink and some more quality time before enjoying Sense & Sensibility. The price of drinks will be covered in any ticket cost, regardless of whether it's a part of the dinner & show package. There are several objectives in offering this Valentine's special event: 1) Supporting other local organizations in the Abingdon community 2) Showing non-theater going couples in the area that a night at the theater is a great date idea all year long (also bringing more men into Barter) 4) Creating a welcoming, relaxed environment in Barter's theater space that patrons will remember fondly

- **P Values:** Place & Promotion: The Main Street of Abingdon has much to offer in terms of culture, shopping, and food. Connecting and building positive relationships with other local businesses is great step forward in uniting the small community. In addition, this event promotes and supports both Barter and Tavern services, as well as brings in potential regular customers.

DESIGN BRIEF

- ★ **Colored Branding** In marketing graphics, Barter Theatre tends to use dark reds as a main focal point supported by dark greys, white, and black. This theme will be carried over into the marketing materials for Sense & Sensibility.
- ★ **Minimalist Designs:** The simple, visually appealing silhouette of the two sisters featured on the poster will be the main "logo" for the show
- ★ **#SenseOrSensibility?** Hashtag people can use to discuss the show and how they identify with the characters



7 M'S ANALYSIS

- ★ **Market:** Barter is at the center of community life in Abingdon. Located on Main Street, Barter Theatre is the #1 Thing to Do for tourists and residents alike, as the high quality, easily accessible productions
- ★ **Motivation:** *"We are a theater that gives."* Barter is committed to making theater as accessible as possible for anyone who wishes to experience it, regardless of a person's ability to pay full price for a ticket
- ★ **Message:** Barter provides theater experiences everyone can enjoy and connect with. You don't have to be a connoisseur of the arts to appreciate Barter productions.
- ★ **Means:** Partnerships with many local businesses and organizations, strong social media presence, earned promotion through local media outlets
- ★ **Money:** Largely funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Virginia Commission for the Arts, dependent upon donations
- ★ **Measure:** Exactly how many people are taking advantage of Barter's accessibility initiatives?
- ★ **Movement:** *Slowly* working towards a more ethnically diverse audience base.