

PROPER PROMOTION FOR FAVORED FOOLS

I want to enlist your aid in a large group effort to scale up the promotion of our productions at Sacred Fools. To do this in the most coordinated fashion possible, I'm going to ask you to keep light records of your activities as we begin this new joint campaign to maximize awareness of every show at Sacred Fools.

There are but three things to remember when promoting a show:

1. Place posters prominently
2. Push postcards personally
3. Press perfect points

Place posters prominently

Each main stage production at Fools has the means of producing posters cheaply, but they do no good sitting in a bag in the lobby, the dressing room, or the back of a producer's car. At each company meeting posters for the upcoming or current show will be distributed to attendees for placement. Placement doesn't mean tacked up haphazardly at the local supermarket or gorilla taped to a flagpole. Placement means a high-traffic location that is approved by the land owner or lease holder or business person that you have sourced ahead of time.

Here's your method of action for the best deployment of posters: Find a business that appears to be trafficked by many people age 18-35 or 35-55. If you already know the business owner, that is much better than a cold call. If you have to make a cold call, don't make your first visit the ask for poster placement. Obviously, you want to source a possible business that has some kind of public marketing space available. If the business appears to have no flyers and no posters in the window, it's probably too tough a target unless you know the owner, but you can be the judge of your abilities to influence a person.

Whether you know the business well or you are making a cold call, make your first visit a simple purchase or use of services. This is key. In this business climate, the smallest transactions count and you win more goodwill with a dollar spent than ten minutes of talk. At the end of the transaction, ask if the owner is around. Say 'owner' instead of manager as asking for management implies a complaint. If only management is around, ask them who to talk to about marketing. When you meet the person who would be in charge of marketing, simply ask for their business card and if they don't have one, ask if you could get a business email from them because you want to send them some information on Sacred Fools sponsorship and advertising. When you describe Sacred Fools, the first thing you say is that we are a **local business**. The second thing you say is we are a **non-profit theatre for the performing arts**, but **local business** is going to resonate in such a greater fashion with any savvy owner or business person. When you have the business card or the email address, say thank you and depart. BE CONFIDENT! If you approach someone with a mushy attitude, even if they aren't busy, they'll blow you off. Fools rocks and you are an attractive person. Have no fear. If they tell you to get lost, no worries.

If it works out to our advantage, your second connection with the owner/manager should be online, thanking them for chatting with you earlier, and asking them if it would be okay if you brought a small poster (11"x17") by and placed it in the window or on the wall or on the door (take note of what space there is for a poster on your initial visit and mention that space specifically as you ask this favor; a direct request is very likely to get a yes answer and an amorphous request is very likely to get a no answer.)

When you get your answer, if it is in the affirmative, return to the business within 48 hours with a poster and tape (always bring your own) and put the poster up in the requested space. After this, contact them with our program advertising rates via email and forward the information you have gathered (business, address, phone, name of contact, email, length of time poster can live) to Marz.

If the answer is no, send the program advertising rates directly to them with our thanks for considering our request and forward what information you have gathered to Marz. We will build a client database as well as a denial database so that we can avoid doubletracking our own work and pissing off businesses with repeated requests.

Your only must-do after this is to visit the business or do a drive-by (if the poster can be seen from the street) to check and see if the poster has been removed for one reason or another. Sometimes a co-owner whom you were not in touch with will go on a cleaning spree and remove everything. Other times enterprising art collectors or flyer mavens will steal well-made posters prior to the completion of the advertised show. Whatever the case, if we have permission, we want there to be active art in that space as often as the owner will allow. It's up to you to be our eyes in your contact base. It also allows you to be a face presence in the business on a regular basis and continues to build the bond between Fools and the marketing partner.

Push postcards personally

We are at the point where flyer production and promotion of events through distribution of printed material is almost completely dead. The late comedian Mitch Hedberg has a joke that says when you hand someone a flyer, what you are saying is, "Throw this away for me." However, because Sacred Fools has many talented artists and solid creative minds creating new promo for every show, we can still eke out a small percentage of tickets sold through the printed word.

What works least is flyer drops. These are spaces in retail locations where you can place flyers for public perusal. They are often messy as hell, filled with flyers inappropriate for the business population (because ad agencies pay folks to do flyer drops and the lists of locations are known to all), and eventually become trashed because the business owner gets sick of the clutter. Nevertheless, as you look for businesses and other locations (universities, colleges, community spaces near housing) for poster placement, you will happen upon flyer drops. I recommend picking a number you will always remember like 9 or 13 (but a low number) and leaving that many flyers behind at a drop you have approval for. This way you will know how busy a location is and if we are having any effect at all with our passive promotion. Flyer drops are so impersonal, all you have to do is ask the person at the counter if you can leave a few flyers. They will often impose the caveat, "If there is room", which usually means if you clean up the space a little bit and make things look nice. I always neatened the space I am placing promo as it does you no good to be on top of a pile of trash.

What works best is person-to-person contact, which means you'll have to do Sacred Fools one big, big favor; you must never be caught without a few postcards on you. This is easier said than done. It will require you to put some on your desk at home, some on your desk at work, some in the glove box of the car, etc. You have to make the current promo the same as your keys and your phone, something you won't leave without, something you'll run back up from the car to grab – but wait! - you were smart and put postcards in the car so you don't have to! Lookit you! SMART!

Person-to-person contact doesn't mean pissing off everyone in class by gang-flyering the room at the end of class when everyone is trying to get out the door and beat traffic. It means picking your shots and a lot of this kinda depends on the amount of attention you receive on a daily basis. Some of us have 40 hour gigs where we are in front of the public for eight hours and we can use a postcard placed in front of our computer monitor as a soft-bounce advertisement that might generate a question, which gives you an instant opportunity to slide the person who asked about the show a card of their own. What the best use of the postcard is would be where you use the card as a reminder to the person taking it to buy tickets as soon as they get home, ***because shows often sell out***. That last sentence is what you should be linking to every hand-off of a flyer – the idea that this is a good thing and in demand, so act now.

Another thing to remember is that whatever you have to say, it is being replicated on the website, so you never have to hand off multiple cards or flyers to any prospective audience member. By all means, talk about each and every show you have knowledge of, but one flyer is all they need.

When you are in a crowd at a show, you rarely need to hand a flyer to every single person in sight. Just like texting pictures of your penis to a co-worker you want to sleep with, that never works. Be charmingly selective. You'll be surprised how people will move to get information that is doled out in small supply vs. a flyer bomb.

There is one place where a flyer bomb can be effective and that is in a bar. If you have means to get in ahead of opening, or if you are a menu ninja and can get a card on each table and 1 per 3 feet of bar on the bar, it is a fine thing and something that the cigarette companies pay real money to gain access to. If you have pals who bartend, barback, or just live in bars, you might want to enlist their aid during a pub crawl and make a game of flyer distribution. This might lead to you getting toasted and winging flyers at each other in the street. Try to limit your destruction.

There are lots of places where you can leave a flyer or a postcard, but again, the key is to place it where a person who is most likely to follow up on the suggestion of art will see it. A goodie bag at an art gallery opening is much more likely to be picked up by a prospective audience member than a stack of cards left at your insurance company, but where ever you place something, make a note of where, when, and how many, and then circle back for a double-check and a possible restock in a week or two. Don't kill yourself with a ton of visits in one day, make it a natural part of your weekly travels and shopping and you'll be much, much happier and this job will be no work at all.

Press perfect points

No matter how great our printed material is, nothing positive is going to happen if you can't speak quickly, clearly, and concisely about the show we are trying to convince someone to either attend or help us promote.

Very often you won't be able to see the show in question on opening weekend, maybe not even until near the end of the run, but you might be able to have done a ton of promotion because you are busy bee. We want to help you with this. Obviously, being a company member of Sacred Fools means that you are likely to have inside knowledge of the upcoming production. In fact if you are a part of it, you are going to have deep insight, but that's not everyone. In order to help get the word out about shows, we will provide via SAA bulletins, a few key phrases or talking points about the show that is the main stage production in the week prior to opening.

For example, with WATSON the key descriptive phrase for someone who knows the Sherlock Holmes mythos is **a moving and theatrically innovative epic comedy.** For someone who doesn't know Holmes' universe that well, you would say it is **the last great tale of the legendary Sherlock Holmes.** If a person says they don't know Holmes at all you would say it is **an action-comedy about the world's greatest detective.** These three phrases will allow you to effectively communicate what the show is about as fast as possible, which is all we are trying to do with marketing; just get the word out.

A final word to follow that last statement: We're here to get the word out about shows because if people don't support new independent art, the shows they've been getting are all that they'll get. You don't have to swear fealty to every production, and if you think a show stinks, then by all means we aren't asking you to carry the banner across the battlefield, but as a company member you do me and your fellow Fools a great service by being informed and activated in promotion of art. We are not looking to hard-sell people, we are just trying to raise awareness that x show is happening on y date on as wide a spectrum as possible. Thanks for your time.

Marz Richards
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