

## Database Management

# In The Arts, Tis (Almost) The Same To Give As To Receive

*A more detailed examination of the relationship between customers and donors in the arts is needed to broaden the traditional donorbase, this author explains.*

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USO

**T**his article's title does not suggest that it is as satisfying to bestow a pair of center-aisle tickets to the gala benefit as it is to get them. Rather, it implies that, in the arts, there is an extremely close relationship between the motivators encouraging a person to attend a performance or exhibit and those persuading him to contribute to the sustaining fund. And, if one accepts this premise, there is a critical difference in information gathering and sharing that the arts organization's data management system must encompass.

Clearly, such a claim about the arts and its family runs counter to the traditional notion that a buyer or user is a different creature from a donor. In the case of most other categories of non-profit endeavor, this author would concur. For example, health care, research and certain service delivery organizations, by their nature, support receivers (users) who are the least likely to be able to give.

Moreover, there may be little parallel interest on the part of the potential donor because of lack of immediate experience with the activities and missions of the organization requesting money. Therefore, the user and the supporter of that non-profit may indeed represent separate sets of motivations and may survive very well on discrete databases.

In contrast, immediate experience and participation are probably the two most crucial factors encouraging a person to be both attendee and supporter in the arts. In the decision-making process, the motivators influencing the option to consume an intangible, hard-to-quantify, non-savable product such as a chamber music concert are also differently aligned to well-documented consumer buying patterns. Therefore, an arts organization's data management system has increased flexibility and the bigger job of analyzing and assessing profit and non-profit lifestyle characteristics to know who its supporters really are.

Such a data management system, based on a broader view of user and donor, would also have to contend with another dual dilemma facing the arts today: increased decentralization on one hand and

the growth of multi-discipline arts centers on the other. Unlike areas such as medical research, where the universe and structure of organizations may be more stable and geographically definable, the arts are moving out and away from East and West Coasts alone into regions and communities large and small.<sup>1</sup>

One only has to track national funding agencies' tendencies toward supporting expansionist arts to recognize this trend. It is being felt at the local level by both arts alliances and producing companies. The upshot is that the arts' arena is becoming more scattered and more complex. Together with the proposed hypothesis that buyers and donors are alike in the arts, data management and its applications represent a unique set of concerns.

### Impact On Data Management

A recently published survey on the arts in America, commissioned by Philip Morris Inc. and conducted by Louis Harris and Associates, disclosed that arts attendance was continuing to grow, despite an actual decrease in leisure time among the better-educated, higher-earning men and women who comprise arts' traditional audience.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more important to the marketer and systems designer, however, is the indicator that as the arts penetrate the masses more and more, there will be increasing numbers of marginal attendees who can and need to be counted. At the same time, there remain

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the traditional multi-attendees, confirmed artsgoers who buy into and support many disciplines — theater, dance, music — rather than just one, creating overlap and a cross-pollination effect.

The results, a complex that probably cannot be duplicated outside of the arts, present data management applications professionals with an interesting set of challenges. As the arts become more of an electronic offering, with cable networks and programming spurring yet another string of audiences and supporters, the market of buyers and donors will become one step more complicated.

In the Harris study, the researchers make another point: the arts draw support not just from donors and attendees, but from the people who participate in the creation of art. Clearly, these people have income and characteristics in common with traditional arts audiences. They may be amateurs and should not be confused with "the starving artist" who is an unlikely target for a fund-raising appeal. Nonetheless, this sector of arts involvement represents yet another potential cluster in a comprehensive data analysis, planning and management system.

### Confirmed In The Marketplace

In testimony submitted before the Subcommittee on the Interior, Appropriations Committee, U.S. House of Representatives on March 19, 1985, the 350-member American Arts Alliance documented the growth of the arts into a nationwide network, with expansion of touring into communities other than home base, and a trend toward programming for new audiences on the part of some of the performing arts. Concurrently, the Alliance reported increased dependence on a larger number of donations from the private sector — both corporate and individual.<sup>3</sup>

While the Alliance's testimony was admittedly in support of 1986 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, in the marketplace the relationship between audiences and donors — and how data

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management is working to handle that relationship — is improving. Larry Murray, executive director of ArtsBoston, confirmed that out of 150 member organizations, "about five could raise funds without first qualifying them as users."<sup>4</sup>

ArtsBoston is taking a broad view of what arts funding is; it includes earned income, incentives and matching grants in the definition. ArtsBoston has had marked success with their consumer-oriented promotion: ArtsMail. Designed as a ticketing-in-advance catalog targeted to the younger arts audience, ArtsMail has been offering cultural opportunities such as travel as an incentive to buy tickets. Many of these offerings are available only to ticket buyers, which immediately links marketing to future fund-raising efforts.

Murray states that he is "conducting an active search process...first to do marketing...then development."<sup>5</sup> The data management system that is supporting this operation clearly has to swap information at some point, and as of late, Murray confirms that increased testing in direct mail marketing and development is being done with different media as well as arts disciplines, drawing in American Repertory Theatre and public television aficionados as well as ArtsBoston's own.

Regarding data exchange, Murray concedes, there is work to do, given the fact that the 30 members on his central database have not fully refined their input processes. He agrees that, as audience-sharing and the increased cross-over between attender, donor and consumer becomes more viable, the concept of "interested observer" will broaden, giving the arts organizations "fringe opportunities" to encourage participation, loyalty and contribution.

The executive director of the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, Leila Smith, is extremely involved in technical and management assistance to the Alliance's membership. Smith is convinced that each arts organization must find its own level based on organizational health. From that point, it should progress in marketing and fund raising, and refine the data management system that will help it to do both.

Rather than being a proponent of a centralized database stemming from the arts' "umbrella group," which this author proposed in an earlier article,<sup>6</sup> Smith believes that the proper role of the Alliance is as teacher not system supplier. In reviewing her members' experiences, she indicates that the League of Washington Theatres has been sharing lists more actively and gaining increasing support from the "Friends" concept that welds attendance, selective participation and support so effectively.

Although the Alliance has no mandate

to provide centralized computer services, it is helping its members to develop their boards of directors, which is critical to the ability of any arts organization to appeal to the corporate sector successfully. Data from the results of such a multi-member effort could have long-term impact if entered into a comprehensive contributions database, whether centralized or distributed.

E'Vonne Rorie, director of management services at the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, indicates that it will soon introduce an on-line Cultural Information Center, the first in the nation to expand the reduced-price marketing concept of TKTS in New York. The Center will encompass advance events information, and member organization access and entry of attender/donor data. This could not happen without an interactive capability, which this author contends is the single most important factor in a data management system that can handle the relationship between donor and audience in the arts.

### How To Do It

In a meeting with Fielding Yost, president of Saturn Corporation, the data management firm that handles donor file maintenance for USO World Headquarters and other non-profits, it was confirmed that an on-line, interactive system capable of "search, select and build" is critical to any sharing of information. Traditionally, user/buyer and donor files have been separate, with comparative information available only through merge-purging no matter how sophisticated the system was.

What is needed is the ability to identify and input/access the characteristic needed from a file based on the person rather than the habit.<sup>7</sup> This opens up the possibility of looking at, not the donor, attender or newsletter subscriber groups, but "Mr. or Ms. X." Basing the file design on people rather than single-track behavior patterns not only presents more opportunities, but it's more realistic and has a track record.

Steven Belth, president of Arts and Science Development Service, discussed the formulation and use of the VALS (Value and Lifestyle System), which was introduced by the Stanford Research Institute, and used as a basis for attender/donor analysis by a number of arts organizations, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a classical theory used in profit-sector marketing, VALS evaluates lifestyles to isolate key characteristics that may also be applicable to donor motivations.

Belth pointed out that data analysis and management alone create neither good

marketing nor good fund-raising concepts; those must emanate from knowledge of product and buyer. However, the ability to examine and plan, based on a thorough assessment of the arts organization's family, is critical to the implementation of a practical system.

Belth indicated that lifestyle analyses such as VALS provide have had positive results when combined with operational good sense. The San Francisco Symphony took its analysis and actually created a "lifestyle campaign," identifying both donors and attenders who were oenophiles and offered them specially labelled bottles of wine as a premium. The highly successful sales effort was designed so that the premium payment was largely deductible as a contribution. In several museums, he acknowledged, commercial travel companies were being hired to develop cultural programs that have been marketed to the museums' combined donor/attender category.

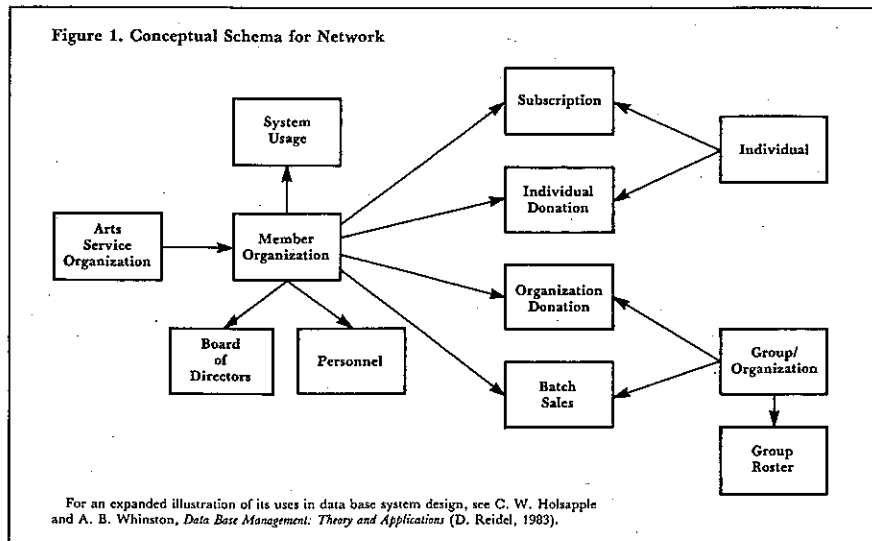
### Underlying Concepts

In their article entitled "The National Information Systems Project,"<sup>8</sup> Mary Van Someren Cok and Edward Dickey review the needs and development of an interstate arts agency database that has parallel application in the marketplace. Overall, there was a recognized demand for a system that would allow its public agency member-users to exchange comparable data on programs, services and constituents...and to develop a database that would incorporate information which arts agencies required consistently.<sup>9</sup>

In creating the standard for NISP, which was begun as a National Endowment for the Arts-funded project in 1980, planners identified the following goals: national compatibility in the organizing and labelling of data; methods of collecting, organizing and disseminating data; and — perhaps most important for other applications — the development of standard system specifications for mailing lists, grants management and arts resources.<sup>10</sup>

The process, which resulted in the 1980 National Standard for Arts Information Exchange, was a sound one: It encompassed systems-in-use research, proposed new specifications, system modifications and only then a final three-system outline incorporating organizing and reporting standards. With modifications appropriate to an alliance-based membership, local league of theaters or performing arts center, this step-by-step discipline would achieve a better system product without unnecessarily throwing out savable elements or adapting ones not feasible for that organization or group. It pays to remember that few constituencies are as dependable and loyal as those of

Figure 1. Conceptual Schema for Network



make up its oldest donor market and the up-and-coming 35 to 55-year-olds already entering the ranks. The immediate experience as motivator, felt by many World War II veterans through direct use of USO overseas, inevitably lessens and changes with younger markets. It then becomes even more necessary for the vitality of the organization to seek a much broader base of knowledge about the user-donor relationship through analysis and assessment, both to tell us what we already suspect and to indicate what their counterparts on as-yet untried mailing lists want. ●

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Testimony of Dance!USA, U.S. Congress, House, Appropriations Committee, National En-*

*dowment for the Arts, Hearings Before Subcommittee on the Interior, April 28, 1983.*

<sup>2</sup> *Louis Harris and Associates, Americans and the Arts 1984, (ACA Books 1985), pp. 2-36.*

<sup>3</sup> *Testimony of American Arts Alliance, U.S. Congress, House, Appropriations Committee, National Endowment for the Arts, Hearings Before Subcommittee on the Interior, March 19, 1985, pp. 1-4.*

<sup>4</sup> *Larry Murray, Executive Director, ArtsBoston, telephone conversation with author, June 19, 1985.*

<sup>5</sup> *Murray, ArtsBoston, conversation with author, June 19, 1985.*

<sup>6</sup> *Nora Carrol, "Tracking the Itinerant Subscriber: Data Base In The Arts Industry", Journal of Arts Management and Law, Spring, (Heldref Publications, Washington, D.C. 1984), pp. 69-73.*

<sup>7</sup> *Fielding Yost, President, Saturn Corp., meeting with author, June 14, 1985.*

<sup>8</sup> *Mary Van Someren Cok and Edward Dickey, "The National Information Systems Project", Journal of Arts Management and Law, Spring (Heldref Publications, Washington, D.C. 1984), p. 19.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid., pp. 20-22.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid., p. 23*

<sup>11</sup> *Robert Holley, "Theatre Communications Group's National Computer Project", Journal of Arts Management and Law, Spring (Heldref Publications, Washington, D.C. 1984), pp. 28-33.*

<sup>12</sup> *Gigi Dobbs, "The Art Museum Association of America Computer Software Project", Journal of Arts Management and Law, Spring (Heldref Publications, Washington, D.C. 1984), pp. 35-38.*