

# Audiences Everywhere: The New Imperative of Audience Engagement

By Matt Lehrman

Presented for the Austin Creative Alliance – Crisis & Opportunity 2.0  
July 28, 2011

---

## Presentation Notes

Highlighted **Discussion Points** indicated areas of lengthy & productive discussion among participants.

1. **The “Audience Apple Tree” is an out-dated paradigm**
  - a. We spend most of our TIME picking the “low hanging fruit” because it’s ready and easy to reach.
  - b. We spend most of our BUDGET picking the “middle fruit” because we believe that it can yield a “return on investment.”
  - c. We forgo the “hard-to-reach fruit” because the considerable effort isn’t worth its uncertain results.
2. **A new paradigm focuses on the intersection of:**
  - a. **Capacity** – opportunity, money, time, ability
  - b. **Interest** – Like Bacon & Eggs: The hen is interested; the pig is committed.
3. **Understand the NEA’s Survey of Public Participation on the Arts**
  - a. <http://www.arts.gov/research/NEA-SPPA-brochure.pdf>
  - b. Only 36% of the US adult population participates in the NEA’s benchmark arts & cultural activities on an annual basis. That means that 2/3 of our population is NOT INTERESTED
  - c. **Discussion Point:** While arts & cultural organizations may compete for attention & participation of the 1/3 of the population that DOES participate, what can we do to affect the behaviors of the 2/3 that DO NOT?
4. **The Cost of Empty Seats:**
  - a. Drains budget
  - b. Demands more advertising
  - c. Pressures to raise ticket prices
  - d. Strains program quantity & quality
  - e. Diminishes pool of future donors
  - f. Compromises mission
  - g. And most importantly – produces the appearance of failure to Audiences, Donors, Sponsors and Stakeholders
5. **“An Empty Seat Never Recommended Anything to Anybody”**
6. **Quadrants of Audience Participation:**
  - a. **Devoted** – high interest & high capacity
  - b. **Oriented** – high interest & low capacity
  - c. **Asleep** – low interest & low capacity
  - d. **Uninspired** – low interest & high capacity

© 2011 Matt Lehrman; All Rights Reserved

For additional information, please contact Matt Lehrman at [Audience@cox.net](mailto:Audience@cox.net); 602-622-7694.

# Audiences Everywhere: The New Imperative of Audience Engagement

By Matt Lehrman

Presented for the Austin Creative Alliance – Crisis & Opportunity 2.0  
July 28, 2011

---

## 7. The Devoted need to LIVE their Passion

- a. Ambassadors – Who more genuine & compelling to speak at a local Rotary about your upcoming event?
- b. Mentors – Invite “less familiar” audiences to discover how others have invested so deeply in this particular artist or art form.
- c. Fans – If this was a football game, these would be the people in the stands dressed in team attire; give them an opportunity to display their zeal!
- d. Critics – Who better than your best friends to suggest how you can improve the experience?
- e. Family – Cultivate these relationships and they’ll stand by you through thick and thin. In an era of shrinking public and private support, it’s more important than ever to surround your organization with articulate people of passion.

### f. Discussion Points:

- i. Consistency in communication is important; not just haphazard or occasional,
- ii. Communication is a 2-way street; audience must be invited to share ideas in a meaningful way,
- iii. Engaging with audience members does NOT require capitulation of artistic integrity or mission,
- iv. The devoted really CRAVE invitations to talk & participate,
- v. There are so many ways to welcome involvement that go far beyond just selling a ticket or asking for a contribution; it’s time to get very creative on how to engage our most interested audiences.
- vi. How do we identify the devoted? Chances are you need invite them just once – they are truly EAGER to participate if you genuinely and warmly welcome their participation.
- vii. The devoted welcome opportunities to be educated and to volunteer – and not just sit passively as audience members. This is really a whole new paradigm of what it means to be an audience member.

## 8. The Oriented need to be EXCITED

### a. For those you DO know:

- i. Up Close & Personal – Use YouTube to speak to an artist or provide unique insight (just like at the Olympics)
- ii. Boomerang – What experiences can you throw away today that will come back to you tomorrow: “Try it, you’ll like it!”
- iii. Facebook – Create a page for a character in a play, the woodwind section, or even the subject of a painting.

© 2011 Matt Lehrman; All Rights Reserved

For additional information, please contact Matt Lehrman at [Audience@cox.net](mailto:Audience@cox.net); 602-622-7694.

# Audiences Everywhere: The New Imperative of Audience Engagement

By Matt Lehrman

Presented for the Austin Creative Alliance – Crisis & Opportunity 2.0  
July 28, 2011

---

- iv. Recommended Readings -Suggest books, articles, videos and music files that provide background for a coming event, especially if trying something new or unfamiliar.
- v. Informal Outings – “Get to know you” opportunities; Let’s explore together!

**b. For those you DON’T know:**

- i. Census/Community Database – Research & analysis coupled with the power to use it.
- ii. Mutual Admiration Society – What other arts & cultural organizations do you respect whose experiences complement your own?
- iii. Respect the power of design. Understand & evaluate what is pretty versus what is compelling?

**c. Discussion Points:**

- i. It’s interesting to think about what show/exhibition offerings best appeal to “oriented” audiences; how do we link especially appealing shows so that they serve as “gateways” to more “devoted” kinds of experiences?
- ii. This isn’t just a marketing collaboration – organizations can begin to think about linking at the programmatic level. How can we string a series of “oriented” experiences together into something greater than the sum of its parts?
- iii. What’s the value to making the “oriented” feel like VIP’s? Is audience loyalty a myth or reality? (The answer to that depends on data analysis that is becoming increasingly feasible.)
- iv. It is remarkable to realize that the “oriented” are the most open to opportunity – and we do them a huge disservice by isolating them from just what they want. How might we put them in control of their own “experience” destiny?

**9. ROUSE the Asleep**

- a. Make investments today that will yield fruit for generations to come. (like Johnny Appleseed)
- b. **Discussion Points:**
  - i. A lot of support for Matt’s suggestion of “Pay It Forward Day”; this could really distinguish the Austin arts & cultural community!
  - ii. Group would like to spend more time exploring ways to build for the future and agree that this can’t just be the realm of the “education department.”

**10. ENGAGE the Uninspired**

- a. Speak to Benefits Rather Than Features – Date Night, Family Outings, Birthday Parties, Girls Night Out, Singles – all are opportunities to engage audiences before selling “arts & culture.”

© 2011 Matt Lehrman; All Rights Reserved

For additional information, please contact Matt Lehrman at [Audience@cox.net](mailto:Audience@cox.net); 602-622-7694.

# Audiences Everywhere: The New Imperative of Audience Engagement

By Matt Lehrman

Presented for the Austin Creative Alliance – Crisis & Opportunity 2.0  
July 28, 2011

---

- b. Visibility – Join forces with the rest of the arts & cultural community to raise visibility and create a sense of urgency; Collaborative Campaign.
- c. Benchmark – Determine your own local “Arts Participation Rate – and then resolve to demonstrably improve it within the next 3-5 years.
- d. Urban Development – Just as “form follows function,” a community that is built for arts & cultural participation will see its populace engage more.
- e. Discussion Points:**
  - i. Austin Creative Alliance expects to create a “Community Database” in the near future – more information on that will be forthcoming shortly; but the group is very interested in knowing what kind of quantitative benchmarks can be established to measure progress.
  - ii. Understanding ways to “create a sense of urgency” is something that the arts & cultural community would do well to understand & practice better.

**11. These changes in audience behavior are not a “storm to be weathered.”**

- a. This is the new normal.
- b. Necessary to endure the short-term
- c. Vital to ensure the long-term.

**12. Final Thoughts:**

- a. Seek Audiences Everywhere.**
  - i. Take nobody for granted.
- b. If you love your Audience, set them free**
  - i. (free free, set them free)*
  - ii. It is possible to both compete & cooperate.
    - 1. Discussion Point:**
      - a. That would be a meaningful culture change for Austin!
- c. Relish Engagement**
  - i. Pursue meaningful relationships over time.
  - ii. Arts & cultural participation is essential to an engaged citizenry in a democratic society.

###