

INNOVATIVE MARKETING

Mapping & Segmentation Strategies at the Wilma

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The Wilma Theater is Philadelphia's home for compelling and memorable theater. The theater attracts a sophisticated audience and fills a unique niche in Philadelphia's rich cultural marketplace. We are really excited about our work and seek to do more than just fill our seats. Our goal is to deliver an evocative and inspiring theater experience to each of our patrons. However, we also look at the bottom line and know that the Wilma must cultivate new audiences while delivering excellent shows and experiences to all of our patrons. To this end the theater recently embarked on a focused analysis of our core audiences. To do this, we sought to describe our existing audiences, identify "gaps" in the marketplace where there are new potential audiences for the Wilma, and apply this knowledge to enhance the experience of our current patrons by refining our message to them and by drawing in new potential theater-goers.

In seeking to understand audiences better, the Wilma knew it was critical to understand where our patrons are from and what their communities are like in terms of socio-demographics. Through the generosity of two sponsors, we were able to perform a thorough analysis using two methods. First, we used focus groups to ascertain that our mission and marketing messages were clear to our patrons and to understand how we might improve our communications and outreach programs. Second, the

Wilma worked with Avenca Incorporated*, a Philadelphia-based software company, to develop a series of maps that analyze the geographic distribution of the Wilma's constituency. In doing this we characterized the nature of the Wilma's stronghold communities and identified similar communities where patronage of the Wilma Theater is lower than might be expected, based on its socioeconomic likeness to our existing subscriber base.

This mapping technique is just one element in the overall number of audience development strategies at the Wilma. We have created a flexible subscription pass to allow busy and/or younger audience members to attend shows at their convenience, we are constantly identifying and cultivating specific audiences in conjunction with our programming such as school-aged children and adolescents, underserved audiences, visitors, women's rights advocacy groups or even attorneys. We have also expanded our efforts toward more event-based marketing (symposia, pre and post-show conversations, readings on stage), which ultimately allows our patrons to engage in the intellectual conversations that fulfill their theater-going experience.

A key finding of our analysis was that there are areas in the region where the population shares the Wilma demographic, but there are no subscribers. On average, Wilma

subscribers live in neighborhoods with a household income of \$62,651, a population density of 12,521 people per square mile, and where 38% of the population has a college education or more, which is not unusual for a theater-goer stronghold. Using this "typical" Wilma neighborhood derived from our demographic analysis, areas with similar demographics were identified. This analysis highlighted some untapped markets across the region that we had not anticipated. In that respect, we found the analysis extremely helpful and have already taken measures, such as direct mail campaigns and cross-promotions with local businesses in these areas, that will allow us to penetrate these markets.

The Wilma Theater worked with Avenca Incorporated to develop maps, reports, and a database as part of this project. The project was warmly received by the Wilma's board and staff. In our opinion, it highlights the need for arts organizations like the Wilma to seek precise information about their core audiences. Indeed, it is evident that such analyses can not only help plan the marketing and outreach activities that enable arts organizations to deepen relationships with their constituents, but also target untapped markets that have high potential for returns. While this kind of spatial marketing analysis is new to the Wilma, we are excited by the enhanced abilities this technology has already offered the theater.

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* Editor's Note: Avenca works with the Cultural Alliance, developing the local legislative lookup in the Alliance's new online advocacy center, and has worked with The Wilma Theater on developing this mapping "gap analysis". The Mellor Group conducted focus groups for the Wilma.