



Selling a production

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Selling: do it yourself or contract it out?

Productions may be sold by their own business manager, by an impresario or by a theatrical agent. The first approach is adopted most commonly by large companies and groups which present several productions a 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, he or she develops expertise and hence inspires confidence ("If he is 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 production as packages, giving less well-known companies a chance to 'piggy-back' on successful shows.

A small company can gain by leaving sales to an experienced impresario but they usually do not take on small starting companies. Doing sales for unknown companies takes more time for the impresario to sell it to the theatre and for the theatre to sell it the audience. You can also decide to invest in a business manager. Personal contact with bookers 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-organized presentation days for programmers to see the productions – especially youth theatre – for themselves (January).
3. Telephone contact with or "house calls" to programmers to discuss the possibilities. A programmer may also attend a performance, watch a dvd or video on You-tube. Traditional theatres mostly begin their annual programming round before mid-October, a year ahead of the season concerned, with other venues such as arts centres starting rather later. Agreement on performance dates and 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.

In March, producers deliver texts and illustrations to theatres for inclusion in their brochures for the forthcoming season. Production of these publications begins almost immediately, so the major theatres want to confirm their programme for the whole season 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.

Certain organizations specialize in negotiating the programming of unusual or international productions, and sometimes also subsidize them. They include the Association of Theatre and Concert Hall Management Boards (Vereniging van Schouwburgen en Concertgebouwdirecties,



[VSCD](#)). The [Dutch Performing Arts Fund](#) subsidizes Dutch performances or presentations abroad. [Stichting Raamwerk](#) brings foreign productions to the Netherlands. From January 2013 the [Bureau Promotie Podiumkunsten](#) will take over the international activities of the MCN and TIN under the name of *Dutch Performing Arts*.

Types of contract

Financial arrangements can take a number of forms.

- The customer (the theatre) pays a fixed fee per performance; this happens less frequently.
- Box-office receipts are shared – for example, 80 per cent for the company and 20 per cent for the theatre.
- 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.
- When a theatre doesn't want to programme your show: own risk: the company pays a rental fee for use of the venue but 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.

How do you 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: 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 with production information already between August and October, and will soon start selling tickets.

More information

On BeroepKunstenaar.nl:

- *I want an impresario (dance and theatre only)*
- Kinds of intermediaries in the world of *music*, world of *dance* and *theatre*. You will find information on costs and tasks and web links to agencies.