

Case Study Analysis



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AAD 616
Fall Term 2016

Background

Kitchen Dog Theater was founded in Dallas, Texas in 1990 by five MFA graduates from SMU's Theatre program. They chose Dallas as their location because they wanted to remain home and work to enhance and shape the artistic canvas of that community. They wished to create a modern, contemporary, theater that asked difficult questions and challenged both the artist and the audience. They sought to alter the scope of the Dallas Theatre scene by transforming the individual and worldview of their audiences. These goals directly correlate with their organizational mission, "to provide a place where questions of justice, morality, and human freedom can be explored. We choose plays that challenge our moral and social consciences, invite our audiences to be provoked, challenged, and amazed. We believe that the theater is a site of individual discovery as well as a force against conventional views of the self and experience. It is not a provider of answers, but an invitation to question. Since theater of this kind is not bound by any traditions, Kitchen Dog Theater is committed to exploring these questions whether they are found in the classics, contemporary works, or new plays."

To foster and achieve this mission, Kitchen Dog focuses primarily on bringing new and contemporary works to Dallas. In pursuit of that focus, they became one of the founding members of the National New Play Network which champions new work and fosters the development of new play programs in theaters nationwide. Kitchen Dog is often putting on regional, area, and worldwide premiers as a result and prides themselves on being on the forefront of theatrical development, linking back to the reason they were founded in the first place. Since that time, they have put on a number of showcases by hosting a regionally, and nationally, accredited New Play Festival that highlights the artistic growth of the Dallas-Fort Worth community and beyond.

Kitchen Dog views themselves as being in the avant garde of the theatre community. As a result, their target audience, and working demographic, tends to fall in the younger audience of 20-30 years of age. While they do not focus marketing towards this group or design programming around them, due to the nature of their contemporary

and forward thinking approach to theater, that tends to be the audience they attract. They are open to all audiences but the older audience tends to not be as prevalent or involved in the theater. Kitchen Dog is, however, a member of the Actors Equity Association and frequently makes use of older to middle aged actors in their productions as a way of speaking to that older audience and getting them involved.

On an organizational level, the theater is quite modern and progressive and they do seem to succeed in their goal of challenging audiences and reshaping the artistic community, as evidence by their continued operation. That being said, the organization does deal with some cons in addition to the pros because of their staunch execution.

Environmental Scan

Economic Scan: Kitchen Dog is legally a non-profit organization operating and registered in Dallas, Texas. As a result, Kitchen Dog is open to both private and public funding of their organization. Ticket sales generate less than half of their annual expenses so these contributions are key in keeping the organization operating at peak capacity and in business. The company has a number of donor levels with a number of perks attached to encourage donations. These range from: Season Support (\$5000+), Kitchen Dogs (\$1000-\$4999), Rabid Dogs (\$500-\$999), Mad Dogs (\$250-\$499), Bad Dogs (\$150-\$249) and Stray Dogs (\$1-\$149). To further encourage and support donations, they have a comprehensive breakdown on the support section of their website listing where a donor's money goes based on the amount given (unless donor requests specific appropriation of funds). (Kitchen Dog Theatre, 2016).

In addition to their donor, Kitchen Dog also makes use of the vibrant business climate afforded them by their location in a major metropolitan US city and has gained a number of corporate sponsors. Just like their donors, they offer varying levels of sponsorship and benefits as follows: Best in Show (\$10,000+), Best of Breed (\$7500-\$9999), Champion (\$5000-\$7499) and Purebred (\$2500-\$4999). They have quite a few sponsors and affiliates for their 2016 season such as: KERA (PBS), Bloomberg Philanthropies, ExxonMobil, Data Span, Neiman Marcus Group, Theatre

Communications Group, Coaching Company, Dallas Faces Race, Speedpro Imaging, Lunar Echo, Dripping Springs, Original Cupcakery, Texas Vodka, Don Julio Tequila, Paula's Texas Spirits, Shin Sei Restaurant, National Endowment for the Arts, Texas Arts Commission, Sullivan Perkins, Gardere, Volunteers of North Texas, Office of Cultural Affairs, and several more smaller corporate donors (Kitchen Dog Theater, 2016).

The organization as a whole appears to be doing quite well. In researching their tax returns for the 2015 year, Kitchen Dog reports their total asset value at near 1 million dollars. Which, given their small size, is quite good for a theater of their caliber. For the 2015 year they even reported a growth in revenue from the previous year of \$320,526, however, their expenses also grew from the previous year in the amount of \$313,910. They report that at the beginning of 2015 they held \$106,627 so with the net revenue for 2015 they ended the year with a net return of \$113,247 (Guidestar, 2015). Not the greatest return but still operating in the green as opposed to the black or grey; something that is to be applauded for a small theater in this modern economic climate.

Demographic Scan: In general, the target audience of the theater appears to be the younger generation between the ages of 18-30. Though they do not explicitly state this anywhere in their literature, it can be inferred from the contemporary nature of their organization, their season structure, the language they use in their official documents, and the overall edgy and avant garde presentation they prefer. Dallas does have a large and growing population in the 18-30 range due to the proximity to universities, one of the healthiest employment rates in the country and the incredibly low cost of living when compared to the rest of the country (United States Census, 2015). Dallas is also an incredibly diverse city with 42% of respondents identifying as hispanic or latino and another 25% identifying as african american (only 28.8% identified as white alone) (US Census, 2015). This diversity is reflected in the organization's staff and acting company so the organization is taking advantage of their demographic and encouraging diversity. That being said, however, while their target audience is the younger population, the vast

majority of the DFW area theatre community is of the older more entrenched generation. While this is changing, the majority of support and patron participation in the industry is coming from the middle aged to elderly population (Theatre Facts, 2014). Kitchen Dog, though not always, can be somewhat off putting to this population with their edgy representation of themselves something that will be looked at further in the SWOC analysis later on.

Cultural Scan: Kitchen Dog maintains a casual atmosphere but still operates as a professional theatre company. With that in mind, while their culture is progressive, forward thinking and edgy in nature, they still operate under a modicum of respect and acceptance in their day to day dealings and how they treat their patrons and staff. A particular challenge they will occasionally face is the overall conservative political climate of Texas. While Dallas itself is quite liberal, the overall political climate is one of conservatism. This can be challenging when putting on controversial productions, which they frequently do, that challenge the tenets of that conservative school of thought.

Additionally, Kitchen Dog benefits from a robust and far reaching leisure climate in North Texas. While their base of operations is in Dallas, patrons from the surrounding cities and the greater Metroplex area commute to Dallas quite often for artistic and cultural offerings. Due to this, the organization has access to a larger clientele and patron base. They frequently utilize this with their outreach offerings.

On the national scale, Kitchen Dog is a founding member of the National New Play Network and, in addition to hosting their own festival, participate and attend national conventions and festivals all over the country. This is evidenced by the fact that some of their corporate sponsors and affiliates are not Texas based organizations. Their operation on the national level affords them a greater level of exposure that some other theaters their size might not have access to.

Technologically, Kitchen Dog is very active on social media. Running various ad campaigns and promotions, while also just engaging their audience, on twitter, facebook, instagram, yelp, and some snapchat engagement. Of those listed they are

least active on Twitter. Facebook is updated with photos and posts on a daily basis that are often cross-posted to Instagram. Twitter is updated sporadically it seems with posts ranging from a couple days apart in May to the next post not coming until the end of October. This is a real missed opportunity for audience engagement and promotional marketing that the organization may want to consider expanding in the near future.

SWOC Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges

Cultural Product

Strengths: Kitchen Dog produces a strong lineup of roughly six contemporary plays each season. All of which are relatively recent and modern and bring in strong reviews. They have a strong company of actors from which to pull from to put on these productions and frequently get commended for their strong artistic display. The shows they produce for their season do not shy away from controversial topics and foster critical thinking and challenge viewpoints across the board.

Weaknesses: Due to the modern and contemporary focus of the theater they sometimes cut out a portion of the Dallas theatre community for a number of reasons. The first being that the older and more entrenched portion of that demographic is looking for those classic shows they grew up with or are famous in reputation and might not attend a venue they know does not put them on. Additionally, since most of their shows would be relatively unheard of outside of the theatre community, they face marketing challenges in garnering interest and potentially alienate the casual theater goer.

Opportunities: Since their season consists of six shows, they might consider reserving one slot for a classic play to cater to their older audience. Some other options would be to include small scale or lower budget musicals; as musicals always bring revenue and audiences from a wide range of demographics. One additional option would be to add a seasonal show. Many of the other contemporary theaters in Dallas offer Christmas or Halloween programming and those are fun ways to engage the casual audience while allowing for a lot of creativity and experimentation with the presentation of the productions.

Challenges: Though their mission states that classic plays are an option, they want to be sure that if they add a slot for a classic or well known production that they are still able to adhere to their mission of challenging audience perception and

viewpoints. Were they to not consider this, they could ostracize themselves from that main demographic of 18-30 year olds who go to Kitchen Dog specifically for those avant garde style productions.

Pricing

Strengths: Their pricing is consistent with no hidden fees or confusing values. They charge a base rate of \$30.00 for all general admission and offer discounted student and senior tickets at \$25.00 with valid idea. Additionally, they offer special ticket pricing to the employees of their corporate sponsors at \$25.00 as well.

Weaknesses: Their range is not very large. With a difference of only \$5.00 between standard fair and discounted pricing the incentives are not very motivating. Speaking of incentives they do not offer any kind of incentivized pricing either. There is no price scaling. So \$30.00 buys admission regardless of the quality of the seat.

Opportunities: They could adjust their price scaling to reflect the seating chart and the quality of the seat. For example, \$30.00 might buy admission for the premium seating but \$28.00 a tier below, \$25.00 and so on and so forth. They might also consider offering a more competitive student rate as well. Many of the other theaters in Dallas offer student rush tickets or pay what you can night reserved for previews and open to students.

Challenges: The cost of producing a theatrical production is high and if they alter their ticket pricing to be more accommodating to their audience they will need to make sure they budget accordingly and prepare adequately for the possibility of taking a hit on an undersold show. If they do not they might find themselves at a deficit sooner rather than later.

Place (Access)

Strengths: Kitchen Dog recently moved to a new location located right off of the I-35 freeway and the Dallas Tollway. This provides easy access to Dallas residents and those commuting in from Fort Worth and Arlington. Texas has very sound road and highway system that is intuitively designed and allows for traffic to flow at a steady pace so access the facility should not be a major concern for patrons.

Weaknesses: The only real weakness to their new location is that they share the facility with other arts organizations. They are now located in the Trinity River Arts

Center along with a few other performing groups and arts organizations. So to the patrons it might not feel like a personal space or familiar place for Kitchen Dog. There may also be some confusion as to where the space is located within the Center until patrons get accustomed to the new location.

Opportunities: Their new locations is located right on the banks of the Trinity River. In the section of Dallas there are a number of museums, shopping centers, and various other cultural stops for the community. Kitchen Dog has a real opportunity to grow their audience base and become a fixture in the downtown Dallas arts scene with this new location.

Challenges: This is the 3rd time Kitchen Dog has moved locations since their founding in 1990. In only 26 years of operation that is a lot of moving around. It would be a different story if they were expanding in size with each move but these location changes have been lateral moves for the most part and the frequency of the relocations might be concerning to backers. They may be concerned about the financial state of the organization if they continue to move so frequently. Kitchen Dog will want to make sure and reassure their backers and sponsors of their resiliency and sound business practice or risk losing support.

Promotional Efforts

Strengths: Kitchen Dog has designed an excellent website. The aesthetic is pleasing to the eye and fun to look at, information is abundant and thorough, and the navigation is intuitive and clear to even a novice web user. As a result, their website serves as a great starting point for self promotion. Additionally, they have a presence on a number of social media websites including Facebook and Twitter. They have a very active and strong Facebook account with pictures, promotions, and regular posts.

Weaknesses: While Kitchen Dog is active on social media, they really are only active on Facebook. Their twitter account is not regularly maintained and posts irregularly. The same can be said of their instagram account. Both of those venues are excellent for audience engagement but receive little to no traffic due to how poorly they are maintained.

Opportunities: Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat offer a fantastic way to quickly engage with an audience base. While Facebook is still popular and used frequently, Twitter and Instagram are used even more so. Were Kitchen Dog to engage their audience through regular tweets, weekly pictures on Instagram and perhaps using

snapchat with their actors or production team for backstage sneak peeks and the like, they would have a wonderful opportunity to reach more of their target audience (18-30).

Challenges: Using social media can be a hugely time consuming. If they were to regularly engage in three to four social media platforms they would need to consider adding on interns or volunteers to manage the accounts and keep them up to date. Or consider adding a full or part time marketing and outreach manager to their staff. This would add more financial constraints to the organization so they would need to budget appropriately before implementing an aggressive social media campaign.

References

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