



Selling a production

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Selling a production: do it yourself or contract it out?

Before a performance can be seen, it must first be sold to the theatres. This is done by the business manager of a company, an impresario or a theatre agency. Usually the choice is made to have a performance sold by an impresario. Sales by a business leader are more common in large companies and orchestras that put out several productions per year. The advantages of 'doing it yourself' are that you retain control of your own tour schedule, you know that maximum effort is going into selling your own production(s) and you do not have to pay an impresario's fee.

However, the investment required to build a network cannot be underestimated. A good impresario is in close and regular contact with the customer. And by specializing in a particular discipline, they develop expertise and hence inspires confidence ("If they are offering modern dance, then it must be good"). Theatres take less and less risks: confidence is therefore very important. An impresario can also offer sets of productions as packages, giving less well-known companies a chance to 'piggy-back' on successful shows.

As a small company you can benefit from an impresario that sells your performance. However, impresarios usually do not accept small starting companies. The sale of an unknown company takes a lot of time, both for the agent who wants to sell it to the theatre and for the theatre to sell it to the public. You can also decide to invest in a business manager. Personal contact with programmers is important for small companies. It really makes a difference if bookers know your company.

Procedure

The sale of a production almost always involves the following steps:

1. Written information to potential venues in the form of a sales brochure.
2. In some cases, impresario-organised presentation days for programmers to see the productions – especially youth theatre – for themselves. These are often organised in January.
3. Telephone contact with or "house calls" to programmers to discuss the possibilities. A programmer may also attend a performance. Traditional theatres mostly begin their annual programming in August, a year ahead of the season concerned. Other venues such as arts centres starting rather later. The start of the booking period differs per location but usually before mid-October. Do you have an agreement on performance dates? Confirm directly per e-mail.
4. In January/February the negotiations on the venue fee or other financial arrangements take place. Send the confirmation of the options mid-March.
5. Signing of the final contract, in some cases confirming an earlier option agreement, mostly happens before summer. Also send the technical list along with the contracts. You can also add orders for publicity material.

Around March, the producers deliver texts and illustrations to the theatres that they can use for their seasonal brochure. The theatres want to complete the programming by the end of March. They often start selling tickets for performances throughout the next season in the summer. Smaller theatres generally start their ticket sales later, so the brochure is not so important and they can take longer to confirm their programmes. The same applies to school performances.



Types of contract

Financial arrangements can take a number of forms:

- *Uitkoopsom*: The theatre pays a fixed fee per performance; this happens less frequently.
- *Partageregeling*: Box-office receipts are shared – for example, 80% for the company and 20% for the theatre.
- *Garantiesom*: A box-office split with guarantee. Receipts are shared as above, but the theatre guarantees the company a minimum payment even if these fail to reach a certain threshold.
- Rental (*verhuur*): When a theatre doesn't want to programme your show you can still rent the space. In this case the company keeps all the box-office receipts.

Some theatres offer the opportunity to rehearse a production on their stage for a number of days, in return for the takings from one or more preview performances.

After performing you will receive a *borderel* from each theater. This is an account with an overview of all actions; think of the number of tickets sold, gross, net, theater surcharge and the occupancy rate.

How to find an impresario

Impresarios and theatrical agents are choosy about what they sell. An impresario doesn't judge one show or one performance but also looks at the potential: artistically and financially. They will wonder what stage would want to programme your show.

An impresario wants to be able to offer productions of high quality which suit their profile and do not compete with other shows they are marketing. So always look first at the other performances an agency has on its books, and consider whether yours will fit in. If you think it does, invite the impresario to a performance and ask for a meeting. You may not succeed straight away, but do not be discouraged. Keep issuing invitations: the interest may take time to develop.

When an impresario does 'bite', think about lead-in periods. Most agencies issue their offer to the theatres with performance information between August and October, and will soon start selling performances.

More information

On BeroepKunstenaar.nl we offer more information about impresario's, agencies, intermediaries, stages and festivals.