

Dance/USA 2011 Conference
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Technology Interviews

Many of the latest tools are all about experimentation, and so we decided to include a few interviews with companies and organizations on their use of particular tools. These interviews are by no means an exhaustive look at technology in arts organizations, but we hope that they inspire you to take your own risks and reach out to others for guidance, support, and ideas.

Fourth Arts Block

<http://www.fabnyc.org/>

About

Fourth Arts Block (FAB) is a non-profit organization founded in 2001 by cultural and community groups to establish and advance the East 4th Street Cultural District, between 2nd Avenue and Bowery. FAB provides a variety of services to its member organizations including leading the development and conversion of 100,000 square feet of cultural space, marketing and promotion of the district, as well as offering discount ticketing and other community events and programs.

Home to more than a dozen arts groups, 10 cultural facilities and 17 performances and rehearsal venues, the East 4th Street Cultural District attracts an annual audience of 200,000, serves 1,200 artists and provides more square feet of active cultural use than any other block in New York.

The East 4th Street Cultural District is nationally recognized as an incubator for new work and diverse artistic voices by supporting experimental performances and cutting-edge productions and is proud of its outstanding records for racial and ethnic diversity, free and low cost programs, and training for emerging artists and youth.

Why We Chose Them

FAB has been working closely with Fractured Atlas on ATHENA, a community-designed, Open Source software framework, and they will also be the first to implement it. Although this hasn't happened yet, we wanted to include an interview with them because we're pretty certain ATHENA is going to be massively helpful to many arts organizations.

Interview

What are you most looking forward to in ATHENA?

I am most looking forward to integrating our website content management system and ticketing in a way that is not solely donor-relation focused.

What main advantages are you anticipating of ATHENA over other ticketing software?
It will be easy to have a programmer build as it is open source. It won't stay frozen in the year it was made like other ticketing sites, but develop with its users' needs and ideas.

Who do you think is the perfect user of ATHENA? What kinds of arts organizations do you think will most benefit from it?

I think an arts organization that has a high technical literacy will benefit more at first because they will be able to implement and customize it faster. However, it will ultimately be useful to anyone who can invest more time than money or is willing to learn because you don't need a software company to do it for you and the code for customized modules will eventually be out there for all to implement.

What are the costs (money, time, and otherwise) of ATHENA?

I don't know yet as I have not seen what it will replace. Increasingly Facebook, Twitter and email are replacing paper mailings, which were highly expensive. I do think companies will need to give the program the time up front to make it work and then do maintenance, which you need to do with any website related function.

im'ij-re

<http://www.amyseiwert.com/>

About

"the vocabulary of ballet never changes, it is only the usage that becomes outmoded."

- William Forsythe

im'ij-re, a contemporary ballet company in San Francisco, holds the belief that ballet has an expressive and vital voice relevant for the current time. Though respect is held for swans and sylphs, they are not where the company's interests lie. I have no desire to regurgitate art. im'ij-re's artists share the belief that through collaboration and experimentation, vibrant and courageous ideas can be expressed. Habitual reactions are discouraged.

- Amy Seiwert

Why We Chose Them

im'ij-re recently completed a successful fundraising effort in Kickstarter, and we wanted to get a first-hand account of how they did it and their reactions to it. To see the project, go here: <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/457282137/amy-seiwerts-imagery-sketch-new-works-pay-the-danc?ref=card>

Interview

Why did you choose Kickstarter rather than another crowd-sourcing microgrant site? It was the best known, so I was hoping that the recognition would help.

What were the costs, money, time, and otherwise, of using Kickstarter to fund this project?

It was extremely easy and the costs fairly small. As I'm pretty versed on my own laptop, set-up was simple. I was able to edit footage of Imagery performance clips in iMovie with a voice-over describing the project, so the video aspect was simple as well. The dancers helped to get the word out on Facebook and I also included the Kickstarter campaign on a Vertical Response group e-mail I did (under \$10). Kickstarter takes 5% of the money you raise.

What were the similarities and differences between fundraising with Kickstarter and other forms of fundraising you've tried?

The negative is it seems Kickstarter is kinda "played out" - every time you are on a social networking site someone is asking for funds, usually through Kickstarter.

I had a matching grant from The San Francisco Foundation about a year and a half ago. Having that grant was fantastic, and it really rallied the community. The timeline was real, but it was from a known foundation and the incentive to give was greater due to the match. There seemed to be more excitement. It's nice to have a foundation showing support for you because it makes people who normally wouldn't notice take note and give.

What was the biggest challenge of using Kickstarter?

Continually asking for help to meet our goal was disheartening. The relief when we made our goal, with time to spare (without the help of an "angel" - a donor guaranteeing to close the gap if necessary), was incredible. The "all or nothing" aspect was stressful, even with an angel waiting in the wings.

What did Kickstarter allow you to do that you couldn't have done otherwise?

It helped focus our fundraising because we had to have an extremely specific goal: pay the dancers from the Kickstarter funds for one week of work (out of five) for our summer season. People really liked knowing exactly what their funds were supporting.

What advice do you have for other artists and companies considering using Kickstarter? Keep the goal realistic. Though it's nice to have an angel to guarantee the goal, it's nicer not to lose that 5% of a committed gift. Use Kickstarter to leverage new funds.

Anything else you'd like to include?

I suspect Kickstarter may be good once but that one would suffer a pretty big sophomore slump. I wouldn't use it as my yearly fundraising event. Try for something specific that you can really generate excitement about. I'd be interested to hear how it goes from people doing it for the second or third time.

The Leopold Group

<http://www.leopoldgroup.org/>

About

Lizzie Leopold holds a BFA in dance from the University of Michigan and a Masters in Performance Studies from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, with thesis work at the intersection of choreography and commerce, specifically focusing on *Le Sacre du Printemps*. In fall 2011 she will begin work on an Interdisciplinary PhD in Theater and Drama Studies at Northwestern University, continuing to focus on the intersection of dance and business. Her work has been presented at the Congress on Research in Dance 2011 Special Topics Conference and the Cultural Studies Association Conference 2011.

Lizzie is the founder and Artistic Director for the Leopold Group, a Chicago based not-for-profit modern dance company currently in residence at the Chicago Cultural Center. In addition to choreographing, Leopold has danced with the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Leopold also works for Audience Architects, a service organization working to build audiences for dance in Chicago. She currently serves on the Alumni Board of Governors at the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theater and Dance.

Why We Chose Them

The Leopold Group is a small and young company, and we wanted to make sure that we highlighted a company that doesn't have the resources of, say, New York City Ballet or Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Beyond that, their unique personality really shines through their Facebook page, Leopold Group(ies), and we find it engaging, enlightening, and very fun. To see their page, visit here: <https://www.facebook.com/leopoldgroup>

Interview

Why do you have a Facebook fan page?

The Leopold Group fan page was started to help us feed our email list, which is where we disseminate the majority of our vital information. It gives us an easy and ubiquitous platform to talk about ourselves without feeling "spam-y" or needy. We only exist if people come see us dance. And people only come see us dance if they know that we exist. So Facebook is a place for us to introduce ourselves to the world, a virtual handshake, without invading someone's email inbox or asking them to purchase a ticket before they know what they get for their money.

What are your goals for your fan page?

My Facebook-ing goals are to foster relationships with existing audience members and meet potential new audience members. It is the nature of our field that we spend a good amount of time in a small room, surrounded by mirrors. The internet, and Facebook specifically, gives us an opportunity to stop looking at ourselves for a while and share what we do. As a small company, opportunities to perform are few and far between. So this gives us an opportunity to share what we do more than once a year.

What do you hope to achieve through your fan page?

Interaction and "likes" are definitely the measure of success on Facebook. I hope to continue to grow these markers and translate them into active participants outside of this virtual community - as audience members, new dancers and general dance enthusiasts.

What are the costs, money, time, and otherwise, of your fan page?

My fan page doesn't cost any money, just time. I would say I spend an average of thirty minutes a day on the fan page, and the content I use is almost exclusively generated during rehearsals (which means it doesn't take any extra time). If used well (and "well" mostly means consistently), Facebook is almost free PR.

One of the most successful strategies to generate conversation or new "fans" has been sharing original content - videos, photos, etc. This allows us to introduce ourselves without asking for money in return. The conversation shouldn't be, "We're the Leopold Group. Buy a ticket." The conversation is, "We're the Leopold Group. Nice to meet you and here's some fun, free stuff because we would like you to get to know us." Traditional marketing is so expensive that a dance company wouldn't have the opportunity to make these connections without it directly correlating to ticket sales.

How do you decide whether or not you should post something to Facebook?

My postings fall into one of three categories:

1. They relate directly to the Leopold Group - a photo, a video, a live stream of a rehearsal, an upcoming show, a dancer's birthday. I have recently started posting "Lessons Learned from Last Night's Rehearsal" which has been great fun.

2. They are important news or information relating to the dance field at large. This is my effort to stop looking at myself in the mirror all day and see/share what is happening in our world.

3. They give a "shout out" to an organization or a person that is working with the Leopold Group. This has proved a great opportunity for cross pollination and exposure.

How did you develop your voice on the page?

My voice on the page is personal, casual and conversational. Because of the nature of Facebook, it's nice to know who you are talking to and not feel like you are talking "at" an organization. The Leopold Group is voiced by Lizzie Leopold. There is no wizard behind the curtain. I also try not to be a sales man, but a choreographer. I want to talk about dance first and sell dance second. I think these two things become tied together if I do my job well.

Has anything surprised you about having a fan page for your company?

I'm learning as I go. The surprise is always who comments and checking on new "fans." I love it when someone new comes along. I get to find out which kind of posts attract which kind of people. It's a little bit like groping in the dark and every once in a while I'll happen upon someone or something that connects. Virtual Pillow (from Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival -- <http://www.jacobspillow.org/Virtual-Pillow/>) has been a great find, as has a group of photographers from the Chicago Photography Center. Connecting with their Facebook pages is the bonus. Our powers combine...

What have been some of the challenges you've encountered in your fan page?

The number one challenge is that this only works if our Facebook presence is continuous. Posting every day and at certain times of day (mostly after work hours) is key. The Facebook world generates new content so quickly that you can get lost and forgotten rather easily. I find myself striding the line of constant vs. annoying. I want to be a presence but not a nuisance.

What advice do you have for other dance companies on Facebook?

I think there are a couple of golden rules:

1. Be a consistent presence. Don't disappear and reappear surrounding your performances.
2. Tell them who they are talking to. Don't let your fans talk "at" an organization. Give them a person and a personal connection.
3. Generate original and interesting content and have some measures of quality control that you are comfortable with. What you post on the internet lives forever, so put your best foot forward.
4. Interact online in the same way you would network in real life.

These are just my humble opinions. The Leopold Group is modest and small. But we are learning and sharing and that is what Facebook has offered us an opportunity to do.

LEVYdance

<http://www.levydance.org/>

About

Founded in 2002, by Benjamin Levy, Artistic Director, LEVYdance has developed into a recognized performing arts organization with a distinct artistic aesthetic that has earned accolades from The San Francisco Chronicle to The New York Times.

LEVYdance has presented original works at prestigious venues across the nation including the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater, Zellerbach Playhouse, ODC Theater, The Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Cowell Theater, Dance Place, Joyce SoHo, and internationally at VDU University in Kaunas, Lithuania. LEVYdance's 2008 home season came to life on custom staging under the stars against the backdrop of mural-painted brick buildings in the streets of San Francisco's industrial SOMA district. The San Francisco Chronicle described the production as a "beguiling frame for ambitious work". Touring endeavors, both national and international, continue to expand, including a performance in Tanzmesse, Germany and a residency in France in the summer of 2010.

Among LEVYdance's distinguished creative collaborators are The Kronos Quartet, The Los Angeles Philharmonic, composers Keeril Makan, Mason Bates and Jeremy Zuckerman, French Couture designer Colleen Quen, and industrial designer Rick Lee.

The company regularly conducts master classes and holds residencies and workshops at universities on the West and East Coasts. LEVYdance also hosts a Summer Intensive for college and pre-professional dancers at Studio Gracia, which is home to the company for rehearsals and also houses the administrative offices of LEVYdance. There are currently more than ten different disciplines of dance classes being taught at Studio Gracia each week.

Why We Chose Them

They conducted a national audition on Vimeo. How cool is that?! We like that they're thinking creatively about what the Vimeo platform can do for their company and then taking a risk.

Interview

Why did you decide to do an audition on Vimeo?

With the advent of social media and public video hosting sites, our access to the international dance community exponentially expanded. I was curious to see if I could know what I needed to know about prospective dancers through an online video audition. Could I gain enough information about their dancing, textural palate, personality, creative capacity, and our potential working chemistry?

Why did you choose Vimeo rather than YouTube?

Vimeo videos are higher quality. Vimeo also provides an option for creating a group where members can post videos, make comments and ask questions. I liked the idea of creating an online audition community where dancers could see the other audition videos that were posted. We listed several videos with instructions for the audition. The instructions from the original post are here:

To Audition:

1) Go to www.vimeo.com/groups/levydance and find the Audition video. Click on "Audition Video" to open up the clip in a larger window. Pause the video to let it fully load before you play it. While the video is loading, set up a video camera in your home (living room, kitchen, bedroom, wherever you have the most space). Record a clip of you introducing yourself: your name, where you live, a bit about your dance background, why you want to be a part of this project, and anything else you'd like us to know about you. Who you are as a human being is as important to us as your technical ability.

2) Pick your favorite song, something that really make you want to move, does not matter what genre...and jam: Record yourself dancing for 2-3 minutes showing your most organic movement style and texture. Be sure to clearly articulate your artistic voice within this. Go all out, have fun.

3) Now return to the audition video. By now it should be fully loaded. Play the video, follow the directions, and record your response. You should now have five video clips- your introduction, your personal dance jam, and your three responses to the audition video.

4) Join vimeo, it's easy and free. www.vimeo.com. To post your audition publicly to the LEVYdance group page (our preferred method)- login to vimeo, at the top banner under Explore, click on Groups. Then at the right of the banner enter LEVYdance in the search field and once you find it, click to enter our group page. Once you are on the LEVYdance Group page, on the right side of the screen click on upload video, and choose which file(s) to upload. You can upload all four clips as one file, or upload each individually. It's that easy. Make sure to save your name as part of the title of your audition video. If you prefer to keep your audition video private- login to vimeo, and on the top banner click on upload. Upload your audition video(s). Once it's uploaded, on the top banner click on videos, and select your video. From the next page click on settings on the top right of the screen, and then privacy. From the privacy page click on password protected, make a password and then click on save. Go back to your video, copy the url of the webpage you are on and include the link and password on your audition registration form (the next step).

5) Go to www.levydance.org/auditioners.htm fill out the registration form. For help on uploading go to <http://vimeo.com/help/compression> Post under the LEVYdance Vimeo account by June 28th at midnight (PST).

How did it go?

It was incredible. We had hundreds of downloads of our video from all over the world. Dancers were extremely generous with taking the time to film themselves, create original movement, and share themselves vulnerably for the audition.

What was the biggest challenge?

Going through hours of video and finding a way to evaluate them equally. It was important to us to watch every minute of video. I felt that if dancers were invested enough to take the time and resources to post their video, I wanted to see what they had to share.

What were the costs, money, time, and otherwise, of the audition?

No financial costs, except for a month of Vimeo plus - about \$10. I had to take the time to prepare the audition phrase, record the audition instructions, post everything, and go through all the submissions.

What advice do you have to other artists and dance companies considering using Vimeo for auditions?

Get clear on what is important for you to see from the submissions and find interesting ways to allow auditioners to showcase that aspect. You don't have the normal restraints of time and space you have at in person auditions - use that to your advantage.