

Digital broadcast of theatre
Learning from the pilot season

NT Live





The Cherry Orchard

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All's Well That Ends Well

About this publication

National Theatre Live (NT Live) is the National Theatre's programme of digital cinema broadcasts, launched in 2009. The project marks the first time the live broadcast of theatre performances has been attempted on this scale in the UK.

This publication shares lessons learned through NT Live, and gives an overview of how the National Theatre developed the project. It highlights some of the key issues to consider, and asks what the future may be for this kind of digital delivery.

There is already an active discussion in the sector on how to use digital media to deliver a performing arts experience. This publication should inform that discussion, and share information that could be applied across a range of projects.

NESTA believes that performing arts organisations, like other creative businesses, face opportunities and challenges from digital technology and that there is an urgent need to invest in trials and conduct experiments. Our research shows that not only are digital technologies bringing new audiences to arts and cultural organisations, but they are also creating new sources of cultural and economic value, and in some cases taking the art form in new directions. NESTA's Culture of Innovation report tackles the question of how cultural organisations can find ways to innovate, and can be downloaded at www.nesta.org.uk/publications/reports/assets/features/culture_of_innovation

Arts Council England's ten-year vision, 'Achieving great art for everyone', prioritises digital innovation. It aims to ensure more people experience and are inspired by the arts, and pledges to support organisations who want to achieve this through the use of digital technology.

Organisations newly exploring digital delivery will be searching for inspiration, expertise and shared information. This publication can provide part of this much-needed resource. The last section includes further examples of emerging practice and useful web resources.

NESTA, Arts Council England



Reflections from the National Theatre



We launched National Theatre Live as a genuine experiment. Whilst it was clear that the Metropolitan Opera had triumphed in its programme of live cinema broadcasts, there remained significant artistic questions as to whether the theatrical medium could be successfully captured. Equally, there were challenges in terms of our rights negotiations and trusted relationships with artists, agents and unions. Finally, we felt strongly that we needed to create a model which would be financially sustainable in the long term.

We regarded the feasibility study as an exciting new opportunity to reach more people across the UK, approaching it with a spirit of open-mindedness and treating it as a case study that risked failure.

Within the industry, there was a great deal of scepticism about the nature of recorded performance. From the beginning, we saw cinema broadcasts as an alternative experience, aware that you can never replace the unique experience of being in the actual theatre. However we felt that we could potentially offer a top quality 'second-class' experience that would greatly increase the opportunity for people to see a National Theatre production, especially those outside London.

As we near the end of the second season, we have become more confident in seeing NT Live as an experience on its own. No, it is not the same as being in the theatre and never could be. But we have seen that it can be an experience of artistic merit, and it can honour the integrity of the work and have a significant connection with audiences – it is not second-class, but a different experience.

The support of NESTA and Arts Council England in jumpstarting the research and development of this project was critical. If arts organisations are to continue to be innovative, both in terms of the art form itself and the means by which audiences can access their work, they must be able to experiment.

Whilst the National had previously been developing a range of digital initiatives, NT Live has suddenly created a new and significant audience that can only interact with us remotely, and who can now interact with us more meaningfully, actually seeing whole productions. This represents an exciting opportunity that has led us to form a digital media department that strives to increase reach and deepen engagement with the National's work across an ever-widening range of platforms and channels.

The specific case of live broadcast to cinema is quite a unique case, which, in all likelihood, may not apply to the majority of organisations. However, I hope that some of the lessons and points that have been explored in this publication will provide more background as to how we approached this large-scale project and some stimulus into the wider questions of experimentation and R&D that digital media is introducing to the arts. It is an exciting and challenging time and there are great opportunities to learn from each other and to keep trying new things.

David Sabel

Head of Digital Media, National Theatre



NT Live and digital delivery

NT Live is part of an exciting picture of digital innovation in the arts. Across the sector, artists and organisations are exploring ways to use digital technology to engage audiences. Over the next few years, this engagement is likely to take two main forms. One may use existing theatre content and offer it complete and ready to watch, using a mode of digital delivery. The other may use digital technology's ability to encourage participation and interaction and to promote new co-created content.

NT Live's cinema broadcast programme comes from the first mode of practice, and this publication looks at this area. There are existing models of recording and transmitting performance via other channels in the form of live relay to open public spaces, television broadcast or recorded performance for consumption at home via DVD or, more recently, online download.

With NT Live, theatre has joined other performing arts on the cinema programme. Look at cinema listings today and you may see a whole year of alternative content: from ballet to orchestral music, from opera to plays.

The Metropolitan Opera in New York is the pioneer of this model. Building on its established Saturday matinee radio broadcasts, The Met launched The Met: Live in HD in 2006. It made fresh agreements with its unions, instigating a profit share scheme that shifted payments towards the end of the process once returns were secured, thereby opening the door to a range of new media possibilities. By 2008, more people saw The Metropolitan Opera in cinemas than in the opera house.

Others have followed The Met into UK cinemas. International institutions like La Scala, The Royal Opera, The Royal Ballet, The Bolshoi Ballet, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic have all been available to a geographically wide cinema audience, and the trend continues.

Until NT Live, theatre did not form part of the programme. The biggest barrier was a lack of belief: it was felt that theatre could never benefit from the transition, that acting for stage and screen were different disciplines, and that previous examples of live recordings had been cold and static. Could the magic of theatre survive the move to cinema screens?



Hamlet

The project

The way film is distributed to cinemas is changing, with 35mm prints being replaced by digital copies of the latest releases. Digital distribution has benefits in ease of use, in cost of production, and in security of storage. Cinemas are switching to digital technology, and in the UK this has been accelerated by the UK Film Council's investment in 240 screen projectors across the Digital Screen Network, including many of the country's independent cinemas. Multiplex cinema chains have followed the same path, upgrading cinemas across the UK.

This change in technology has made it possible for alternative content to be screened at cinemas. Some of the earliest examples began in the music industry, accustomed to the capture of live performance, with, for example, a worldwide transmission of a David Bowie concert in 2002. **The Met: Live in HD** brought the same kind of technology to the opera house in 2006.

“Digital distribution has benefits in ease of use, in cost of production, and in security of storage.”





In 2008, the National Theatre began its feasibility study into digital broadcasts to cinemas. It appointed David Sabel as Producer for NT Live and the scheme launched in June 2009 with a production of Racine's **Phèdre**, translated by Ted Hughes and featuring Helen Mirren. By April 2010, the National Theatre had produced four full-length productions for NT Live, including **All's Well That Ends Well**, **The Habit of Art** by Alan Bennett, and **Nation**, an adaptation by Mark Ravenhill of Terry Pratchett's novel. These productions could be shown as a season over the course of several months, building momentum and illustrating the breadth of National Theatre output. The end of the first season had been so popular with audiences that the National added a 'bonus' broadcast of the sell-out hit **London Assurance**, in response to public demand.

NESTA and Arts Council England have been involved in the project since the early stages, and in 2009 NESTA undertook research on two NT Live pilot screenings: **Phèdre** (June), and **All's Well That Ends Well** (October). Survey exercises took place at the original National Theatre performances and at 35 cinemas taking part in NT Live, and two sets of data were compiled: one for the theatre audience and one for the cinema audience.

NESTA aimed to collect key socio-demographic information, as well as insight into motivation, expectation and reaction. Two different productions were surveyed in order to balance out any reaction specific to the show or type of show. The research can be found at www.nesta.org.uk/publications/assets/features/beyond_live

NT Live is now nearing the end of its second season, with a major sponsor, Aviva, on board. Productions for 2010/11 include **Hamlet**, **Frankenstein**, **FELA!**, **The Cherry Orchard**, and two collaborations with partner theatre companies – Complicite's **A Disappearing Number** and the Donmar Warehouse's **King Lear**.

Insights from NT Live

Artistic considerations

Liveness

At this new kind of event, savouring a fleeting moment is part of the pleasure, just as it is in the theatre.

NT Live presents the live transmission as more than a regular cinema screening: it is branded as a special event. There is a positive audience response. Eighty-four per cent of NT Live cinema audiences ‘felt real excitement’ because they knew that the performance they were watching was taking place live that evening. Watching the show with others was also an important factor. Audiences tend to applaud at the end of the screening: they appear to feel connected to the performance and the South Bank audience.

But these benefits of the live experience have also been observed in audiences watching time-delayed NT Live broadcasts. There is a four-week window for the NT Live recording to be shown, and screenings on the other side of the world can take place weeks after the event. It has been a surprise to NT Live to find that these screenings appear to work just as well, suggesting that the atmosphere of the screening and the brand are as important as the instant relay.



The National Theatre made the choice not to edit delayed broadcasts and to present them with all of the live presentation introductions and supplemental material as seen in the simultaneous broadcasts. The intention was to preserve a sense of event so that the collective experience of the performance should remain consistent for all audiences.

In the second season, NT Live added some repeat screenings when demand exceeded the capacity for the live screenings. Anecdotal feedback in non-live territories and for such repeat screenings has shown that the knowledge that it was originally broadcast live seems to be a factor in its appeal, more than if it had been distributed solely as a pre-recorded or edited version.

Scale

NT Live has aimed for grand scale, reinforcing brand attributes of high quality and international stature. The size of cinema screens and the quality of sound help deliver this, so the cinema experience imitates the scale of the theatre experience.

There is more to the experience than imitation, however. The natural advantages of film – the close-up, the cut, the quality of the sound – also allow the NT Live audience new ways of engaging with the work.



The artistic challenge

Filming live performance is challenging. Even if technical quality is high, screened work is judged by the same standards set for stage performances – and the sternest critical appraisal is likely to come from within the project. Artistic Directors are looking for a screened production they can be proud of: a showcase for the producing company's philosophy and high quality output.

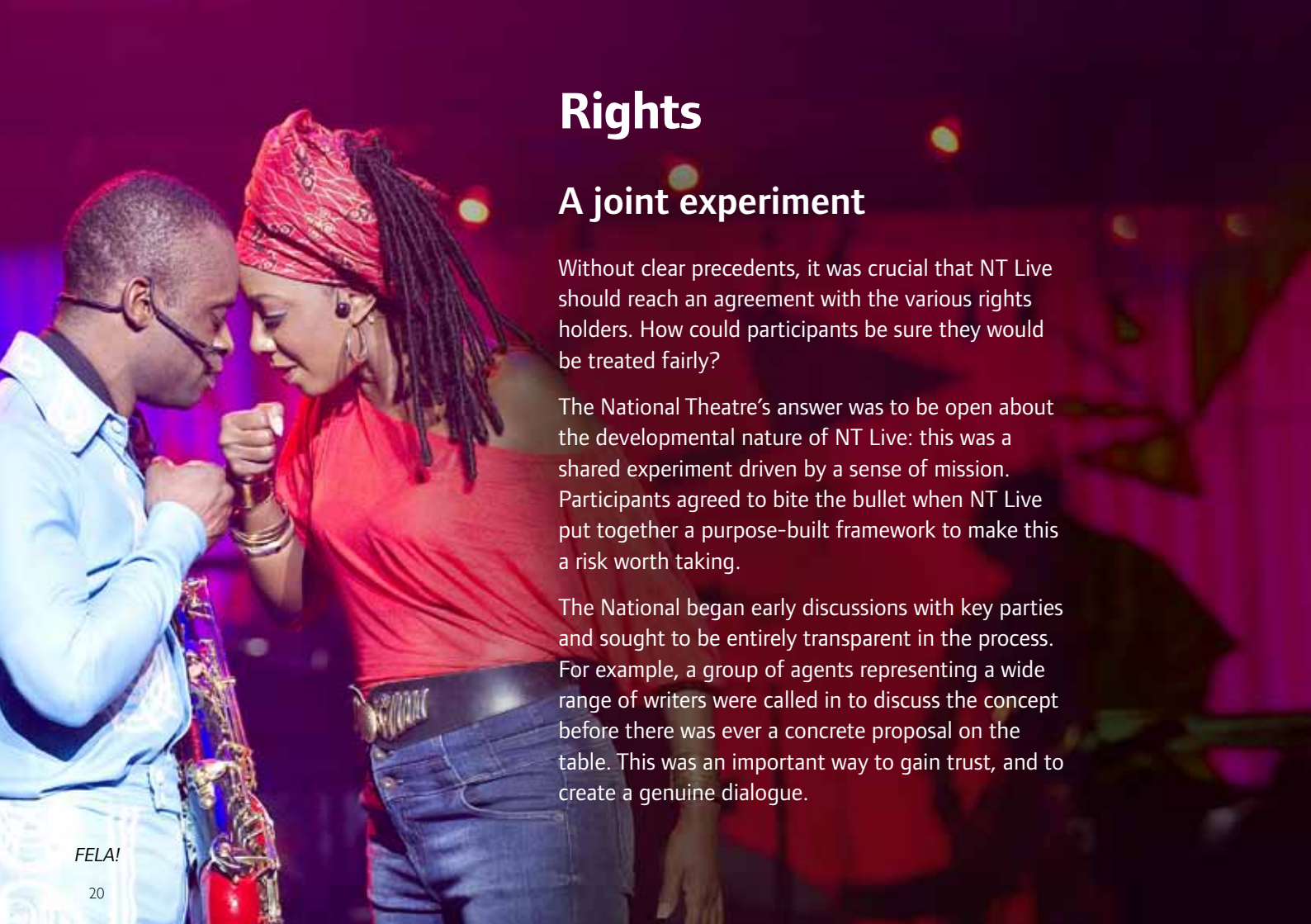
At the National Theatre, Director Nicholas Hytner had some previous experience of mounting stage and opera productions, which had subsequently been broadcast live on television or to a public screen. Hytner insisted on flexible camera positions that could offer screen audiences the best seats in the house. NT Live took a 'studio' approach to filming, where camera positions were reserved within the seating plan regardless of box office value, and the camera script was devised and rehearsed in tandem with stage rehearsals. For the night of the live transmission, filming the show was the priority. By producing the broadcasts in-house, NT Live integrated the broadcast elements into the theatre production process, establishing a close collaboration between the Camera Director and the Stage Director, as well as the wider theatre creative team.

“NT Live took a 'studio' approach to filming, where camera positions were reserved within the seating plan regardless of box office value.”

Lessons learned

- 'Liveness' can be communicated successfully through satellite transmission of live theatre, and audiences value this unique atmosphere.
- Whilst 'actual' or simultaneous liveness may not be critical, capturing the sense of event and the atmosphere of the live performance may enhance the audience's experience.
- Cinemacasts can achieve very high quality, and in certain specific ways can surpass the theatre experience.
- Cinemacasts and live theatre are two distinct experiences – there is no evidence that one audience takes from the other.
- NT Live's production process is geared to making a high-quality screened product, and for the night of the screening, this is the priority – the audience in the theatre is not a normal paying public whom the cameras must avoid disrupting.






Rights

A joint experiment

Without clear precedents, it was crucial that NT Live should reach an agreement with the various rights holders. How could participants be sure they would be treated fairly?

The National Theatre's answer was to be open about the developmental nature of NT Live: this was a shared experiment driven by a sense of mission. Participants agreed to bite the bullet when NT Live put together a purpose-built framework to make this a risk worth taking.

The National began early discussions with key parties and sought to be entirely transparent in the process. For example, a group of agents representing a wide range of writers were called in to discuss the concept before there was ever a concrete proposal on the table. This was an important way to gain trust, and to create a genuine dialogue.



It was clear that the project was unlikely to make money in the short term and that the project's aims were clearly founded in the National's responsibilities as a publicly funded institution. As the National was prepared to take on the financial and reputational risk on its own, it created a context of joint venture for all parties involved. Having the driving support of the most senior members of the organisation was critical; equally, securing the support of key artists of significant profile, such as Helen Mirren and Alan Bennett, created ambassadors for the programme and a willingness to take part in the experiment. Nicholas Hytner agreed to be Executive Producer of the programme which helped to ensure participants that quality was a key consideration.

In the initial discussions, there was much debate about how extensive a rights agreement should be. It is often thought best to secure all future rights upfront so as to avoid awkward negotiations at a later date. The Metropolitan Opera had negotiated a deal in which profits from all future use of the recording (TV, DVD, online, etc.) would be shared amongst the various stakeholders. The National considered this approach but felt that it would be a difficult negotiation to agree rights for uses which were not yet foreseen and for which the demand and risk was entirely unclear. The National knew that its aim and passion was recreating the live, shared experience in the cinema. If, after the live broadcast, all parties looked at the recording and felt it could have a successful future life, then it was more sensible to cross such bridges at that point. This allowed NT Live to move swiftly in its negotiations for the pilot season.



NT Live built a degree of flexibility into the deal, in order to increase sustainability of the project. In the end, a four-week window was agreed (from the date of the live broadcast), allowing venues to show the screening up to four times. This was designed primarily for delayed territories where the possibility of multiple screenings allowed for a wider distribution.

The deal paid a sensible upfront fee for work incurred (two camera rehearsals) but also created a generous profit-share framework for royalty distribution should the project become commercial. The aim was to increase access to the National's work and this was supported by the various rights holders and artists involved; however, the National was committed to sharing the bulk of any profits arising with those involved. The National did not build NT Live as a profit-making venture, but created a business model within it.

In this project, successful rights negotiations were built on transparency, and a shared interest in the long-term development of theatre.

Lessons learned

- Very early conversations on rights are essential.
- NT Live negotiations benefited from being open about the experimental nature of the project, and by putting an emphasis on quality.
- Having ambassadors supporting the programme is key, both from within the organisation and for participants involved.
- There is a spirit of adventure about NT Live that has seen it willing to work in different ways, find new partners, employ new financial models, and take new artistic approaches.
- It is important to distinguish between commercial and mission-related activities; however, the pursuit of not-for-profit mission and commercial exploitation need not be mutually exclusive.
- Currently, each arts organisation will have to negotiate its own partnerships. Other examples of rights models are provided in the further resources section. In future, there may be a role for a universal framework relating to legal rights and digital delivery.



Production logistics

The project cycle at NT Live

A distilled picture of the NT Live Project Cycle in its inception is shown in Figure 1. Here, buy-in to the project at the top of the organisation has been vital to NT Live's success. National Theatre senior management and the NT Live Producer work together at the start of the project, and the Producer subsequently works closely with the Stage Director.

The project cycle then moves to a negotiation on rights, and proceeds through logistics (staffing, distribution, marketing), then production and rehearsal, and ultimately to performance. Inevitably, these stages overlap particularly as the programme takes shape over a season of productions.

The heart of the broadcast production process is from A to B in Figure 1. This process has been developed during the pilot season. From the start, NT Live made a key decision to have two camera rehearsals, with time in between for notes and amendments.

Whilst this had a financial implication (it is more common for there to be only one rehearsal in previous recordings of live performance for broadcast), it allowed the camera team and Stage Director to refine the capture significantly and be more ambitious in the camera scripting and recording.

Preparation time for broadcast considerations, such as makeup, re-lighting and sound capture, are built into the schedule, again reflecting the philosophy that the cinema audience is the priority for this performance.

“Buy-in to the project at the top of the organisation has been vital to NT Live's success.”

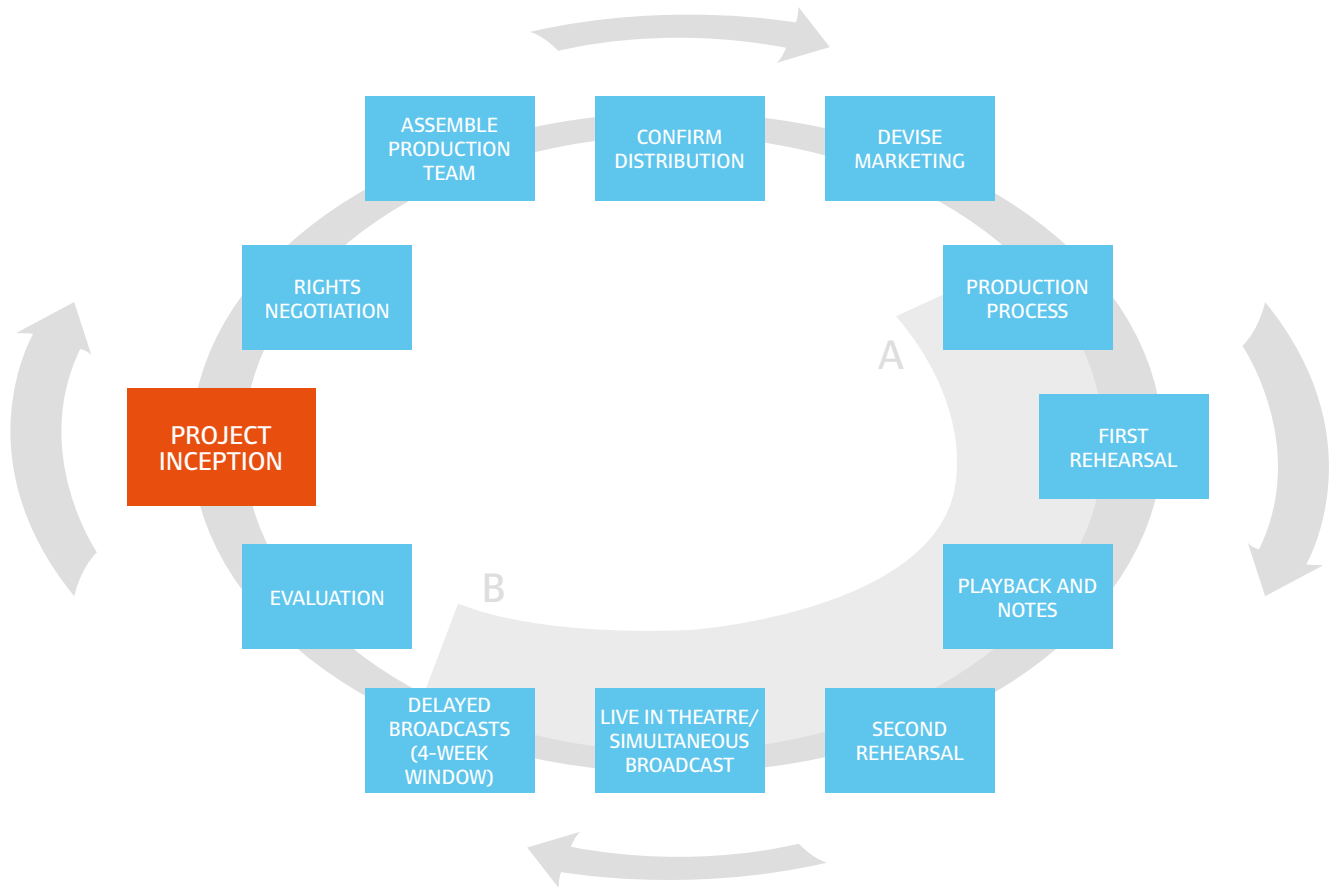


Figure 1 The project cycle at NT Live

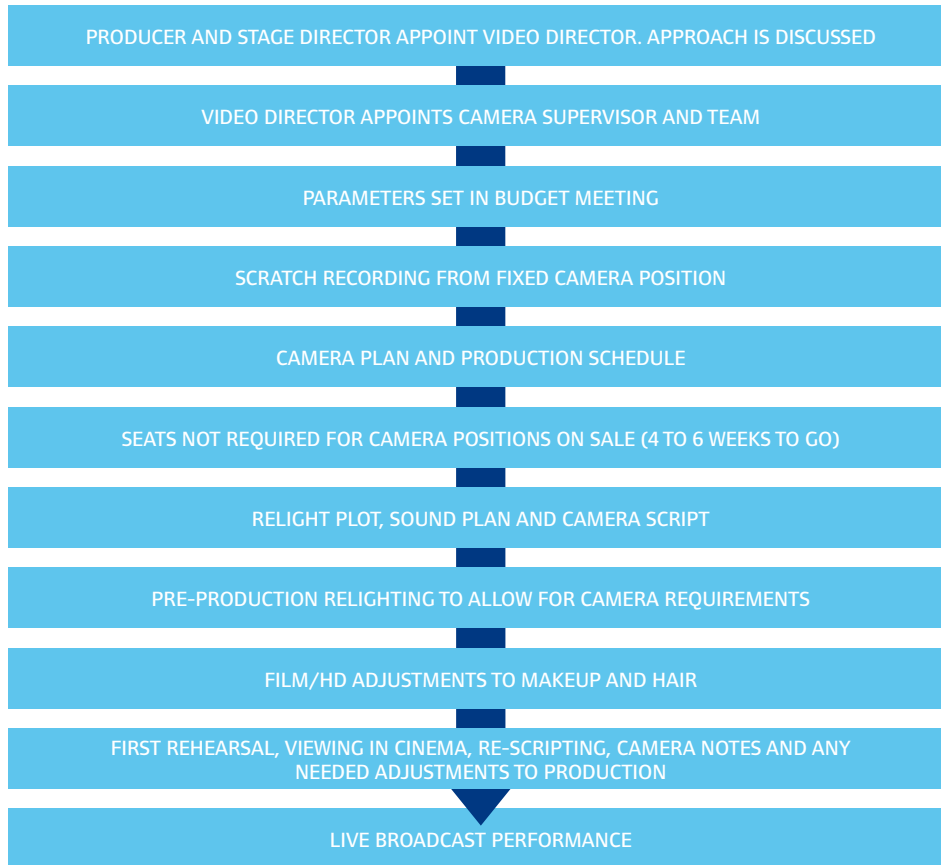


Figure 2 **The broadcast production sequence in overview**

The overall sequence of events within this production process is shown in Figure 2.

A team has been assembled to staff this production process, partly using existing personnel, and partly through the employment of freelance specialists. NT Live has proved a learning opportunity for many National Theatre technical staff and the in-house team has grown skilled and autonomous at helping to produce the events. Nonetheless, there will always remain a significant need for the expertise of an external broadcast team. On any live broadcast (though it may vary according to production) a total team of around 40 external members comprise the broadcast team. It has been extremely important to NT Live to integrate any external members seamlessly with internal staff. Systems and processes have been developed over time and strong relationships between regular freelancers and permanent staff have been built. By producing the broadcasts in-house, NT Live sought to create a collaborative approach and not alienate theatre staff from an external broadcast production team.

Key roles from the production team are described below and on page 29. In the case of NT Live, the roles of Producer, Broadcast Production Manager and Floor Manager have been sourced in-house from existing expertise. This has helped to create a collaborative approach between a large team of freelancers and internal staff.

Producer: in-house NT Producer oversees all aspects of broadcast production (artistic, technical and financial) and managing the cinema distribution, as well as working with the NT's marketing and press departments to promote the events.

Technical Producer: freelancer with expertise in the technical production of live global broadcasts brought in to work across all NT Live productions; liaises with the outside broadcast and satellite uplink vendors, monitors and advises on all technical aspects of the live broadcast.



All's Well That Ends Well



Broadcast Production Manager: oversees liaison between internal NT staff and external outside broadcast staff, and works with the show's Production Manager where adjustments to the production may be required. Produces schedules and call sheets in conjunction with broadcast team and theatre stage managers.

Floor Manager: manages the floor during rehearsals and live broadcast, as the communications link to the production gallery and the theatre.

Video Director: experienced live, multi-camera director.

Camera Supervisor: works with the Video Director and oversees the team of camera operators.

Script Supervisor: responsible for producing the camera script and calling the camera cues and shots during the transmission.

Vision Mixer: responsible for mixing the live transmission working with the Video Director.

Broadcast Sound Supervisor: freelancer with expertise in mixing sound for live cinema broadcast.

Broadcast Lighting Supervisor: freelancer with expertise in lighting for camera/broadcast. Works closely with the Lighting Designer and Lighting Board Operator on adapting the design where necessary.

Outdoor Broadcast Unit Manager: head of the outside broadcast unit facility and responsible for all outside broadcast staff and provisions.



Lessons learned

- While NT Live has chosen to manage production logistics in-house, it has also drawn on external expertise brought in for the preparation and for the night of the screening.
- Each show needs a slightly different approach, but this is best managed following a process template.
- A collaborative approach is key to success. It is important the broadcast team works seamlessly with the theatre staff.
- There are a large number of people working on a live broadcast with a wide range of responsibilities; communication is critical and a strong overseeing organisation is needed to ensure nothing slips through the cracks.



Marketing and promotion

With NT Live, the National Theatre sought to create a way to engage new audiences with its wide variety of productions. The National has created a distinct brand in NT Live, one identified with the live broadcast programme which aims to eventually grow an international following.

NT Live is presented in seasons, aiming to create a sense of momentum and build a loyal audience. Marketing materials have also been produced to support the NT Live programme with a specially created logo and consistent design theme.

One of the challenges was how to introduce NT Live to audiences outside the UK. While the National Theatre has a respected international profile, there are many 'national theatres' in different countries and the National does not have the same global reach as New York's Metropolitan Opera. So it was important in developing NT Live that the National found new ways of communicating its reputation and diverse programme to an audience not necessarily familiar with its work.

International distribution brings additional challenges for marketing. However, the UK is well known for its excellence in theatre and NT Live used the 'Live from London' hook as a way of building interest and awareness in the programme. In the second season, because of partnerships with Complicite and Donmar, NT Live's strap line became 'Best of British Theatre broadcast to cinemas around the world.'

The other challenge facing NT Live was how to market itself successfully, with very limited resources, in hundreds of different venues around the world. As it would be impossible to have a marketing budget in every place where NT Live plays, the National is very dependent on its partner cinemas to successfully promote the events.



Tools

NT Live cannot print and distribute assets for all venues, but is equally keen to retain a consistent brand and provide venues with the materials needed to facilitate their marketing. An online marketing toolkit helps cinemas promote NT Live screenings. This includes designed materials for print and, where possible, an online trailer or other rich media marketing materials. The National's key marketing expenditure has been in producing a cinema trailer. The trailer is created in-house at the National Theatre, and then formatted for distribution by a screen advertising agency. Trailers are usually shown five to six weeks prior to the broadcast. Due to the costs, the National does not produce a trailer for every show; for the second season a season trailer promoted the whole range of productions and the concept of NT Live.

The NT Live website plays a prominent role in marketing the event, in direct communication with audiences, and also as a resource for cinemas who can use it to download print and online trailers. NT Live works closely with its international distributor and partner cinemas to encourage their marketing efforts and provide information and support where possible. This has meant frequent communication with cinemas, hosting conference calls with all partners at the launch of a production and providing low-cost materials that can be distributed digitally, such as press sheets and online videos.

Because cinemas handle ticket sales, there is no consistent data capture for NT Live, which makes communicating to audiences more challenging. In order to grow a community the National can market to, an e-subscriber list has been promoted on the website and social media outlets, particularly Facebook and Twitter, have been used. Press activity and a limited use of media advertising in key territories completes the marketing mix.





Pricing

NT Live began the pilot season with a price guide of £10 per ticket. This was partly due to its desire to keep ticket prices accessible and not to exceed the lowest ticket price at the National (at that time, £10 as part of the Travelex £10 Season). NESTA's research suggested that audiences were willing to pay £15.

In order to reduce losses from the pilot season and increase sustainability, NT Live set a pricing guide of up to £15 in the second season (prices vary and are set by each venue). After the success of the first season, it was felt that NT Live created a valuable proposal to audiences and represented a premium on cinema tickets they were willing to pay.

Internationally, the general rule of thumb has been twice the price of a cinema ticket. Income from international ticket sales has helped to subsidise the UK programme.

The correct market level for an NT Live ticket is influenced partly by the standard price of a cinema ticket, but also by the cost of a theatre ticket for the same production.

Lessons learned

- Touring companies will recognise this process of producing marketing assets and liaising with partners. The main challenge that NT Live has had to address has been in building a new brand and marketing to so many venues at one time.
- International distribution has required NT Live to take a second look at how its brand works abroad, and to assert the key benefits in different terms.
- Digital distribution of theatre lends itself to promotion through digital marketing tools, such as web, social media and email.



The Cherry Orchard

Audience

A bigger, more geographically diverse audience for the show, but still a core theatre audience.

On 25 June 2009, the performance of **Phèdre** at the National Theatre secured an audience of around 50,000, including audiences in Europe and North America. In terms of audience capacity, it was a straightforward advance and with each screening outside London, NT Live reached people who were otherwise unlikely to have seen the show.

Beyond this, NESTA's research offers detail on the role NT Live is playing in audience development for theatre. It tells us that NT Live is effective in reaching new audiences for the production: the cinema screenings significantly increased the 'virtual capacity' of the National Theatre. Over 90 per cent of attendees said that the proximity of the cinema was important and a significant number attended the cinema screening because the theatrical performance had sold out. Thus NT Live enabled the National Theatre to take the play to people who would not otherwise have been able to attend, because of constraints of distance or unavailability of tickets.

NT Live appears to have drawn in larger lower income audiences than those at the theatre and audiences were attracted to a new way of experiencing theatre. A quarter of the cinema audience earned under £20,000 per year, and those earning under £50,000 per year was half as small as at the theatre.



NT Live is not, however, a tool for attracting entirely new audiences to theatre. Ninety-one per cent of the cinema audience had been to a play that year, and only 4 per cent said they had little or no knowledge of theatre. Audiences for NT Live were also regular cinema-goers: 77 per cent had visited the cinema in the last 12 months.¹

Arts marketing often turns to art house cinema to supply an intelligent, adventurous audience, in the knowledge that there is a high level of cross-over between this audience and that for theatre. NT Live has found a way to take the product directly to this audience.

Exploring a new interface with theatre

Cinema audiences reported high levels of emotional engagement with the play, even compared with their peers at the theatre performance. Satisfaction levels on key indicators ('I was totally absorbed', 'I was transported to another world and lost track of time' and 'I felt an emotional response to the play') were 15 per cent higher among cinema audiences than at the theatre. The chance to see the actors 'up close' provided an additional dimension to the screening.

NT Live audiences also enjoyed the 'live' aspect. Eighty-four per cent of cinema audiences felt real excitement because the performance was taking place at that moment at the National Theatre. They enjoyed the collective experience of watching in a group.

1. Please note that this research was undertaken on the first two shows – *Phèdre* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. More recent shows such as *FELA!* and *Frankenstein* have seen a more diverse demographic.

Lessons learned

- NT Live has generated larger audiences for individual performances, and reached new audiences for the National Theatre's work.
- The quality of NT Live is considered high, and some aspects of the screened performance are more emotionally engaging than the stage performance.
- There may be limits to the 'anytime, anywhere' attitude to the consumption of content. The response to the live aspect of NT Live would suggest that there is a right time and a right place for some cultural experiences.



Frankenstein

Sustainability

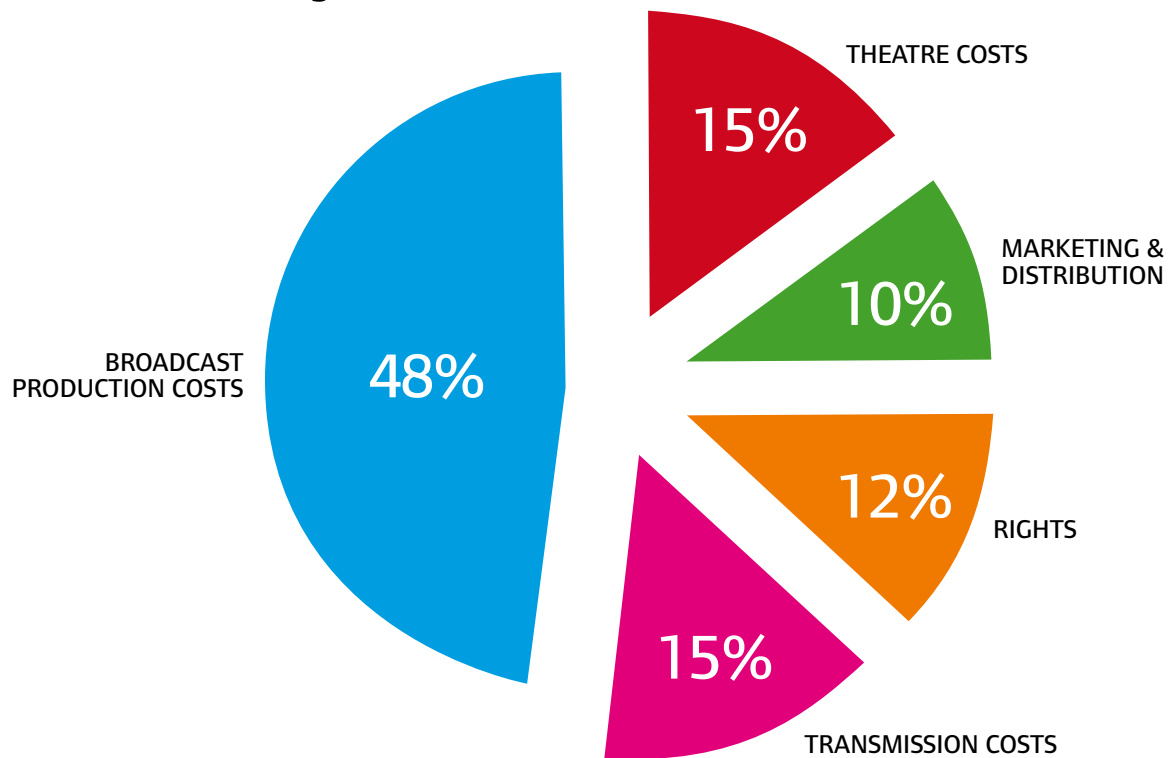


Figure 3 Costs of NT Live

In-house production

NT Live is very much an in-house project. External expertise is brought in where necessary, but the emphasis is on internal control and integration. The decision to produce the recording of the show in-house is in line with this philosophy, and has also proved cost-effective.

Distribution

It was crucial for NT Live to understand how distribution of the product was going to work. It became clear that sustainability could never be achieved with only a UK distribution, particularly when the rights agreement did not include future use of the recording. The NT Live brand would have to be effective across the world.

While NT Live coordinated UK distribution in-house, it also employed an external agency, BY Experience <http://byexperience.net/>, to manage the international distribution.





Price and cinema capacity

The capacity of cinemas to show alternative content is also limited and scheduling is a key factor in distribution. While looking for a space in the programme, NT Live was steered away from highly competitive weekends. In the UK, for example, 'Orange Wednesdays' made Wednesday nights difficult. Thursday nights were chosen over traditionally slower nights at the beginning of the week.

An additional influence on capacity is that cinema spaces for alternative content tend to be small: the average seating capacity for an NT Live screening is around 200. By expanding its international distribution to include around 400 cinemas globally, NT Live's total capacity is significant. Only with this global distribution is the model financially feasible.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship and external funding can help income and expenditure balance in an experimental venture such as this. There is no doubt that NT Live has many attractive features for a sponsor, with its accessible proposition, its large audience base and its global reach. Aviva's recent commitment as a project sponsor confirms this.

Lessons learned

- Although NT Live is produced in-house, the producers have engaged external expertise. Bringing together specialist freelancers and existing theatre staff has proved a cost-effective approach.
- A global distribution network has been essential to NT Live's financial feasibility.
- Initiatives such as NT Live have the potential to attract sponsorship, offering benefits relating to access, wide brand awareness and innovation.
- NT Live has produced and distributed performances originated by other producing companies (Complicite and Donmar Warehouse). Collaborative working helps to contain costs and make a project achievable by working as a co-production, whereby partners share the costs and risks.²

2. NT Live has expanded in its second season to include collaborative partnerships and co-productions with other British theatre companies. NT Live has built a distribution network of cinemas, grown an audience looking for theatre content and refined a production process for successfully filming live performance and would like to share this learning and expand its programme to include the work of selected partners, as with Complicite and Donmar Warehouse. This allows NT Live to diversify its offering and become a brand whereby people can see a range of top-quality British theatre at their local cinema.



A Disappearing Number

Conclusions and the future

Digital technology is sure to play a part in the way producing theatres engage with their audiences in the future.

Funding opportunities are likely to reflect this. Arts Council England has identified digital innovation as a priority for artists and organisations looking for ways to engage audiences.

NESTA sees cultural organisations at a digital crossroads, and urges them to experiment and develop new business models. It believes there are benefits to be gained in attracting new audiences, creating new cultural and economic value, and taking artforms in new directions.

NT Live is a successful experiment, and part of this success is in the exposure it has given to the key questions around digital delivery: questions about quality, sustainability and the audience.



All's Well That Ends Well

Quality

Quality is paramount: for the audience, but also for everyone involved in the production. It can make the difference between success and failure in rights negotiation and can determine whether or not the organisation's leadership can embrace the project.

Theatre practitioners have tended to approach live broadcasts with low expectations of quality, fearing that the buzz of live performance will be lost in the transmission. They forecast cold, static records of far-distant events that only reinforce the idea that 'you had to be there'.

But time and again, the actual experience is more positive. Audiences enjoy the HD quality and surround sound, the close-ups of performers, a convincing sense of 'liveness', as well as the opportunity to see additional material such as backstage interviews and post-show 'Q and A'.

NT Live is an example of how specific problems – in this case, the traditionally 'flat' feeling of recorded performances – can be resolved.

Producing companies using new technology should be encouraged to create experiences that some audiences will prefer above all others, creating new products that are different from stage performances. NT Live has shown that a new form of high quality theatre experience is possible.





Sustainability

The NT Live model is not for every organisation. Given the substantial cost of producing material for broadcast, of securing rights to distribute it, and of covering marketing and satellite broadcast costs, live transmission to cinemas appears to be out of reach to all but a few international companies. Even in these cases, sustainability depends on global distribution, and because of its global reach, NT Live is supported by additional external funding or sponsorship.

But not everyone has had to go it alone. NT Live's promotion of Donmar Warehouse and Complicite productions show that companies can tap into the delivery model without having to fund everything themselves. Digitaltheatre.com has provided a similar service routed to private screens for The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Young Vic, The Royal Court and others. Production companies, such as Illuminations, have produced filmed versions of stage productions with the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Royal Opera House has enjoyed a long partnership with the BBC and its own production arm, Opus Arte, has also filmed for other companies, such as Shakespeare's Globe.

NT Live is reaching a sustainable model in its second season. As the number of cinemas has grown to nearly 400 venues worldwide (110 of these in the UK alone) and continues to widen, the project is expected to be modestly profitable. NT Live has made some key efficiencies with budgets, but high fixed costs and

the programme will continue to need some increased management resource as the number of productions expands. However, the audience is also steadily growing, with capacity levels rising. The aim is to continue to grow the shared experience in cinemas, but NT Live will also explore models of recorded delivery, as a way of further increasing access, growing the brand of NT Live and potentially creating a new revenue stream for the National and the artists working there.

Audience

We know that NT Live was a good fit for a cinema audience who already had an active interest in theatre. They wanted to try it, and they enjoyed the experience. Indeed, they liked some aspects of it better than ‘the real thing’. The research also suggests that National Theatre audiences are not likely to desert the theatre for the cinema.

“The Met cinemacast programme seems to have been a contributing factor to overall rises in box office, subscriptions and donations.”

However much they enjoy a cinema broadcast, a theatre lover will still find time to visit the theatre. The National Theatre points to the experience at The Met where its cinemacast programme seems to have been a contributing factor to overall rises in box office, subscriptions and donations between

2006 and 2008. The development of the brand and audiences’ relationship with it undoubtedly had an effect here.

Looking more widely, we can predict that there will be people that respond well to any digital delivery innovated by arts providers. We can predict what kind of people they will be, too. Where the content is recognisable as theatre product, it is very likely that these people will also be existing theatre audiences. At first, they will tend to be interested in the mode of delivery itself, rather than the content. NESTA research suggests that NT Live audiences had very different motivations for watching the performance compared to theatre audiences: a key interest (especially in the first shows) was in the delivery mechanism and the technology. They may also use this mode of delivery because it is convenient. In the NESTA research, a third of cinema audiences chose screen over stage because it was closer to their home.

At the simplest level, we can see that a National Theatre production reaches significantly more of the population through NT Live than would otherwise be the case. The story so far suggests we need to look right across the field of potential for digital delivery and continue to explore and experiment. We need the right content, the right modes of delivery, and the right brands. It is for the sector to discover what those successful combinations will be.



The Habit of Art



Further resources

NT Live at www.ntlive.com

Met Opera: Live in HD at www.metoperafamily.org

Some other examples of practice with digital broadcast

There is a range of other theatre practitioners experimenting with digital technology in new ways to get content out in more ways to larger audiences. This is not intended as an exhaustive list, but as a source of inspiration for those seeking to build their digital expertise.

English National Opera (ENO) and **Sky** collaborated on a world-first broadcasting project of live opera in 3D. The partnership created the world's first 'quadcast' on 23 February 2011, with a live broadcast on Sky Arts 2 (HD), Sky 3D and live into selected cinemas in 3D around the UK. The fourth element of the 'quadcast', onto Sky Arts 1, included interviews about the concept and with people behind the scenes.
www.eno.org

Pilot Theatre (www.pilot-theatre.co.uk) shares audio, video and images, blogs, actively uses Facebook and Twitter, has created its own Second Life space and online games. It has also launched an online broadcast channel for live streaming of events **www.livestream.com/PilotTheatre**

National Theatre Wales (www.nationaltheatrewales.org) has developed its own very active 'ning' (social network) site **<http://community.nationaltheatrewales.org>** as an open platform to inform theatre development in Wales; online discussion is integrated with the making of the work. The site also opens out rehearsals and events, and includes discussion spaces for a range of separate interest groups.

Nitro Theatre (www.nitro.co.uk) uses a range of video, audio and photography tools to share its content, including live streaming of events.

Liverpool-based venue **FACT** hosts its own online video platform, FACT Player (**www.fact.tv**) On the platform, audiences can view exhibitions and events in high definition, easily share and feed videos and make their own playlists.

C and T (www.candt.org) is a company of drama practitioners, technologists, web designers and teachers creating works for schools and adults, shared through a mix of performance, learning and new media.

Shift Happens (www.shift-happens.co.uk) is a conference which demonstrates to the arts, learning and technology sectors how to make the most of the growing opportunities of technology. Video footage of previous conferences is available on the website.

Digital Theatre (www.digitaltheatre.com) is a partnership of theatres including the Almeida Theatre, the English Touring Theatre, the Royal Court, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Young Vic, working together to capture live performance authentically and in high-definition online. Digital Theatre has developed a library of diverse productions, available as paid-for downloads with free trailers and behind the scenes material. Digital Theatre launched a free iPhone app enabling instant access to information and booking facilities for productions around the UK.

Theatre Sandbox (www.theatresandbox.co.uk) is a commissioning scheme for six theatre artists and companies to research and develop new ideas using pervasive media technologies – any experience that uses sensors and/or mobile/wireless networks to bring you content that is sensitive to your situation.

Opus Arte (www.opusarte.com) is owned by the Royal Opera House and enables the company to offer live and pre-recorded cinema screenings in over 20 countries with developments in 3D and online delivery.

Bushgreen (www.bushgreen.org) is an online community that connects playwrights and other theatre practitioners and allows playwrights to publish their plays online. It was conceived and built by the Bush Theatre.

Blast Theory (www.blasttheory.co.uk) is one of the most adventurous artists' groups using interactive media, creating new forms of performance and interactive art that mixes audiences across the internet, live performance and digital broadcasting.

Body>Data>Space (www.bodydataspace.net) is a collective of artists and designers engaged in creating connections between performance, architecture, new media and virtual worlds.

Slung Low (www.web.me.com/slung.low) is a company specialising in new work. At the core of the company's work is the intention to use all the technology and resources available and relevant to the demands of each story.

Free and low-cost digital tools

Digital technologies are changing business practice and business models across the cultural industries. Not every organisation has the capacity to run experiments on the scale of NT Live, but it is important to explore digital tools to understand what works best for different forms of content and organisation. There is a range of tools, many of which are available for free, which can transform or enhance the experience of delivering content to audiences. The following section offers tips about tools which are simple to use without technological knowledge and do not require a big team to run. Understanding how these can work for you is a valuable starting point for digital innovation. There are also great opportunities for collaboration across arts organisations, through shared learning, shared investment in resources and technical development.



The Cherry Orchard

Video, audio and images

- Live does not have to mean cinema. Explore the Livestream tools to stream shows and live post-show chats with directors and actors direct to your website or on mobile devices.
- Consider putting the first ten minutes of the show or a trailer on Vimeo or YouTube and linking through to the box office page to drive sales.
- Use digital media to open up the process, for instance live streaming technical rehearsals to give audiences a wider range of access points to the work.
- Audioboo and Soundcloud are mobile/web platforms that allow you to record and upload audio in reasonable quality.
- Take photographs of people at performances and events and put them on Flickr or Picasa. Flickr is free for up to 200 images.
- Interview attenders at your events about what they thought and put these online.
- Skype is an excellent free tool for post-show chats with select groups, for instance conversations between the cast and a school group.
- Consider mobile phone opportunities, bearing in mind that content needs to work well in this format. Screen and format size and the way in which people engage with content on their phones may be limiting, but there is a growing market in entertainment 'apps'.

Social media

- Encourage the director, writer, or actors to write on Twitter. Blogs or diaries in rehearsal can make your potential audience feel part of the production process. It can also improve your ranking in organic search and contribute to building an audience before the show.
- Combine strength with other institutions around you by hosting a ‘tweetup’, a meeting of people on Twitter, to discuss ideas and collaborate.
- Hire a freelancer familiar with social media to seed your show on social media sites.
- If you don’t want to be on Facebook, add the like-button to your website and your event pages so that your audiences can share it with their friends.
- Claim your venue on Foursquare and add your events to Foursquare to understand your audiences better. Let your audiences know that shows are on Foursquare with a sign at the entrance to the venue.
- Social media can be a powerful tool in supporting a production. You can recruit extras, get audiences to comment on developing scripts or productions in rehearsal and then mobilise your community of participants to market your show.

Blogging

- As well as Twitter, start a blog for your organisation. WordPress and Blogger are free services.
- Add audience comments and reviews to blogs. Don't forget to include a link to your homepage where they can find more information.
- Invite bloggers to your events (as you would invite the press) and encourage them to write about it. Google 'blog + the name of your city' or check out the frequent commenters on the website of the local newspaper to find local bloggers.

Digital tools for understanding your audience

- Google the name of your show the day after and see what others might have written. Also embrace Twitter as a 'listening' platform.
- Sign up to Google Alerts and Mediafunnel to get automated emails about where people are talking about you.
- Install Google Analytics on your website - a free tool which offers details of the number of visitors and what they visited before they went to your site.

Building digital into your organisation's culture

- Assign a member of the team to each of the platforms you use to ensure it is up to date and feels personal and not a corporate sell.
- Open your wifi network for your audiences.
- Use a principle of 'digital amplification' across your work, from ticket booking to downloadable educational resources, and from streaming content to social media, listening and engaging tools.
- Do not be afraid to experiment. Take a 'perpetual beta' approach which allows you to add in new features to your web/digital content and engage your audience as real-time testers.
- Do not mistake popularity for financial success: getting thousands of hits is great but be sure that there are ways to translate hits into sales.
- Test your digital campaigns with your audiences... then test them again.
- Digital content, marketing and distribution are constantly evolving worlds. Try to keep your knowledge fresh and if you can afford it, bring in an expert, or support a member of the team to stay across digital trends.



Photographer credits

Simon Annand

All's Well That Ends Well (pages 4 - 5, 28 & 47)

Catherine Ashmore

Frankenstein (cover, pages 10, 41 & 54)

London Assurance (pages 23, 36 & 62)

Phèdre (pages 33, 39 & 43)

The Cherry Orchard (pages 3, 22, 37 & 57)

Stephanie Berger

A Disappearing Number (pages 45 & 49)

Tristram Kenton

FELA! (pages 20, 31 & 44)

Johan Persson

The Habit of Art (pages 15, 19 & 53)

Hamlet (pages 12 & 35)

King Lear (pages 6 - 7) Thanks to Donmar Warehouse



Nation (page 30)

Michael Wharley

NT Live Hamlet (pages 11 & 17)

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