



Image source: Unsplash, Jeremy Yap



ADVISORY
BOARD
for the ARTS

Transforming Arts Organizations Worldwide

Subscription and Season Announcements: Interview Report

February-April 2024

Research Methodology

Research Question

How are cultural institutions leveraging their season announcements to position their subscriptions and boost overall sales?

To investigate this question, we conducted the following research:



Preliminary survey:

- 15-question survey on the topic of subscription packages, prices and season announcement timelines
- Survey was conducted between Jan 18- Feb 2, 2024
- 15 organizations participated in the survey



Interviews with 11 organizations:

- 4 Performing Arts Cultural Centers and Presenters
- 5 Theaters
- 2 Classical Music/ Opera/ Symphony

Our interviews covered the following topics:

- Landscape of subscriptions and overall renewal rates
- Motivations for price increases and/or decreases
- Segmentation of audiences by subscriber types, purchase habits and frequency
- Announcement timelines and pre-sale periods for different groups
- Messaging to different audiences
- Opportunities for further engagement and benefits

Research Participants

CARNEGIE HALL



WOLF TRAP



Executive Summary

1. Segmentation and Channels

- **Two core segment groups for season announcements:** Organizations segment their announcement and subscription messaging between fixed seat subscribers and other more flexible passes , CYO, series etc.
- **Other segments used to upsell:** Genre/affinity segmentation as well as ticket purchase history can help organizations predict audiences' likelihood to increase their purchase frequency.
- **Season announcement campaign channels:** Organizations will market across all channels, including print, press, social and email.
- **Segmented channels for specific sales moments:** Organizations will then typically focus their communications channels for more pointed sales based on who they are selling to.
- **Finding artists existing audiences:** Organizations can research programmed artists' social media presence, to identify most suited communications channels for their events.

2. Pricing practices and discounts

- **Limited push back for price increases:** Across our calls, most audiences did not push back on price increases, suggesting less price sensitivity especially for higher end-packages.
- **Using discounts and group tickets to increase sales volume:** Organizations can offer discounts or grouped tickets to increase volume of single tickets sales.
- **Specific rush-tickets models can build audience habits:** Organizations with dedicated rush ticket lists can use those lists to move inventory around and build attendance habit and frequency.
- **Single-priced membership models help move inventory:** Single-priced memberships typically provide members access to all events, which helps ensure that events throughout the season have high sales rates- not just the popular and familiar events.

Executive Summary

3. Differentiating messages

- **Two messaging types based on subscriber groups:** Organizations use tactical messaging around the best seats at the best prices to encourage fixed seat subscriptions and will use more performance and experience-based messaging for other packages.
- **Making the most of TBAs to position memberships:** TBAs can be used to enhance member benefits, by focusing on their early access . TBAs can also help CYO series throughout the season.

4. Engagement events

- **Event formats for different audiences:** Based on desired outcomes, and who is invited to events, some organizations host sit-down presentations, party-style event previews or free-form community days to showcase their season and subscriptions.
- **Benefits of events:** Season announcement events are a great way to increase overall brand awareness and sell more tickets and subscriptions.

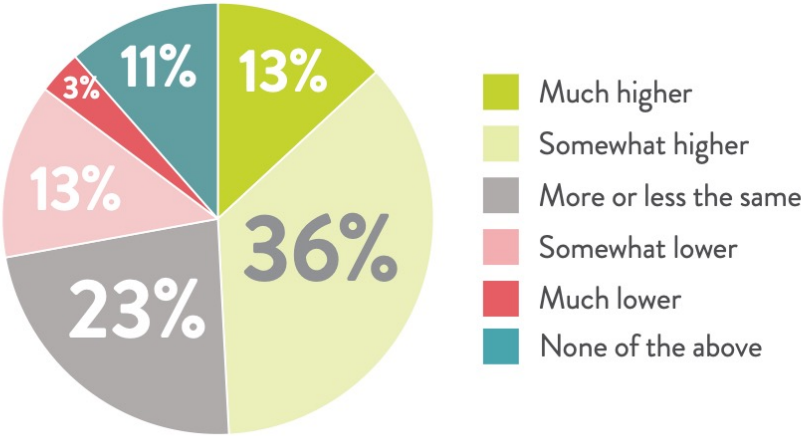
5. Announcement and sales timelines

- **Extended planning cycles:** Since the pandemic, some organizations mentioned a shift in planning schedules, with longer and more delayed contract periods and later confirmations.
- **Finding ways to bring marketing into programming decisions:** Some organizations have adopted a task force model to promote more ongoing conversations between artistic and marketing teams in the planning phase.
- **Different sales-periods for different subscriptions:** Fixed subscription renewals typically have the shortest sales period, while CYO and other flex passes can be sold over time.
- **Avoiding sales seasonality:** Organizations with an all-access membership can sell their memberships all year round.

Overall, Subscriptions Seem To Be Bouncing Back

Subscription/Membership Sales Are Mostly Higher in 2023

How would you compare subscription/membership sales from last year to this year?

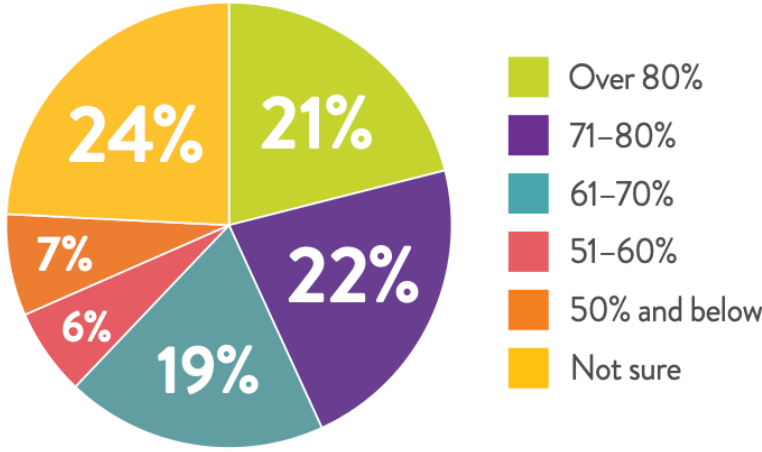


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[ABA Executive Benchmark, October 2023](#)

Majority Saw Over 60% Subscription Renewal Rates in 2023

% of 2022 Subscribers Who Renewed Subscriptions for 2023 Season



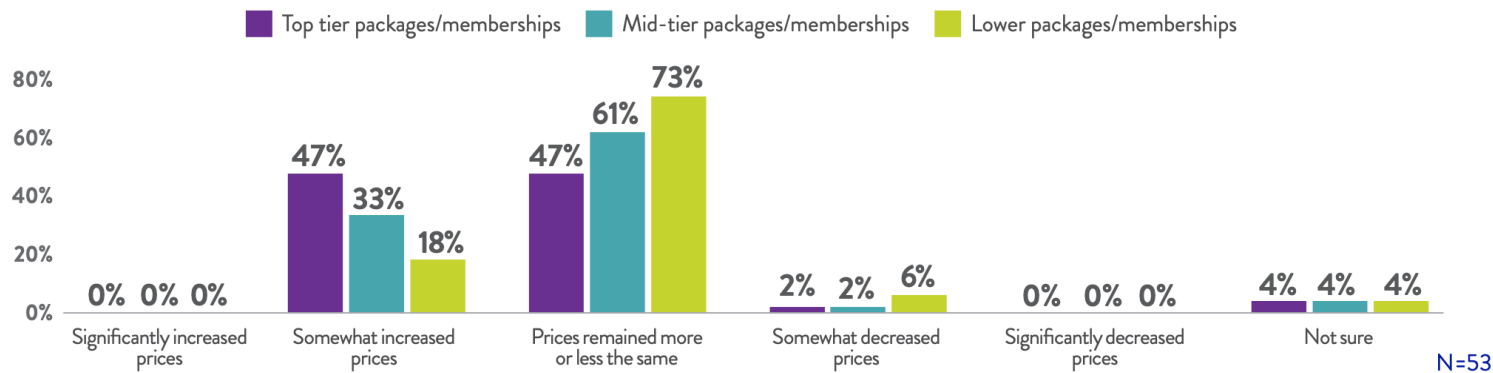
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[ABA Executive Benchmark, April 2023](#)

With Stable Prices, Organizations Still See Increased Revenues

Package/Membership Prices have Remained the Same or Somewhat Increased

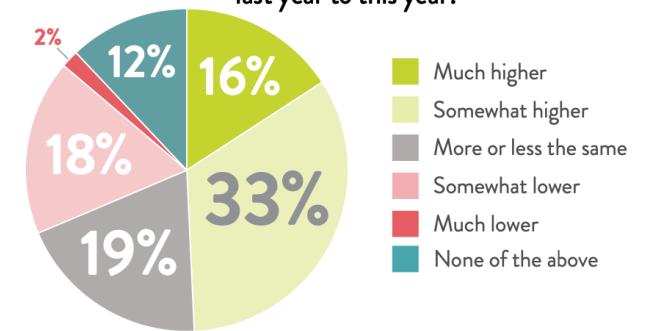
How have the package/membership prices changed from 2022 to 2023?



[ABA Executive Benchmark, October 2023](#)

Revenue from Subscriptions/Membership Is Somewhat Higher

How has revenue from subscriptions/memberships changed from last year to this year?



[ABA Executive Benchmark, October 2023](#)

Report Outline



**Segmentation and
Communication
Channels**



**Pricing
Structures**



**Differentiated
Messaging**



**Engagement
Events**



**Sales Timelines
and Trends**

Section Outline



Segmentation and Communication Channels

Section Takeaways:

- Season announcements typically target subscribers- with segmentation around fixed seat subscribers and other more flexible pass holders.
- Organizations use purchase habits and genre/interests to determine the potential for increased purchase frequency and volume.
- Season announcement typically include all channels, while selling subscriptions and single ticket buyers requires more targeted communication channels.
- Leveraging artists' profiles and their social media followers can help organizations like Wolf Trap curate campaigns around those existing audiences.

Subscriber Groups Are Core Targets of Announcement Messaging

Season & Subscription Announcements

Subscriber

YES

Fixed seat/full season subscribers

More flexible passes, CYO series subscribers

NO

Single ticket buyers and other non-subscribers

Differentiated season messaging

- This group is focused mainly on maintaining their seats within fixed packages – securing the best seats at the best prices
- They tend to be the more loyal audience groups, renewing at higher rates

Differentiated season messaging

- This group is less particular about seats, but more interested in performance and program choice and flexibility
- They tend to renew at lower and less predictable rates- more dependent on program

Not the priority audiences for initial announcements and sales campaigns

Additional Segments Used To Predict Interest and Purchase Potential

Segmenting past attendance/purchases habits

- Have they ever purchased a subscription before?
- When was the last time they attended an event?
- Have they attended multiple events in a single year?
- For past events, how quickly did they make their purchase?

Opportunities:

- ✓ Getting audiences to come back
- ✓ Getting audiences to increase their purchase frequency
- ✓ Getting audiences to scale up to light/flexible subscriptions

Note: Many organizations seem to focus more on converting regular single-ticket buyers to light subscribers rather than provide lapsed buyers with tailored messaging as this group seems harder to recapture.

Segmenting types of programs attended

- What kinds of events have they attended before?
- Do they typically attend family events, specific genres etc.?
- Can we connect their interests with new programs on offer?
- Can we encourage new content that isn't too much of a stretch?

Opportunities:

- ✓ Introduce audiences to new events they might not be aware of
- ✓ Make suggestions for similar programs based on past interests
- ✓ Increase potential for repeat attendance/ scale up

Note: Organizations with enough similar packages and offers presented simultaneously can promote synergies between packages to encourage audiences to buy multiple comparable series.

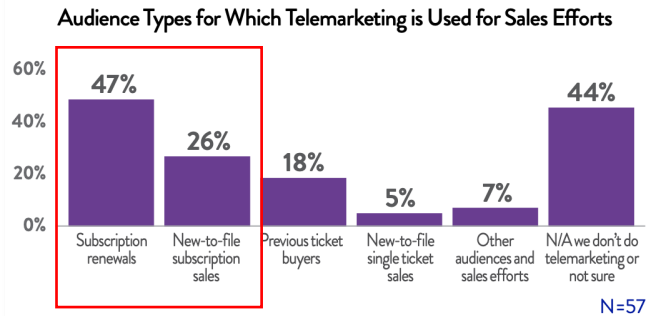
Organizations Segment Channels for Specific Sales Targets

Typically, for major season announcement campaigns, organizations will communicate across all their channels, including print, press, email etc. There is more segmentation when organizations are communicating around specific purchase opportunities.

Channels Used for Specific Targets

Subscription Sales

Telemarketing Tends to Be Reserved for Selling Subscriptions and Tickets to Previous Buyers

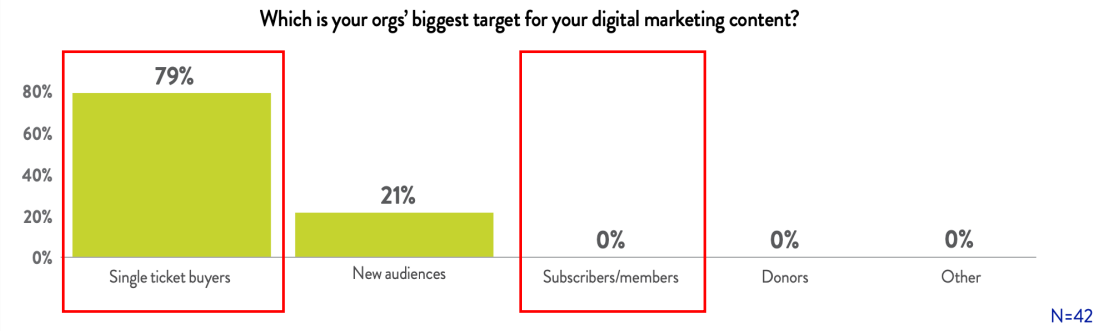


[ABA Executive Benchmark, May 2023](#)

Telemarketing is used primarily to promote subscription renewals and sell new subscriptions. It is used less frequently for single ticket buyers.

Single Ticket Sales

Single Ticket Buyers are Greatest Target for Digital Marketing



[ABA Executive Benchmark, August 2023](#)

Digital marketing is used primarily to promote single ticket buyers. It is not a priority channel for subscription communications.

Leveraging Social Presence of Programmed Artists for Promotions

Promoting niche events and lesser-known artists & finding audiences most likely to attend

What typically happens:

Organizations may not have time or resources to do deep market study for each event and artist programmed

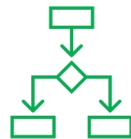


What Wolf Trap does:

- ✓ After receiving the full programming slate, **Wolf Trap's marketing team** researches each artist to **understand their story**
- ✓ They also research **artists' existing social media presence** to determine the kinds of audiences they already **have** and where they are being communicated to

Typical Outcomes:

Organizations will therefore promote events using their standard marketing mix



Wolf Trap Outcomes:

- ✓ Wolf Trap is able to leverage artists' social media presence to market their events to their existing audiences
- ✓ Wolf Trap customizes the marketing mix most appropriate for each artist and event
- ✓ Wolf Trap's in-house multimedia specialists can create custom video content and posts suited to each target

Note: This practice of marketing to artists' existing audiences on their social media can be applied to other creatives in the industry, such as artistic directors, specific actors and others who might similarly have built-in audiences on different platforms.

Section Outline



2

Pricing Structures

Section Takeaways:

- Organizations share overall motivations and need for sustained price increases
- Audiences are not overtly reacting to price increases, suggesting less price sensitivity
- Using discounts strategically can help upsell multiple tickets, move inventory and build up towards more sustained attendance with examples from Teatro alla Scala and Toronto Symphony Orchestra.
- When possible, organizations can adopt an all-access memberships to foster more access and easy payments like at Lac Lugano and ZACH Theatre.

Overall Landscape of Subscription Price Increases

Across our interviews, Organization indicated very little pushback from subscribers over price increases, suggesting audiences are not so price sensitive — especially on higher priced packages. Here are a few commonalities and ideas on how to manage price increases.



Reasons for price increases

- Most organizations seem to be increasing their prices to cover increasing production costs and to match inflation rates.
- Some organizations also increased their prices to better match the value of their offer in comparison to similar value propositions in their local market.



Typical increase amounts

- Some organizations match their annual increase rates with inflation rates, therefore hovering around a 3-5% annual increase.
- A 10% increase on subscription prices seems to be the highest increase rate organizations are comfortable with, before risking customer dissatisfaction.



Models for price increases

- Some organizations will do a generalized percentage increase across all subscription packages and prices
- Some organizations will increase prices more on a case-by-case basis based on specific criteria for subscriptions such as artists included, number of shows etc.



Testing price sensitivity

- To determine audiences' potential reaction to price increases many organizations run a price-comparison study across peer and local institutions
- Organizations can also review their own history of dynamic pricing and the results of those price changes to see impact on sales

Note: Some organizations removed certain online fees and other ticket add-on fees and absorbed those amounts into the total price.

Creating an All-Access Membership for a Year-Round Full Venue

LAC+ : A single price all access membership program

Story of the new membership model

- Launched in 2022, Lac+ is a new membership offer at LAC Lugano Performing Arts Center, designed to offer audiences **the greatest access to arts and culture with as few barriers as possible.**
- The starting point for this initiative was to **resolve the downward trend of traditional subscriptions** by offering a whole new membership that would shift the paradigm
- LAC Lugano was **highly inspired by the Netflix subscription model**, and in their design, they tried to absorb as many of those features as possible
- LAC Lugano programs around 100 events a year, **of which only 15-20 shows make up the majority of their ticket revenues.**
- They felt they could offer their members full access to their season **to fill their venue without too much of a risk of revenue loss.**



Membership principles

- ✓ Eliminate decision fatigue by offering as much as possible at an affordable price.
- ✓ Eliminate experience related friction for example by providing free parking
- ✓ The year-round membership also resolves the issue of the seasonality of sales by selling the membership 365 days a year



Membership benefits

- Access to over 50 performances and shows
- 20% (or 40% for U25s) discounts on tickets to all other shows
- Free access to activities offered by the LAC education team
- Entry MASILugano art museum
- Priority ticket purchasing
- Free parking



Pricing and sales structure

- Symbolic price of 199CHF for 1 adult/ 398CHF for two adults/ 99 CHF for under 25s
- To support the project, there is a parallel structure where corporate companies can sponsor the project
- Members can access their tickets at the ticket office or through the member portal online and through their newly launched app

Results so far:

- Total 1545 subscriptions sold since launch in July 2022
- Subscriptions have grown from 197 (pre-launch period 2020) to 1545 to today (almost 900% increase)
- From August 2023 to January 2023, average 94 new memberships sold each month
- At least 80% increase in overall ticket revenues since implementation of the new membership model

Fixed-Price Monthly Payments for Full Access Membership

ZACHXP: Recurring monthly-payments for all access membership

Goal of new membership model

- ZACH XP, is ZACH Theatre's new all-access membership program, **where members can access unlimited performances with regular monthly payments.**
- ZACH XP was launched in 2021 and modeled off other content subscriptions such as Netflix **to offer audiences the greatest flexibility and access to their full season.**
- Members can **purchase tickets for events up to the day-of with no limitations.**
- Members of ZACH XP can **access all programs including Holiday shows.**



Core membership benefits:

- Early access to all tickets including big shows like Christmas Carol
- There are no limits to XP member tickets for shows
- Free parking
- Exclusive concession and merchandise discounts
- 10% discounts on additional tickets for friends and family
- Invitations to members-only events
- Discounts at surrounding bars and



Pricing and sales structure:

- Streamlined and accessible monthly price
- \$39/ a month
- Can be cancelled at any time after first 90 days
- Automatic monthly renewals
- Membership available for sale on a rolling basis
- Not reliant on a single seasonal sale period
- Free ticket booking at any time with their member login and access code.

Results so far, and next steps:

- There are approximately 460 current Zach XP members. The program had around 100 members after year 1.
- Zach Theatre has spent about 6-8k in digital advertising for this program.
- Their strategy was to launch the program first and allow it to scale naturally in order to work out the kinks over time to improve the user experience.
- The next big goal for the organization is to build a custom log-in experience for XP members, especially for mobile users as well.

Using Discounts to Upsell Multiple-Tickets and Packages

Discounts to Upsell Multiple Tickets

Main goal: Encourage multiple/group ticket purchases using discounts offered for specific programs and/or age groups.

What is it:

The **Carnet of tickets** is a new proposal for audience members who want to buy a series of performances ahead of time- choosing the title, the date and seats (as per availability).

Benefits: Buying multiple tickets through the carnet offer provides audiences with 10% discounts on tickets, or 50% discounts for the Under35 carnets.

The carnets options are divided into three different offers that audiences can pick and choose from:

- Choice of 3 or more Ballets/Operas (Jan-June 12 titles available, and June-November 12 titles available)
- Choice of 3 or more Thursdays for Under 30/35 (from among 10 title options)
- Choice of 3 or more Baroque (from among 4 title options)

How it works:

- At time of purchase buyers must select which performances, seats and dates they want.
- For each customer account, a maximum of 6 carnets can be purchased at the same time.
- The prices vary according to the performances chosen

Results for 2023 (inaugural year)

A total of 317 individual accounts bought carnets, of which:

- 132 (42%) bought 1 carnet
- 161 (51%) bought 2 carnets
- 14 (4%) bought 3 carnets
- < 10 (3%) bought 4 or more carnets

Most buyers purchased carnets for the minimum required 3 performances. Only a few purchased more (up to six).

Note: For a higher number of performances, fixed date subscriptions are more convenient.

Combining Offers to Young Adults to Build Habit and Move Inventory

Rush Tickets as an Entryway to Increase Sales and Build towards Subscriptions

TSOUNDCHECK Rush Tickets

Main goals:

- Move around inventory with last minute rush tickets
- Build a list of under 35 attendees to the Orchestra
- Create an accessible entry point to the Orchestra and attendance habit

What it is:

- TSOUNDCHECK is an email list of under 35 audiences interested in last minute ticket deals
- Members of the TSOUNDCHECK list get last minute rush deals usually 1-2 weeks before performances dates with available inventory.
- The Orchestra markets the rush program to young people as “Do more, for less.”

How it works:

- Specific seats are targeted in order to reduce gaps in the hall.
- TSOUNDCHECK may include premium seats, depending on sales for particular performances.
- Tiered pricing: \$19 (balcony), \$29 (main), \$39 (mezzanine)

TSOUNDCHECK subscription

Under 35 audiences, including members of the TSOUNDCHECK list can upgrade their engagement with the dedicated U35 subscription offer.

The Subscription Offer:

- Compose your own 4+ show packages
- Tickets available at steep discounted rates from \$31-\$55
- Regular prices are between \$124-\$261 and single ticket “rush” ticket prices are \$19-\$39

Member benefits:

- Guaranteed access to all programs, including those likely to sell out (and, therefore, not be part of the Rush program)
- Early access to seat selection
- Significant discount compared to regular subscription.

Section Outline



3

Differentiated Messaging

Section takeaways:

- Organizations typically use tactical messaging around best seats at best prices for fixed seat subscriptions and renewals.
- Organizations will use more content and experience messaging for other more flexible subscription types (e.g, CYO)
- TBAs can be leveraged to enhance the exclusive early-access benefits for members and subscribers
- There is room for more messaging creativity if organizations look at other segments and audience attendance motivations.

Tactical and Content/Experience Messaging During Season Announcements

Tactical messaging



Target audience: Fixed-seat core subscriptions, larger subscription packages and early-bird renewals



Core messaging:

- ✓ Best seats at the best price
- ✓ Preferred access to all performances
- ✓ Free ticket exchanges

- *“We’ve been offering an early bird renewal period where you win something if you subscribe by a certain date.”*
- *“Mainly the leverage is the seat quality. Also, this price aspect. The idea that you guarantee the lowest price for your seat.”*

Content/ experience messaging



Target audience: CYO subscribers, and other more flexible and smaller pass holders



Core messaging:

- ✓ Flexible performance combinations at good prices
- ✓ Access to tickets ahead of general public
- ✓ Buzz of the season and performances

- *“We’ll also concept out themed CYOs. One of the most successful we ever had was called something like ‘Women On Top,’ suggesting plays from our season either directed or written by a woman.”*
- *“Fact that we have a stronger season and more buzz, we message around not wanting to miss out on great content”.*

Note: This segmentation reflects overall what we heard in our interviews, of course there are organizations that message differently based on the specific makeup of their audiences and their ticket/pass offers. We also heard a combination of tactical and content related messaging for attracting single ticket buyers throughout the whole season.

Creating Buzz Around Later Announcements and ‘Unknowns’

With many organizations mentioning more TBAs at time of the season announcement, here are a few approaches we heard about making TBAs part of the messaging to build value around member pre-sale benefits and selling to CYO holders later in the season.



Connecting unannounced shows to past seasons to build program continuity

“In our annual new play festival, we feature 2 world premieres and 5 readings. Often one or more of those readings will be chosen for a full production in the next season.

We position the TBAs as the most exciting new plays coming out of this successful program.”



Using TBAs to Bolster Membership benefits

“When we get new programs announced, we include those as general announcements.

Our members will of course have preferred access to sales, and that becomes part of how we position to single ticket buyers.

We will message to our general public things like, ‘members are buying today!’ to build anticipation once tickets are released.”



Leveraging TBA shows to sell CYO subscribers later in the season

“When I have TBAs at times of new acquisition - I lean into our CYO audiences.

I message around ‘sit in the same great seats, get it all locked in now’. Leap of faith to get certain guarantees.

We will sell these later announced events to our CYO packages before releasing them to single ticket buyers.”

Other Creative Messaging to Build Engagement and Anticipation



Engaging subscribers before and after the renewal period

Sharing regular and exclusive member stories to keep momentum:

“We do a series for our fixed seat subscribers of mini-interviews with the creatives of each of the plays, so they get really juicy content.

These written or video content pieces are communicated as ‘subscriber exclusives’, contributing to one of the benefits that we promise our people for subscribing, i.e. access to exclusive behind the scenes content/sneak peeks.”



Promoting partner events with personal stories

Giving voice to partners to share their stories:

“I mentioned South Asian programming. We’re doing a new series called District of Raga. We had the founder and producer, Nishta Raj Wright, speak from the stage prior to performances and we’ve created videos with Nishta talking about the programs and promoted it on social media and digital advertising. We’ve done similar things for opera and symphony events as well.”



Positioning season as part of expected seasonal traditions

Connecting positive feelings for summer vibes with your season:

“Ravinia is a summer tradition in Chicago. As we prepare for our mid-March announcement—which comes toward the end of a long and cold winter—we think about creating excitement around the experience. Beyond the lineup, we want people to imagine themselves on the lawn, picnicking on a summer evening with friends and family.

This year, The Record said, “The groundhog had his day, but a more predictable sign of warmer weather, at least for North Shore residents, is the annual release of Ravinia Festival’s season lineup.”

Messaging to the Eight Motivational Segments in the Arts

While many early season messaging focuses on tactical motivations for renewals (best seats, at the best prices), there are opportunities to message around other attendance motivations later in the sales cycle.

Past ABA Research:

Going back to ABA's 2020 study on the [Eight motivational segments in the Arts](#), we looked at the variety of reasons people attend the arts.

We posit that these motivations can:

- ✓ Be used to creatively message subscription experiences and benefits
- ✓ Promote experiences for other flexible pass holders and tickets buyers
- ✓ Help with new audience acquisitions

Arts Lovers

Arts Passionates

Motivation: Pursue a passion (*not* a special occasion or shared memory)

Values: Compassion, enthusiasm, creativity

Quality Seekers

Motivations: see art at the highest quality (*not* to show others or create a shared memory)

Values: Excellence, balance

Personal Developers

Mastery Builders

Motivation: gain expertise

Values: Personal growth

Conversational Challengers

Motivations: conversations, challenge preconceptions (*not* art at the highest quality)

Values: Compassion, friendship, competence, ethics

Community Appreciators

Civic Stewards

Motivation: Create vibrant community. Fulfill duty toward the arts

Values: Being liked, making a difference, involvement in community, family

Social Samplers

Motivation: Try something new (*not* pursue a passion)

Values: Independence, patience, learning

Amiable Followers

Willing Companions

Motivation: Support friends and family

Values: Excellence

Culture Surfers

Motivation: See Popular, Famous Works

Values: Humor, enthusiasm

Section Outline



4

Engagement Events

Section takeaways:

- Different organizations hosts **season preview and announcement events to showcase lesser-known works, sell tickets and subscriptions to their key stakeholders-** with examples from ZACH Theater and Ravinia Festival.
- **Open community days** can also help sell subscriptions as well as **increase general brand awareness and new acquisitions** as seen at San Diego Symphony.
- **Working with other departments such as development** can boost subscriber connections through networking and stewardship events.
- **Local organizations can represent an opportunity** to provide audiences other hands on and fun engagement activities.

Preview Party for Key Stakeholders



Who is invited?

- **Key stakeholders are invited to attend this single core showcase event** (e.g., staff, donors, corporate members, subscribers etc.)
- Capacity for the event is around 420.
- Last year they welcomed 300 attendees, who enjoyed the party free with admission.



Desired outcome

- Through the sneak peak previews of certain scenes and songs from programmed shows in the season, the event is designed to **create buzz and sell subscriptions**.
- Audiences in attendance receive an automated email while enjoying the production to renew their subscriptions then and there. There are also tables in the lobby to help attendees renew their subscriptions in person.
- Secure 21 DAY-OF sales (not including week after)



Staffing

- Event is **coordinated by the marketing team**
- Heavily produced and requires a **considerable lift and involvement artistic and production**



Event date

- To alleviate the load for the artistic and programming teams, the **season announcement event is timed with the organization's annual gala**, so that the creative teams can develop and present the same content at both events.



Event Details

- Artistic team brings in **local artists to perform preview scenes and songs** from shows in the upcoming season
- Typically involves one song from each programmed musical, and a short scene from each play
- **Regular cash bar on site**
- Includes a **pre-event for higher level donors** with open bar, beer and wine and an exclusive talk with the AD.
- Balloon drop at the end (Packaged as a full night of fun)
- Doors open for cocktails at 6-6:30pm, and program starts at 7:30pm



Image source: ZACH Theatre Instagram and ZACH Theatre Website

Season Presentations for Development & Marketing



Who is invited?

- Season preview is organized in **7 iterations for different target groups**.
- These groups include the Board of Trustees, Associates Board with invited guests, and several events for **prospects** and **other donors** not serving on the aforementioned boards.



Desired outcome

- The purpose of the season preview is to showcase the full season and **promote lesser-known artists and works** that audiences may not be as familiar with without additional context.
- These events are an opportunity **to increase engagement and sales across the season**.
- The preview is produced alongside Development with the shared goal of **cultivating relationships with prospects, donors, and board members**.



Staffing

- The season preview is closely coordinated **between the marketing and development teams**.
- The **Artistic team** presents the programming
- To create a **fully-produced event**, additional teams participate, including photo/video, graphic design, lighting/sound production, food/beverage service, and gate staff/ushers.



Event date

- The previews coincide with the **spring board meeting**.
- It runs like a production that has 7 showings for different target groups during the donor-sale period.



Event Details

- This event was inspired by **Apple** product reveals and **Ted** conferences.
- The presentation includes a mixture of **static slides, musical excerpts, and video compilations**.
- Select previews included a **live performance and brief talk-back about the organization's mission and impact**.



Image source: Ravinia Festival

Open Events for Community Building and Acquisitions



Who is invited?

- Event is open and free to the general public
- Everyone is invited including members, single ticket buyers, etc.



Desired outcome

- Event is geared towards **subscription renewals, but also as an acquisition event.**
- The Symphony positions the subscription and acquisition very tactfully throughout the event
- The event is an opportunity to **invite the community in and experience the venue for the day**
- The event also helps build more **brand awareness around the Symphony as a whole**



Staffing & marketing assets

- San Diego Symphony's Picnic in the Park is **lead by the marketing team**
- There are **screens and print collateral with season and subscription information**
- Subscribers and event attendees who RSVP's all get renewal and subscription information
- Also work with a local radio for press



Event date

- Event is held in early **March on a Sunday to showcase the upcoming summer events**
- Event is held outside, where the **public can wander around the full campus area and bring their own picnic**



Event Details

- **Welcoming speech from the CEO**
- **Symphonic quartet performance and local rock bands**
- **Presentation of the season and positioning of of subscription** as best way to get access to events ahead of single tickets sold a few months later
- **Padres baseball team** present as with a fast-pitch station
- **Tastings** from local brands.
- Celebrity chef **book signing**



Image source: San Diego Symphony Instagram

Ad-Hoc Events to Boost Experiences and Audience Engagement

Leveraging existing resources



Making connection with other existing cultural activities

Enhance membership benefits: Organizations that host other cultural events and celebrations, should consider those opportunities as additional benefits to their existing members to build ongoing connections.

- Does your organization offer regular public events you could extend to subscribers?
- Does your organization include a wider campus with other cultural sites that subscribers could access?

“We look at our membership as a way to create engagement in the community. We have a group of people that are very committed, and they are looking to engage with us in different ways. We are a big cultural center that includes a museum, so we extend full access to our members to the museum, and we will organize special events like previews to art exhibitions as part of their full experience”



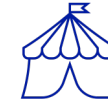
Leveraging donor events to build networks for subscribers

Support network opportunities: There is interest in social and networking opportunities among subscriber groups, so organizations should leverage member events for more cultural engagement.

- Do you think events to build networks and bring people together could be of interest to certain subscriber groups? (if yes, which groups?)
- What existing donor events could be extended to subscribers?

“Many of our Associates Board members studied music growing up and want to stay connected to the arts. We want to serve this young and vibrant group with specific events that connect their experience and philanthropic giving with networking and cultural activities”

Bringing in new resources



Enhancing performances with out of the box activations

Engage with partner activities: Based on performance content and events, some organizations have been creative in offering relevant activities with partners that can engage audiences with hands on experiences.

- Are there performances that could be more attractive and engaging with on-site activations?
- Are their local partners who could help in these efforts?

“We had the National Science Museum come for a special Jurassic Park event, where kids could dig for fossils. These activities can be great bonuses for existing attendees, but I’ve also had times where the buzz around these added activations increases our ticket sales”

Section Outline



5

Announcement and Sales Timelines

Section takeaways:

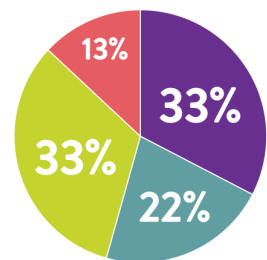
- Many marketing teams are dealing with **increased delays in planning and increased TBAs at the time of their season announcement.**
- To manage these concerns, some organizations have **shifted their working models with cross-function task forces** that share expertise and information throughout the programming planning.
- In terms of timelines and announcements, there are **consistent phases across organizations with fixed-seat subscribers having the first and shorter renewal period** followed by other subscription types.
- Organizations that operate with annual memberships **avoid sales seasonality and can sell memberships throughout their seasons.**

Opportunities for Including Marketing in Programming Decisions and Process

With increased scheduling delays, longer contract negotiation periods and more TBAs in season announcements, some organizations are looking at new ways of involving marketing earlier on in the programming planning process.

A Mix of Programming Relationships with Marketing

How do you engage with the marketing department in artistic planning?



- The Artistic team determines the programming season, and the Marketing team creates appropriate forecasts based on the proposed programming mix.
- The Marketing team reviews the initial programming selection proposed by the Artistic team, and makes suggestions to increase potential revenue from the programming mix.
- The Marketing team provides data along the way to help inform artistic decisions based on the past revenues from various programming mix.
- Other

N=46

[ABA Executive Benchmark, December 2023](#)



Cross Functional Teams Support Shared Information and Collaborative Planning

Who is involved? Artistic Director, Managing Director, Marketing Director, Associate Marketing Director, and Director of Production.

First Deliverable

The Artistic director provides a first list of titles they are interested in programming and shares that list with the Marketing Director.

Second Deliverable

From the provided list of titles, the Marketing Director develops sample seasons selecting pieces that will satisfy and engage diverse audiences and meet revenue targets.

Third Deliverable

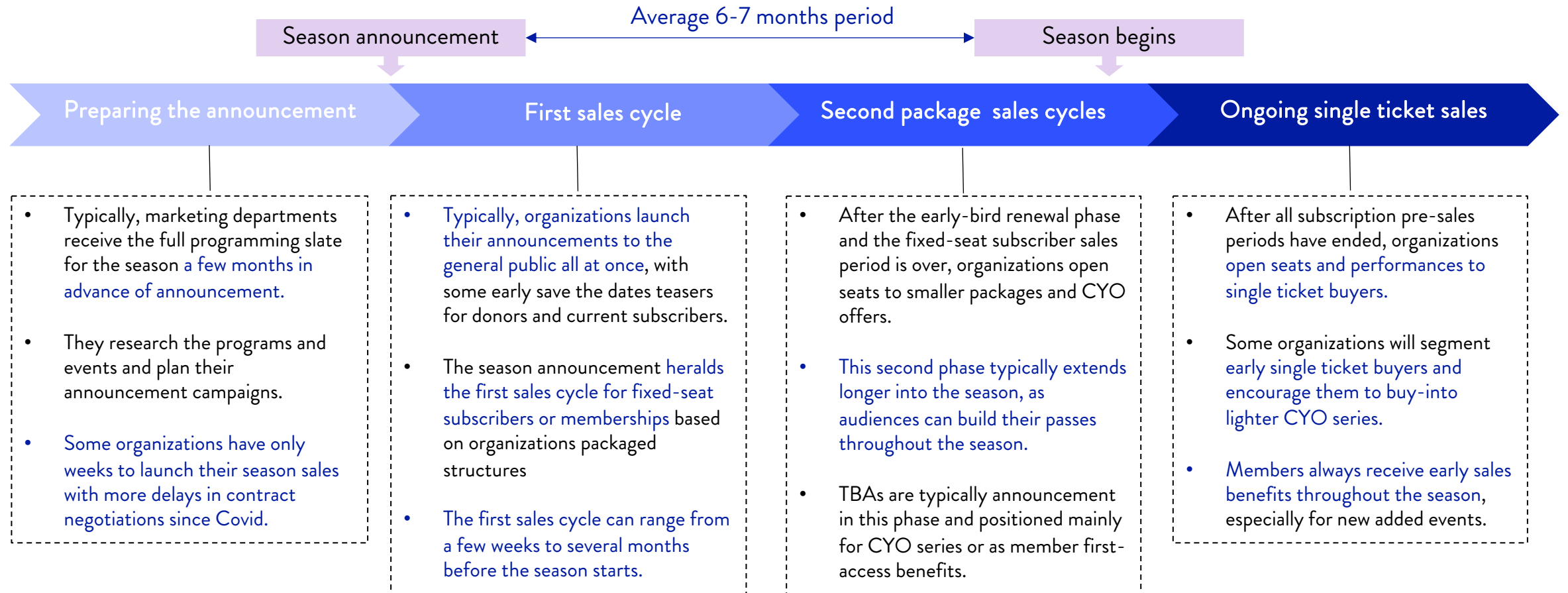
The Artistic Director takes the marketing team's suggestions and refines a final list with different programming scenarios and mixes they would like to prioritize.

Fourth Deliverable

From the revised programming mix, the marketing team provides final budget samples and forecasts.

Final Decision: The Artistic Director will make the final decision based on the information provided and in consultation with the Marketing team and cross-functional task force.

Typical Announcement Timelines and Sales Cycles



Note: Organizations with all-access membership programs avoid the seasonality of subscription sales by virtue of offering their membership throughout the year on a renewable basis. Audiences can access performances throughout the year starting from their purchase date. Christmas time is a key moment to bump sales during the holiday season.



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