

Running Head: THE IRISH REPERTORY THEATRE AND TRIPTYCH

The Irish Repertory Theatre and TRIPTYCH

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Table of Contents

The Irish Repertory Theatre and Triptych.....	3
Background.....	3
Mission, Objectives, and Strategies.....	4
Situation Analysis.....	6
Market Summary.....	6
SWOT Analysis.....	6
Alternative Providers.....	8
Services Offered.....	8
Keys to Success.....	9
Critical Issues.....	9
Capabilities and Resources.....	10
Marketing Strategy.....	10
Mission.....	10
Objectives.....	11
Financial Objectives.....	11
Target Markets.....	12
Position.....	13
Ways and Means.....	13
Financials.....	15
Break Even Analysis.....	15
Funding Forecast.....	16
Expense Forecast.....	17
Recommendations.....	18

The Irish Repertory Theatre and Triptych

The Irish Repertory Theatre is an Off-Broadway theatre company celebrating its nineteenth season in New York City. Founded by Ciaran O'Reilly and Charlotte Moore, The Irish Repertory Theatre has gone on to produce dozens of productions and won numerous awards. It is currently at a transitioning point where it is cultivating a more active Board of Directors, expanding its current membership, and attempting to transfer a production to a larger venue where it will enjoy an extended performance run. Recently, The Irish Repertory Theatre opened its first show in its 2004/5 season entitled TRIPTYCH. The show has a notable cast and playwright. However, it opened to mixed-to-poor reviews making the remaining weeks, until closing, very difficult for all parties involved. With a small marketing budget, no marketing staff, and poor reviews, The Irish Repertory Theatre has the challenge of strengthening its core audience to prevent future productions being damaged by poor reviews, attracting enough audience to cover the expenses for the current production, and, furthermore, starting a capital campaign to purchase the theatre and administrative offices it is currently leasing.

Background

Ciaran O'Reilly, Producing Director, and Charlotte Moore, Artistic Director, founded the Irish Repertory Theatre (IRT) in

1988. IRT's administrative offices, a 137-seat main stage, and 37-seat studio theatre all reside at 132 West 22nd Street in Chelsea, New York City. IRT is classified as an Off-Broadway theatre company and is the only professional repertory theatre production company in New York City focusing on Irish and Irish-American dramatic works.

With the current 2004/5 season it is now boasting its nineteenth season, having produced such hits as THE IRISH . . . AND HOW THEY GOT THAT WAY, FINIAN'S RAINBOW, PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD, and EDEN. It has received numerous awards, most notably a Drama Desk award for "Excellence in Presenting Distinguished Irish Drama." IRT produces up to five productions per year with the schedule depending upon the response to the current production.

On October 7, 2004, IRT opened its 2004/5 season with a new play entitled TRIPTYCH written by Edna O'Brien. It stars Ally Sheedy, Margaret Colin, and Carrie Specksgoor. The play has a production length of seven weeks and will close on November 14, 2004.

Mission, Objectives, and Strategies

All theatre production companies have a mission to explore the human spirit, relationships, controversial issues, etc., through the use of the dramatic arts and IRT is no different.

More specifically, however, according to The Irish Repertory Theatre's literature, its mission is threefold:

- to bring works by Irish and Irish-American masters and contemporary playwrights to American audiences,
- to provide a context for understanding the contemporary Irish American experience, and
- to encourage the development of new works focusing on the Irish and Irish-American experience, as well as a range of other cultures.

The objectives of IRT are numerous and are shared by many other theatre productions companies in New York City and around the world:

- Maximize gross & net income
- Increase the number of subscribers and members
- Decrease the number of discounts needed
- Maximize audience attendance
- Increase public visibility
- Increase the renewal rate of subscribers and members
- Increase attendance frequency from non-subscribers and members
- Decrease the amount of marketing dollars spent attracting each patron

Situation Analysis

Market Summary

The market for live theatre is very cyclical. Whether on Broadway, Off-Broadway, or in Regional theatre, there is an audience base from which all theatres must share. The audience is rarely loyal to one theatre and will instead attend a number of quality productions regardless of the actual production company. Currently, with the United States economy rebounding from a recession and the job market on the rise, the theatre industry is seeing an increase in attendance as well as philanthropic gifts from foundations, government, and individuals. Furthermore, theatre companies rarely compete with one another based strictly on product, i.e., the production. Instead, theatre companies compete for the consumers' discretionary dollars. However, it competes not only with others in the industry, but also movies, sports, museums, and any other form of entertainment or discretionary purchase available to the consumer.

SWOT Analysis

IRT's greatest strengths are it has a dedicated staff and volunteer pool, a collaborative and friendly working environment both administratively and in production, all staff are fluid in their responsibilities and are willing to take on other responsibilities as needed, it operates and produces in a shoe-

string budget environment, and offers quality theatre at an affordable price.

The strengths of TRIPTYCH are its cast. With notable actresses Ally Sheedy and Margaret Colin, and a renowned playwright, Edna O'Brien, the production has the resources to garner press and other news articles other than rely on the standard performance reviews.

IRT's weaknesses include the arrangement of the audience seating. The stage is cornered and flanked on two sides by the audience causing a challenge in viewing, staging, and directing. In addition, it has a limited budget for productions and a small, but loyal, patron base from which to sell tickets.

The weaknesses of TRIPTYCH are that it is a new play the benefit of previous productions. Without this production history "buzz," the entire production is being created for the very first time, which is both costly and time-consuming.

The opportunities IRT has are that it frequently receives good reviews resulting in significant public interest. Other opportunities are that it is the only venue in the area focusing on live theatre and Irish culture, the warm and inviting environment that has been created for the audience, the informality of the theatre and the friendliness that is present, a large pool of dedicated members and former members of IRT from which to access, and a very good reputation in the industry.

Threats facing IRT are few, but significant. The primary threat currently facing IRT is its lease is about to expire. Therefore, in addition to producing year round on a limited budget it is also simultaneously beginning a capital campaign to raise the necessary funds to purchase the real estate IRT currently leases. Other threats are a possible loss of charitable contributions such as government or foundation grants, bad reviews, poor programming, and a poor economy.

TRIPTYCH faces two major threats. Its first threat is the limited marketing dollars available to promote and market the production in order to attract an audience. Second, and more importantly, are the poor reviews the show received resulting in a lack of interest from the general public.

Alternative Providers

The Irish Arts Center is a major competitor of The Irish Repertory Theatre in regards to discretionary dollars being spent on Irish culture.

Other alternative providers of live theatre include, but are not limited to, Broadway, numerous other Off and Off-Off-Broadway venues, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, BAM, The Public Theatre, etc.

Services Offered

The Irish Repertory Theatre, and its production of TRIPTYCH, offers the public only a quality evening of theatre in

New York City. The evening is made up of not only the performance itself, but also a warm and inviting environment from which to experience the theatre.

Keys to Success

In order to continue on for many more seasons to come, IRT needs to

- remain committed to its mission,
- work towards its objectives,
- maintain a positive working environment both administratively and in production,
- build alliances with other theatre production companies in the United States and in Ireland, and
- pursue quality work related to the Irish and Irish-American drama.

Critical Issues

The critical issues facing The Irish Repertory Theatre immediately are two fold. One, to expand the name of The Irish Repertory Theatre more broadly than it currently is. It needs to become a household name when one mentions Irish theatre and become the place to go when wanting to experience quality international drama. The second critical issue is to reduce the volatility of each production when it receives poor reviews such as the current production of TRIPTYCH.

Capabilities and Resources

The Irish Repertory Theatre has few resources at its disposal. It has neither full-time staff dedicated to marketing nor a large budget from which to purchase advertising, direct mail, or other forms of marketing instruments.

However, what IRT does have is a loyal patron base and dedicated staff and volunteers. With its long history of quality productions, it has also obtained the respect of the press resulting in feature articles, reviews, and other news items promoting IRT and its productions.

Marketing Strategy

Mission

The marketing mission is two-fold:

1. To attract enough audience members to The Irish Repertory Theatre in order to cover expenses and have a net income large enough to support the organization.
2. To attract enough attention from the general public, including, but not limited to the current audience, government, and foundations, to support its claim to professional production of Irish and Irish-American drama in order to garner ongoing charitable contributions.

These two missions support every aspect of The Irish Repertory Theatre. One is focused on ticket sales while the other is promoting the name of The Irish Repertory Theatre so that it

becomes well know regardless of whether one actually attends a production.

Objectives

The immediate marketing objectives of The Irish Repertory Theatre are to:

1. sell 137 tickets per performance between September 26 and November 14, 2004, when TRIPTYCH closes, for a total of 7,672 tickets during the seven week run.
2. begin marketing and selling the next production, AFTER THE BALL, while TRIPTYCH is currently playing and resulting in a substantial advance before the first preview performance on December 7, 2004.
3. generate enough interest from vendors to entice them to pay to advertise or sponsor specific elements of The Irish Repertory Theatre.

Financial Objectives

The marketing financial objectives of The Irish Repertory Theatre are to:

1. collect ticket sales totaling at least \$129,560, but strive to sell to a maximum capacity of \$331,650 during the seven week run.
2. minimize the number of discounts necessary to sell tickets, i.e., \$5 preview ticket discounts, Theatre

Development Fund discount tickets, TKTS half-price tickets, and complimentary tickets.

3. collect \$110,000 before December 7, 2004, when the next production opens thus covering all of the capitalization expenses before the first performance.
4. collect \$90,000 in program advertisements, ticket stock advertisements, and ticket envelope advertisements from local and regional sponsors and vendors ultimately paying for the entire season's printing needs.

Target Markets

The target market for The Irish Repertory Theatre is its own database. It contains over 35,000 names of those individuals having attended a performance sometime in the last nineteen years. It is made up of the standard theatre-going audience, which are affluent, educated, repeat consumers. In addition, in order to tap into the families embedded within the mailing list The Irish Repertory is going to begin sponsoring Family Nights where the parents can enjoy the performance while the children are being entertained elsewhere learning about Irish drama. Also, in order to tap into the event-driven audience, The Irish Repertory Theatre is going to sponsor wine-tasting sessions or other special events prior to selected performances. Both initiatives are to drive ticket sales towards less popular performances.

Position

The Irish Repertory Theatre is going to position itself as an event-driven theatre company. While most Off-Broadway performances are of high quality, theatre companies need to differentiate themselves in whatever means is at their disposal. The Irish Repertory Theatre will be differentiated by providing not only the quality performance, but will also have strategic alliances with local restaurants and vendors creating pre-show events such as Family Night, Wine-Tasting, etc., ultimately creating a theatre company that makes every audience member part of The Irish Repertory Theatre family.

Ways and Means

The Irish Repertory Theatre will achieve this marketing strategy through an increase in ad placement, strategic alliances, and news and press. More specifically:

1. Regular paid advertisements will be placed in the same place on the same days in the Irish Echo and Irish Voice newspapers promoting not only the current production or event, but also membership at The Irish Repertory Theatre.
2. Regular listings is all the major theatrical listing sections such as the New York Times, New York Post, Daily News, Playbill, BroadwayWorld.com, TheatreMania.com, Broadway.com, etc.

3. Public Service Announcements will be sent to Irish Radio, National Public Radio, and other strategically chosen radio stations with demographics similar to that of The Irish Repertory Theatre.
4. Posters for each production will be created and mailed to every known Irish restaurant, pub, or facility promoting the current production.
5. The Irish Repertory Theatre will work together with selected Irish restaurants cross-promoting each other's product, i.e., IRT will sell discounted meal coupons and the restaurant will sell discounted theatre tickets.
6. Postcards, both production-oriented and general IRT, will be distributed to every known Irish restaurant, pub, or facility for subsequent distribution.
7. Drink coasters will be made and distributed to every known Irish restaurant and pub promoting The Irish Repertory Theatre.
8. The Irish Repertory Theatre will have a presence at cultural festivals in the area promoting its quality theatrical productions and membership.
9. The Irish Repertory Theatre's website will be regularly optimized for greater "searchability" while increasing

the number of hits when searching for theatre in New York and Irish theatre.

10. Tickets distributed to the Theatre Development Fund and/or TKTS are promoted by an outside company thus resulting in a complete sell-out of the discounted tickets.
11. Events are scheduled and promoted to the entire mailing list garnering interest and an increase in attendance at specific performances.
12. The Irish Repertory Theatre targets group sales agents and offers them package deals containing theatre tickets, dinners, and parking at an affordable price for their clients.
13. Hotel Concierges are invited to an early production so they may speak of the current production first hand.
14. Present a Saturday morning children's drama program developing interest in not only the children, but also introducing the parents to The Irish Repertory Theatre.
15. Targeting student groups studying Irish theatre or Irish culture.

Financials

Break Even Analysis

Based on the 2004 fiscal year, The Irish Repertory Theatre needs to generate a breakeven income of \$1.6M. Based on ticket

sales, with an average ticket price of \$45, The Irish Repertory Theatre would need to sell over 35K tickets, or sell out 32 weeks of eight performances each. During the same time period, The Irish Repertory Theatre spent nearly \$300K to generate public interest in the productions and to raise the unearned income through its development and fundraising efforts. For discussion purposes only, at an average of \$45 per ticket, it required a spending of approximately \$8.58 to attract every \$45 ticket.

With the before mentioned strategy of expanding the public awareness of The Irish Repertory Theatre, it is expected to bring the cost of attracting each ticket buyer down by 5-10% to \$7.30 increasing the number of audience members and making every marketing dollar more effective and efficient.

Funding Forecast

Generally, on a cash flow basis, The Irish Repertory Theatre does not have additional funding to spend on these marketing efforts. It will therefore be required to incur the expense first and reap the benefits of increased sales later. However, because of the objective of increasing program advertisements, etc., the IRT will have some funds it was not accustomed to before therefore creating a cash surplus. In addition to this new surplus, it has allocated \$300,000 for marketing and promotion based on historical figures.

Expense Forecast

The expenses incurred in 2004 to garner support, whether through tickets sales or development and fundraising efforts, are as follows:

- Subscription acquisition - \$28,346
- Promotion - \$180,813
- Fundraising & Membership - \$90,163

For the 2004/5 season, subscription acquisition has been eliminated and greater efforts are instead being made to acquire more members.

For the 2004/5 season, the expense forecast is as follows:

- Irish Echo (\$13,000)
- Irish Voice (\$13,000)
- New York Times Listings (\$49,240)
- Posters (\$5000)
- Postcards (\$50,000)
- Drink coasters (\$10,000)
- Cultural festivals (\$2500)
- TKTS Promotion (\$7000)
- Children's Activities (\$2400)
- Fundraising & Membership (\$90,000)
- Membership Acquisition (\$40,000)
- Press Agent & Expenses (\$28,000)

- Other Items (\$5,000)

This will all be accomplished for approximately \$315,000.

Though the overall marketing expense has increased from the previous year, with the increase in spending and more strategic purchases IRT will attract more audience to each performance.

Recommendations

The recommendations to The Irish Repertory Theatre are summarized as:

1. maintain a constant presence year-round through ad placements, mailings, posters, festivals, etc., in lieu of individual performance efforts.
2. Build upon the uniqueness of the IRT environment and add events focused towards special audience groups such as families, singles, gay/lesbians, wine enthusiasts, etc.
3. Be aggressive with marketing. IRT needs to have a role in the Off-Broadway community and go after every discretionary dollar available.

It is with these three recommendations coupled by the marketing strategy outlined that the 2004/5 season of The Irish Repertory Theatre will be its most successful every in its nineteen year history.