

Thinking Like A Consumer

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THE THEATERMAKERS STUDIO

Hello, TheaterMakers!

Every year around this time, I like to make a list of all my favorite pieces of theatre I experienced in the past twelve months. Now, anyone who knows me knows I see a *lot* of theatre (nearly 100 shows this year across Broadway, Off-Broadway, West End, regional, and more). Making this list helps me remember the pieces of theatre that moved me, stuck with me, challenged me, and inspired me. **This list helps ground me, reminding me why I love working in this industry.** But I also use this list to think about myself differently. In a way I don't always think about as a Producer.

This list makes me think about myself as a consumer.



Whenever I finalize my list, I like to analyze what sort of trends I can find. Did I tend to like shows more on Broadway or Off? Plays or musicals? Large production or small intimate? These things tend to reveal a bit about where my theatrical tastes are at this given moment. But I also start to think about more practical aspects about my show experience. Did I see a matinee or an evening show? Were these shows 90 minutes with no intermission, or over 2 hrs with intermission? Was the theatre close to where I live or a longer commute? Taking stock of this, it's easy for me to start realizing how these elements can have an affect.on one's experience with a show.

Now, of course, I recognize that there are even more factors that define whether or not I enjoyed a show. Did I see it with other friends or family? Did I buy expensive premium tickets or get a discounted rush ticket? Did I see it on a weekday or a weekend? All of these elements would have affected the psychology of my experience.

Thinking about seating. Where did I sit? Was I too far from the stage? Too close? Were they full view or partial? Were the seats comfortable or do I remember feeling uncomfortable? Looking back on some of the shows that maybe didn't make my list, it's possible that my seat experience might have affected my perception of the show.

Even more important to recognize - What drew me to that show? Was it a friend's recommendation? Industry word of mouth? A tweet from a trusted source? A positive review? An appealing ad campaign? An interesting story? An exciting star? A trusted theatre company? Many shows I saw drew me in for differing reasons, so it's interesting to see which initial appeal was the most common among my favorite shows.

You probably see where I'm going with this now.

Every time I do this, I learn about what I as a consumer want from my theatrical experience. I decipher what it is that gets me to go to the theater. I define what my values are as an arts patron. And thus, I start to see what those particular productions or theatre companies did right in winning me over.

As a Producer, I am always thinking about consumers through the lens of my own personal interests. Of course, I recognize that my particular interests do not in any way fully encapsulate the diverse breadth of interests and aesthetic tastes that the Broadway audience represents; however, it can be really easy to think about audiences more narrowly through the realm of liking one thing and not the other. Marketing thinks about target audiences through assumptions based on data, and this can be incredibly valuable especially when trying to use precious marketing dollars on targeted ad campaigns. But audiences are far more complex than just holding one narrow interest or specific value.

Thinking about yourself as a consumer helps you recognize the incredible nuances of an audience's psyche when trying to determine what to see. It also helps you find clarity in determining what it is your show needs in order to appeal to an audience. When I produce a show, I ask myself "would I want to see this show? What would be *my* hook? What would I need to know about it before I decide to buy a ticket? What elements of the show-going experience would I appreciate as an audience member that would make it feel worthwhile?" It can be hard to define this objectively, so when I look back on my findings from my year's best theatre list, I'm able to deduce what it is that my show needs most to get a consumer like me to buy a ticket.

Try this exercise: What are the shows you're most looking forward to seeing in 2024? Why are

Try this exercise. What are the shows you're most looking forward to seeing in 2024? Why are you looking forward to seeing them? Are you going to buy a ticket now or wait and see what reviews say? Write those thoughts down. Be incredibly specific. And take stock of those thoughts. Because when it's time for your show to take the big stage, you're going to want to see your show on a lot of "most anticipated lists" at the beginning of the year... and hopefully, if all goes right, on a lot of "top theatre lists" at the end of the year.

Happy Holidays!



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