

Dance Events in a Recession? YOU CAN DO IT!

Tomorr Kokona, Artistic Director of Culture and Arts and Dance Challenge™, has organised dance events in Albania, Italy, Spain and England. Now he tells you how to thrive against all odds using the D.A.N.C.E formula.

The recession is here to stay. Budgets are being slashed. So what should we dance event organisers do? Hibernate? Give up? Or fight on? Of course, we must fight on, but we can do more than survive. In a recession, opportunities do open up; what seems impossible becomes achievable because the recession creates new rules and new attitudes. This article is about how dance event organisers can THRIVE in this recession – or, at worst, survive – by applying the **D.A.N.C.E** formula for organising dance events.

D is for DEVELOPMENT

To make your dance event successful requires many things, but above all it requires planning. Having a **triple C-plan** is the first step: a **C**omprehensive, **C**osted written plan that is **C**apable of being carried out in reality. I learned this valuable lesson the hard way: in 1998 I had 5 dancers, 6 weeks of rehearsals and a few very successful performances – but I had spent my entire savings. Great idea. Great production. Bad plan.

Many dance practitioners (including me) are prepared to earn nothing just to make the dance dream come true, but we must get real:

- a. Is your project realistic for your budget?
- b. What is your time scale?
- c. Can you really get a big enough paying audience?

Developing a detailed, realistic action plan is the essential foundation on which to build your creativity on.

A is for ATTRACTION

A great plan with nobody interested in it is like a great on-stage performance - with no audience. You have to attract interest, and above all funding. Never easy, but are my **Top Ten Tips**:

- **Perfect the one-minute presentation:** also not easy, but getting your key points prioritised, your phrases clear and concise, is so important when you often only have a moment to impress somebody. Then you are ready to...
- **Network:** register with relevant arts organisations, and go to their events: great opportunities to meet others, exchange ideas - and find new funders or sponsors. An absolute must that costs nothing.
- **Research community funding opportunities:** it's amazing just how many opportunities there are from local, national and specialist funders and sponsors. Simply[, try Googling] Google a range of keywords.
- **Find alternatives to cash:** often companies and people that can't afford cash will willingly offer you goods in kind, such as their time and their skills.
- **Consider hiring a fund raiser:** you need a choreographer (if you are not doing it yourself) to get the dance right – and you might need an expert to get the funding right. It can be expensive, but can also pay real dividends.
- **Good causes:** getting a local charity or good cause (eg school funds) involved can deliver spectators, marketing support and media coverage. They generate funds; you build awareness.
- **Do the maths:** raising your ticket price by 10% could increase your profit by 25% -10% means an extra 70p on a £7 ticket. Make sure your audience can afford it, but this generally works very well.
- **Use up-selling:** learn from Amazon. Get people to buy more than a ticket: online auctions, raffles at events, DVDs, T-shirts, sale-or-return goods from local shops. Photographers will

pay a percentage of sales of photos. Dance and sports shops will sometimes give you free products for making them your "preferred supplier".

- **Set up marketing partnerships:** arts centres, theatre groups, youth groups, special interest groups, local authorities. Such connections can help [them – and you], even if only publicising your events. When cash is not involved many more people say "yes".
- **Additional dance events:** offering to dance at your local shopping centre can publicise your event, and create opportunities with shops.

N is for NOTHING

- **No big shops:** I've found that small shops and workshops are best. The owner knows how low the price of leaflets, banners, design or props can go, and will reward your loyalty with lower prices. Always ask for a discount of up to 50% - and always get three quotes.
- **No VAT:** leaflets and other community event promotions are VAT exempt.
- **No prima donnas:** reduce your production costs by getting your dancers involved in admin and other office tasks, leaflet distribution, email marketing etc – but NOT immediately before or after the show unless absolutely necessary.
- **No volunteer staff at events?:** although volunteers are invaluable, consider employment laws, training, insurance etc. You can consult your Local Council Arts and Sports departments who offer **FREE training** courses and support for volunteers which could be useful to you.

C is for COMMUNICATIONS

- **Marketing is fundamental** for any business, but you can do it with little or no money. An outdoor performer, who needed to sell over 70% of tickets to cover costs, could not afford to distribute her 20,000 leaflets, so she asked her organic food deliverer - and within days her show was sold out.
- **Auto-responders** are very cost-effective, e.g.: an answering machine for your website enquiries; automatic "received and thank you" responses to emails; automatic newsletter sign-ups etc.
- **Guerrilla Marketing** is huge in the USA. Visit www.gmarketing.com for over 200 Guerrilla marketing techniques – 100+ are free.
- **Launch events** are a great way to obtain free marketing and sell tickets. Also offer free workshops.
- **Use the local media** for articles *before* events (contact at least three weeks ahead of performance dates), for reader ticket offers (2-for-1) and competition prizes, and make one or more your "Media Partner".

E is for EXECUTION

Putting on dance events is exhausting, so there is real danger that you will get to the first night bad-tempered, uncommunicative and fearing the worst. So just when you need to be at your best – smart, passionate, successful – all your worst features show up. Keep back 20% of your energies for the first performance to make sure you are on top form.

Finally, always evaluate your success against the targets you set in the plan. Learn from your mistakes – but always remember your successes too. There will be plenty of them if you believe you can succeed – even in this recession – because YOU CAN IF YOU THINK YOU CAN.

Dance production has many more key elements (insurance, codes of conduct, risk assessment, venues, tour bookings etc). Find out much more at www.cultureandarts.co.uk/resources.html