



SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE

Remarks made by Karen Brooks Hopkins to the 2008 NAMP Conference

I'd like to begin my remarks today with some complaining—whining, actually—about the general economic climate; why it's a total pain in the neck; why we haven't succeeded in making sure that our field is one that is more valued and appreciated by consumers; why every time there is a downturn we feel the pain immediately, are dismissed as a frill, and so on and so on.

As a New Yorker, a Brooklynite—as well as a 28-year veteran of the field of arts administration and a life-long fundraiser—I am used to taking rejection in every form. I'd like to think I'm resilient—able to roll with the punches, live to fight another day and all that stuff. But the truth is, I am aggravated. Here we have our field—the arts—that:

1. offers distinctive, creative programs that inspire and educate millions of American school children;
2. stimulates the economy of the local community—when we are dark, every local business suffers;
3. generates tourism—let's face it, no one is going to New York for the weather;
4. can be an effective tool in diplomacy. Think about the New York Philharmonic in North Korea, or popular culture, such as hip hop, in places like Hong Kong and Seoul, where American street culture is emulated by youth and could, if properly channeled, be an effective Public Relations tool for the United States.
5. should I even mention the art itself, which ignites the imagination, illuminates the best of our history as a civilization on this planet, and inspires us by touching both our hearts and our minds?
6. creates "social profit"—I ask, how can we reposition not-for-profits as sources of social profit, a concept that *Chronicle of Philanthropy* writer Claire Gaudiani has put forth, in essence asserting that not-for-profits exist to create value for society rather than for shareholders.

Throw all this together and add to it the fact that private sector support and ticket sales pick up most of the tab—could there be a better return for the money or a better investment for every citizen? And yet, somehow we have not succeeded in convincing the public of our true, enduring value.

Today, we are going to discuss the convergence of marketing—getting the message out there—and fundraising—paying for the product. Can they meet and find happiness together, and raise the bar for the arts? We shall see...

At this point, in order to create some context for you, I will give a snapshot of my institution, BAM, the Brooklyn Academy of Music where I currently serve as President and have worked for 28 years. BAM's mission is to be the preeminent progressive performing arts and cinema arts center of the 21st century, engaging both global and local communities. Its enduring purpose is to provide a distinctive environment in which its audiences—annually, more than 550,000 people from a wide geographic area—may experience a broad array of challenging and enriching aesthetic/cultural programs.

Over the years the institution has become increasingly successful, attracting larger audiences and donations and growing in critical acclaim. In fact, I believe that BAM and its sister Brooklyn cultural institutions have had a primary role in transforming Brooklyn into the hot epicenter of contemporary culture in New York City—a vast turnaround from the 70's and 80's. Back then, when people would say, "such-and-such event is playing at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and then in London," the other person would say, "OK—I'll see it in London". This is the kind of value that can resonate on behalf of the entire field and energize the community.

I believe that the first part of driving home our mission as an organization is a strong and focused marketing message. In essence, the entire organization is speaking in one voice. It sounds overly simple, but it's true. The job of every arts administrator is the same: institution-building. If, as in many museums, the painting department doesn't speak to the photography department, which hates the print department, etc, it undermines the personality of the organization. At BAM, the goal is to speak in one voice.

What is the essence of speaking in one voice? Too many organizations have hundreds of logos for each different program. It dissipates the message and undermines the connection between funders and the institution. Without graphic clarity, funders could be supporting anyone. At BAM, the idea is that the marketing feels like the programming; the fundraising feels like the programming, the building feels like the programming. It speaks in one voice.

Every ticket buyer is encouraged to become a subscriber, every subscriber a member, every member a patron, and so on. Leave us a gift in your will; it is cradle to grave BAM, and it is based on communicating and building a sense of ownership among one's constituents. This is really where the marketing and fundraising come together. It's not enough to sell the ticket. An organization must repeat a clear, consistent message over and over again in the most creative way possible.

For example, we conducted focus groups this past year to determine how we could generate further crossover from movie ticket buyers (BAM has four cinemas in addition to two theaters) to the mainstage. Movie ticket buyers are the youngest audiences, take advantage of the cheapest ticket prices, and support a business that runs 365 days a year. Part of our objective is to move that movie ticket buyer into feeling a sense of ownership of or connection with BAM—then he or she will try out the stage programs, become a supporter, and eventually move up the food chain. This audience is generally young, curious, and has free time—which makes them ideal. By offering special incentives, discounts, and opportunities to young moviegoers, we can increase their interest in stage shows, and BAM overall. In order to achieve this, we run trailers in the cinema about the stage, talk directly to customers, and market deeper to those moviegoers that have already decided to attend a BAM program in the first place.

Our studies show that it is easier to get a person who already comes to BAM to buy more BAM—so first we are going deeper rather than wider. These ticket buyers are also a feeder system for fundraising; once they are giving at a certain level, they get a priority period for ticket sales that is exclusive to members. They like the services, and they increase donations.

This audience exemplifies a well-defined demographic and, as a result, attracts corporate sponsorship. The whole thing turns back on itself—and here is fundraising stimulating ticket sales, and reinforcing marketing goals.

These two areas are inextricably tied, and have to work together to succeed. There are even more examples in corporate sponsorship:

1. BAM set up a youth marketing committee. Our young staff met regularly to generate ideas which would appeal to their peers, both interesting programs and strategies to reach younger audiences.

One concept they created is Takeover. Tickets are \$25, and the night includes: themed movie series in all four theaters until 4 am; music in the opera house (including bands, Sufjan Stevens, etc); a video game/pinball lounge in the attic; a DJ and dance party in BAMcafe, art installations in the lobby; veggie and meat burgers, \$3 beers, etc—all night.

The point: to initiate the uninitiated, and then to do it again and again. Frequency = comfort and participation = support. About 3000 20- and 30-somethings attended, with lines around the block. And yes—there were lots of sponsors: beer sponsors, gift bag sponsors, Urban Outfitters, media sponsors, etc.

All spaces engaged + speaking in one voice + hitting the target demographic + bringing in the sponsors + everyone having a great time + lots of press = an event is born. Now we connect all of these young people to Shakespeare, opera and BAMcinématek—everything.

2. Another example: high rise condos are being built all over the area. The developers are approached by BAM sponsorship to give each new purchaser a BAM membership. We will discount the memberships and sell them in bulk to the developer—so we've generated income.

The developer then gives the gift of BAM to the new owner—much better than the usual bottle of champagne, and the identification with BAM can be used as a sales incentive. The new owner is now a member, and BAM, through very little effort, has gotten to know all the new people in the community who will then buy tickets and make contributions.

3. We must use our size, demographics and programs to clarify what we stand for. If we can demonstrate, in marketing jargon, that our attendees are “influencers”, we can be more competitive for sponsorship.

So we see fundraising and marketing together again: For corporate sponsors, launching new products can hit their demographic target at BAM in a completely focused way. We can give them a cinema lobby display, a trailer on the screen, the opportunity to set up on-site promotions, do follow-up mailings and, in some cases, give BAM tickets to their customers. Best of all, the climate of advertising in Brooklyn is unlike that in Manhattan—there are no other distractions on the street or crowds to dissipate quickly. Our audiences are exactly in their demographic zone. The audience, in turn, learns about new corporate products and services, and because they are at BAM, they get these services at a discount. We also can provide special opportunities for the sponsors' customers to go behind the scenes—a dinner

with the cast, a backstage tour—in order to give them a unique experience that makes them feel like insiders.

It is all designed to work for everyone: for the audience, the institution, the sponsors and both departments—marketing and fundraising. These departments—both corporate sponsorship and individual giving—must have counterparts in marketing. They have to work as a team.

We can also niche our audiences in a very specific way, one that works for the audience and the sponsors alike. We can help people select the shows (e.g. the creation of themed ticket packages like “Next Wave Virgin”, “Next Wave Thursdays”, or “Ticket Around the World”) and then make recommendations for additional shows based on their interests. It is like Amazon.com—if you like this, then you might like that even better. Try something new—take a chance. We can email them links to articles about the shows the purchased tickets for—giving them more connection to the material—and then we send these emails courtesy of the sponsors. Then we can let them blog or chat online about the shows after they’ve seen them. It is all connected.

Marketing sells the programs to audiences; the audience has specific characteristics—age, ethnicity, income, etc. The audience characteristics appeal to sponsors, and fundraising occurs. “The Result”: a great, well supported program happens; audiences are thrilled and become donors.

So when life is this good and this simple, it makes sense for marketing and fundraising not only to get along, but to form a long-lasting relationship that can withstand the complaining and difficult brought on by this lousy economy. This ultimately raises the bar for the field.

The fact is, marketing and fundraising have always been inextricable, whether or not we realize it. At the same time that a cultural organization serves as a valuable asset to educate and inspire the community, it must also be a creatively packaged product with easily identifiable brand-appeal. The institution must be a familiar site with which individuals from a young age identify as community members, a site in which they want to invest as audiences, patrons, as individual contributors, and eventually as sponsors through their own business ventures.

If this is achieved, we can move to the next level in terms of the perception of our field.

1. Our board members must be vocal on our behalf to elected officials; these officials should be invited as *ex officio* board members and allowed to address the board briefly on local policy as it pertains to the arts. We must connect them directly to our work.
2. We must be players at the grassroots level of community service and somehow get press for that work in addition to coverage of glamorous opening nights.
3. We must visit editorial boards and bond with our sister culturals to deliver our message.
4. We must encourage municipalities—states and cities—to invest in our organizations financially. We must advocate for small and large institutions to partner with local businesses to create unique cultural tourism packages

5. It is necessary to communicate the big picture over and over again through print and electronic media, as well as established and emerging internet technologies.
6. Use end of the year appeals to reinforce the field and to be personal with your donors. Don't write a renewal as usual this year, with a long list of your shows; acknowledge that times are tough and that they will be making difficult choices. Tell them how much it will mean for one of those choices to your institution.

That is marketing.

That is fundraising.

That is letting your institution speak to everyone in one loud, clear voice.