

Tiana Lui, Assignment 2, Arts Marketing

Nutcracker Case Summary

The Boston Ballet's 2015-2016 Nutcracker Production, achieving \$8.1 million in gross sales, surpassed revenue goals by \$1.5 million and paid ticket goals by 12,000. Jennifer Weissman, new chief marketing officer, attributes this success to strategic shifts in promotions and pricing. Previously, promotional messaging focused on pricing and timing. In the 2015-2016 season, messaging shifted to product based content (fun/interesting bits about the show) and more budget was allocated for content creation. A total of 30 behind-the-scenes videos, photo albums, and social media posts attracted new patrons and encouraged repeat patrons. Promotions were further made more effective through multi-channel traditional and digital advertising, adding new targeted radio buys for streaming services like Pandora, increasing segmenting and testing of email marketing, increasing organic and paid social media, and syncing marketing channels to re-target potential customers through a sequence of display, social and video, postcard mail, email, and Facebook/Youtube posts. Data driven dynamic pricing (tracking real time daily sales to price bump and rezone) maximized revenue by selling more seats on less popular dates, while getting top dollar for the most desirable performance dates. Targeted discounting also encouraged early sales and increased ticket prices later. Lastly, leadership oriented around pricing and sales results has empowered each team member to think of individual ways to maximize revenue.

Recommendations for Non-Holiday Programming

The 2015-2016 Nutcracker success study primarily focused on the Boston Ballet refreshing its communications elements (promotions and pricing). However, the company's shift in messaging to attract new audiences outside of ballet enthusiasts can inform decision making

around the target audience, frame of reference, and points of difference for non-holiday ballet performances. Prior to 2015, messaging for the Nutcracker promoted timing and pricing. This type of promotion was geared towards ballet enthusiasts who already knew what was in-store and only needed to know the when and how much. In 2015, promotions for the Nutcracker revealed interesting behind-the-scenes preparation, fun feats (quick costume changes), and culturally relevant clips (like the “snow scene” shot in the style of *The Matrix*). These types of promotions conveyed that the Nutcracker was an extraordinary and wondrous experience, attracting family, friends, and groups looking for a special outing during the holidays. The Nutcracker’s success at expanding its target audience past ballet enthusiasts to groups can be applied to non-holiday performances, targeting Greater Boston Area families and art-inclined friends. Targeting Greater Boston Area families and art-inclined friends is exhaustive, sustainable, and actionable. By segmenting our audience based on family status and interest, we are increasing the accessibility of ballet to those of any race, gender, and age, exhausting a greater portion of the Greater Boston Area market. Families and younger art-inclined friends have a longer customer lifetime value and can maintain the appreciation of ballet over generations, thereby making the target audience sustainable. Targeting based on family and art interest is also actionable; marketing can be done in schools and workplaces (where parents work), and the Boston Ballet can collaborate with other arts organizations (like they did with the Museum of Fine Arts) to raise ballet awareness among all art goers.

While the Nutcracker’s frame of reference is a special holiday event, non-holiday performances want to de-emphasize the idea that ballet performances are a once-a-year occasion. Labeling non-holiday performances under the frame of reference of arts events makes sense in terms of scope and competition. The scope of live events is much larger and competes with

sports, clubs etc. While ballet might deliver on endurance, sports fans are looking for more camaraderie, excitement, and action than ballet can give. Ballet, a quiet, highly trained affair is unable to compete with the rowdy energy of live sporting and festival events, and therefore does not fit the live events frame of reference. On the other side of the scale, the scope of dance and ballet are too narrow, not capturing a large enough audience. Thus, the frame of reference, arts events, makes sense because the product (ballet performances) can deliver on artistry/satisfy the needs of arts goers, and compete with other arts events, while also growing the market size beyond dance enthusiasts to include arts enthusiasts in general.

Again, the points of difference for non-holiday performances should keep the idea that ballet performances are extraordinary and unique, but discard the idea that ballet is a rare holiday experience. Points of difference that describe why ballet is different from other arts events are that ballets' are meaningful, masterful, and breathtaking experiences. Unlike movies meant for cheap thrills and laughs, ballet performances feed the soul and give the viewer a sense of refinement, sophistication, and enlightenment. Ballet dancers are masterfully trained for months on end and its form requires perfection and synchronization. Unlike still or moving images, ballet is breathtaking not only for its beauty, but also for its athleticism and attention to detail.

The proposed positioning statement for the Boston Ballet would be: For Greater Boston Area families and art-inclined friends looking to attend arts events, Boston Ballet's non-holiday repertoire provides meaningful, masterful, and breathtaking experiences. This positioning statement works because Boston Ballet's non-holiday repertoire fulfills families' and art goers' needs for extraordinary artistic experiences, can leverage its points of differences to compete with other arts events, and can reach a market beyond ballet enthusiasts.

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