

## **Individual Project: Improving and Strengthening the Brand of Barter Theatre**

By: Justin Hartsell

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### **History and Mission Statement**

Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia is the state theatre of Virginia. It has been open since 1933 during the Great Depression, making it one of the longest repertory theatres in the United States. It was started by Robert Porterfield, with the name originating from patrons being able to attend a 40-cent show by “bartering” with produce, canned goods, meat, etc. This is a result of the economic pressures placed on U.S. citizens going through the Depression. The first marketing slogan was “Ham for Hamlet,” which resulted in a sold-out show on the first performance. (The Barter still collects canned, non-perishable goods once a year to donate to Feeding America Southwest Virginia.)

The first director of the theatre was Robert Porterfield—the founder—followed by Rex Partington. Richard Rose is the current artistic director and announced his retirement effective the end of 2019. His successor is only the fourth director and first female leader in Barter history, Kathy Brown.

The theatre has served as the starting grounds for successful actors and actresses, including Gregory Peck, Ernest Borgnine, Patricia Neal and others. President Kennedy once praised Porterfield’s efforts in operating the Barter Theatre.

Barter Theatre advocates for education of those invested in the arts. One means of doing this is through “Barter Players,” in which non-resident actors and actresses from around the country gain the experience of being part of professional theatre. The theatre also offers internships to students interested in developing their real-world skills. Barter partners with Emory & Henry College’s Theatre Department to allow students to experience professional theatre that is not often experienced at other institutions.

Barter began a program that offers attendees at the first performance of any show to “pay-what-you-want” or “pay-as-you-can.” The motivation behind this is in Barter’s historic commitment to allowing the arts to be accessible to all. Thus, those who do not have the financial resources to enjoy the arts are given a fair chance to enjoy the arts.

This summer, Barter officials announced that they faced financial struggles that were the result of low tickets sales combined with costly productions. Also, budgeting had been reduced for them from outside entities (i.e. Town of Abingdon). Barter claims—though not consistent with the Abingdon Convention and Visitors Bureau records—that tourism has been down. This financial struggle and low attendance is what motivates a look at strategic planning.

Sources: Barter Theatre, *Whitetopper*, *Bristol Herald Courier*, Abingdon CVB

[The following was extracted directly from Barter Theatre’s website and their mission statement]:

Our Mission

Enriching Lives Through Extraordinary Theatre

Barter is a resident company of passionate professional artists and leaders dedicated to serving and enriching our region by creating live theatre in repertory; by providing a nurturing environment for all involved; by embracing and celebrating Appalachia; by being stewards of the legacy of Barter Theatre; by using theatre as a vehicle for education; and by providing audiences, both youth and adult, with an extraordinary and enlightening experience each and every time they engage with us.

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### **S.W.O.T. Analysis**

Introduction: This S.W.O.T. analysis aims to comprehensively collect where Barter Theatre is currently in terms of marketing effectiveness and/or lack thereof. In essence, Barter largely is able to use its name, history and faithful clientele to remain in business for the time being. However, challenges the theatre faces consists of not focusing marketing efforts on broader audience, using an old communication system, not being proactive in having a vision for the future, being in the middle of a conservative culture where its rural settings are becoming further abandoned, and having to overcome stigmas of theatre being for those with money.

### **Strengths (S)**

- Long, rich history at Barter
- The fact that it has been there so long
- Has a strong standing within the theatre community

- Theatre-goers who have been to New York, Chicago, and London regard this rural theatre as equivalent or superior—depending on the person and what theatres they have been to in the big cities (not all theatres are good, they are just merely there in a densely populated area); thus, Barter stands out for the theatre-experienced attendees
- Loyalty of our patrons
- People who come for the first time anticipate community theatre but are then surprised at how professional the acting and sets are
- Infrastructure

### **Weaknesses (W)**

- Outdated communication system
- Ticket sales
  - How they work/interact with Abingdon, the community
- Old marketing scheme
- Mixed ages of audiences, but mainly is older population
- Old fashioned approach to theatre
- Would love to market to people in Kingsport and Johnson City but just have not been marketing to them effectively
- Relied on a marketing structure that worked a long time that is not anymore

### **Opportunities (O)**

- Millennials and Gen Zs appreciate experiences more than material things

- As they graduate and make money, they will not be spending it as much on things, so this money can be in experiences—which is exactly what theatre is
- People are wanting to get out of the city/urban areas to rural areas to get away and “breathe”
  - Barter is perfect for that since it is located in a rural, beautiful area
- Rural America is changing (*could also be a threat since we do not know which way it is going to change; could be for the better or for the worse*)
- An article was recently published saying Appalachia could be going through a renaissance, as opposed to its culture going away
- Great education in Southwest Virginia that could really enhance the work of Barter and how it is received
- Appalachian arts & crafts have taken place for hundreds of years
  - Barter can tap into that more to tell stories of the region
- Urban Americans look to move to rural areas because of increased affordability and stronger sense of community—which Barter is perfectly nestled in such a geographical region
- Johnson City has a large demographic of LGBT population that could support more progressive plays that Barter would like to push (i.e. *La Cage aux Folles*, *The Producers*)
- New marketing director
  - Utilizing social media
  - Strategic planner
  - Really honing in on understanding the audience of Barter
- Suggestions of doing packages for individuals in the Tri-Cities (i.e. date night at a restaurant and play; weekend get-away to Barter and local attractions/hotel)

### Threat (T)

- Again, rural America is changing (*could be an opportunity should that change be for the good*)
- Generally, the region is not socially progressive
  - Hinders the range of acceptable material presented in a play
- Politics
- The economy
- Stigma associated with theatre
  - Only for the “elite”

Sources: Jacqueline Blevins, Senior Advancement Manager & Director of External Affairs

Ross Egan, Managing Director

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### **Objectives, Strategies, Tactics and Theories**

- ❑ **Objective 1:** Better promote Barter as an experience rather than a mere destination within the next two years, with 70% of patrons acknowledging Barter to be an experience.
- ❑ **Strategy 1:** Market to a larger audience than those nearby using packages/bundles.

- ❑ **Tactic 1:** Offer date night packages to a show and local restaurant that would benefit people within a reasonable driving distance (i.e. Tri-Cities, Roanoke, etc.)

- ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Nudge Theory** - This theory of “subtle changes in the way choices are presented to people” being influential on choice applies in this context of offering packages. If people are thinking about coming to Barter Theatre or visiting Abingdon but are unsure of wanting to commit to the drive for a day trip when they have closer attractions in their own community, this package could sway them into feeling that the reward justifies the drive.
  - ❑ **Unimodel** - This model of central and peripheral processing happening collectively in varying degrees applies in this case because one is likely to be “centrally” thinking about going to Abingdon or the Barter but might “peripherally” engage with the persuasive offer because the appeal of paying a little extra and getting a meal included is intriguing.
- ❑ **Tactic 2:** Offer travel packages that combine a show, restaurant, nearby hotel (i.e. Martha Washington Inn & Spa, new Holiday Inn, Hampton Inn, Alpine Motel, bed and breakfast etc.), airfare (i.e. Tri-Cities Regional Airport airline services) and rental car/shuttle services for those traveling a greater distance.

❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Nudge Theory** - Again, this theory of “subtle changes in the way choices are presented to people” being influential on their decision applies in this context of offering vacation packages. If people are thinking about coming to Barter Theatre or visiting Abingdon from a broader distance but are unsure of wanting to commit to having to plan all the separate components and logistics of their trip (i.e. lodging, airfare, food, etc.), this package could “push” them into booking a trip by purchasing one of these packages. What better way to sell Barter as an experience than with a package that conveniently arranges your airfare, ground transportation, lodging, food and entertainment.
- ❑ **Unimodel** - Again, this model of central and peripheral processing happening simultaneously in varying degrees applies here because an individual might be “centrally” thinking about going to Abingdon, the Barter or Appalachia in general when coming across this offer. However, they might “peripherally” engage with the persuasive offer because the appeal of paying the extra and having the stressful part of planning the trip already be taken care of for you could be very attractive.

- ❑ **Strategy 2:** Develop more opportunities for crowd-engagement.



- ❑ **Tactic 1:** Have actor and actress meet-and-greets after the show to take a picture with them, thank them and say hi.

- ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Politeness Theory** - Though negative face does not necessarily relate to this example—other than if a socially anxious person feels pressured to talk to the cast as they walk out or they sense a favorite actor or actress of theirs is really not as nice off stage as they had thought, possibly appearing fake, rude, or indifferent—positive face certainly applies here. When engaging with the audience as they exit through the lobby, a smiling actor or actress who is willing to take a picture or selfie with a patron will make the cast appear to be personable and approachable. Should they ask the audience members to come again, it might run the risk of negative face in making people obligated to come back, but it is more likely to cause the visitors to view the cast and theatre as a whole as grateful, humble and kind. Ultimately, it is just one giant way of amping up positive face in an intimate style of public relations.
  - ❑ **Direct Effects Model of Immediacy** - This model that highlights there being a link “between nonverbal behavior and social influence,” particularly in the sense of being “warm, involving immediate behaviors [that] lead to increased persuasion.” Thus, if the cast is smiling,

laughing, shaking hands, making eye contact during conversation, hugging when prompted/asked, taking pictures with visitors, signing autographs, etc., then they will likely be received even more than what they already are when only doing their curtain call. This sense of meeting a celebrity that was on stage opens the door for patrons to think very highly of their experience and allows for a greater chance of an individual wanting to return to see that particular actor or actress on stage again.

- ❑ **Tactic 2:** Increase crowd participation by actors and actresses approaching or acknowledging crowd members during the show (something they occasionally do already), or even during the pre-show while patrons are waiting for the show to start.

❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Expectancy Violations Theory** - This theory of violating the norm for space expectations between a sender and a receiver to influence a receiver's thought towards you applies in this scenario due to the common structure of any entertaining performance (i.e. concert, theatre) involves the subject being confined to the stage and the audience being removed by being confined to their seat, with little to no intermingling of the two. However, if a cast member approaches an audience member during the performance or before the show, the odds for a patron remembering that

show and the moment's experience is much higher because that will hold personal significance to them—even if it is just laughter and “embarrassment.” For example, when I went to see “La Cage aux Folles” [three times] this past summer, the supporting cast interacted with the crowd, along with there being a time or two in the actual play where the leads engaged with audience members for comedic effect. Almost everyone who was engaged with laughed, smiled from ear-to-ear and/or played along with the directions they were told to do from a cast member, resulting in the crowd laughing and seeming to really enjoy those moments.

- ❑ **Politeness Theory** - This theory of being motivated to maintain both positive and negative face certainly fits within this tactic. Overall, it seems that positive face would prevail in this scenario because people sense that a scenario like this one being a special moment because they were personally chosen to be engaged with. The negative face, though, might come into play if the chosen individual is someone who does not like being put on the spot or may not find a comment funny if delivered poorly, resulting in the threat of that individual not coming back.

- ❑ **Strategy 3:** Market to the “experience-focused” generations of Millennials and Generation Z.

- ❑ **Tactic 1:** Build a stronger social media presence with accounts on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and TikTok.

- ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Viral Persuasion** - This theory of having a message reach a large audience fits under the topic of building a better social media presence. The theatre could run ads on social media that are seen by non-followers, run pages that can attract large numbers of followers or simply can publish posts that can be shared by individuals on their personal pages for friends and family to see. All three scenarios result in one message being accessible to hundreds and thousands of people—specifically targeting the social media-obsessed generations of Millennials and Gen Zs.
  - ❑ **Communication Accommodation Theory** - This theory “argues that when we communicate with others we adjust our style of speaking to their style in order to gain approval and increase communications.” What better platform to be intentional with your style and language when wanting to attract Millennials and Gen Zs than by using social media? Using social media to reach these generations effectively typically involves using language that resembles the vocabulary of these younger generations. For example, when showing a Generated Interchange Format (GIF) of a spotlight coming on the main actress on stage for the

upcoming play, a caption that read, “This play is lit,” would be a pun in the use of the spotlight but also using youthful jargon that means it is exciting or amazing.

- ❑ **Tactic 2:** Offer plays that will appeal to a younger adult and/or teenager crowd, such as something from the “Harry Potter” series, the “Hunger Games” series, Disney productions, “Mean Girls,” “Wicked,” “Mrs. Doubtfire,” “The Office! The Musical,” “How the Grinch Stole Christmas,” “The Dark Knight,” “Her,” and so on.

#### ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Communication Accommodation Theory** - Again, this theory of using language directed at a specific target audience—younger adults and teenagers—applies here because the plays and their scripts are geared towards this particular audience in mind. For example, unless a younger person is a theatre buff or literature enthusiast, plays from Shakespeare or other “mature” plays may not appeal to a younger person. However, showcasing plays that are geared to bring in a younger audience will persuade younger individuals to come to the theatre because they love super heros, “The Hunger Games,” “Harry Potter,” “The Office,” Disney, etc.
- ❑ **Viral Persuasion** - This form of viral persuasion is unique when applied to this tactic because it is not so much about trying to create a bandwagon as much as it is chasing and

climbing onto the bandwagon. In other words, the Barter would be getting on the “Harry Potter” bandwagon or “The Office” train that younger individuals are already on in order to get them to come, rather than trying to construct an original idea and trying to force it to be marketed virally amongst young people unfamiliar with the topic.

- ❑ **Tactic 3:** Offer plays that are visually-engaging or has characters that are visually demanding that are based on books or movies (i.e. “2001: A Space Odyssey,” “Pan’s Labyrinth,” “The Lion King,” “A Quiet Place,” “The Great Gatsby,” “Joker,” “Edward Scissorhands,” and so on).

❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Elaboration Likelihood Model** - If a patron is already engaged with the topic—such as being a fan of “The Lion King” or loving comic book villains like the Joker—then showcasing plays about these various visually-awing characters and stories would take the central processing route. However, it is the peripheral processing route that is most useful in this tactic because the large appeal for these sort of plays would be all of the visuals. Whether it is the elaborate costumes, stage design or special effects, the plays would strongly focus on being experiences because they want the audience to sit there in amazement by what they visually see more so than having a complex plot. For example, someone who is not generally interested

in theatre because they might think it is boring because of it being too much talking or not having enough action might would find a play based in space where the characters are suspended for most of the play in outer space interesting. Additionally, a play about the origins of Batman's Joker—a villainous character who wears make-up—going through the streets of Gotham to cause senseless mayhem might visually draw someone in because of the special effects, Joker's makeup and his wardrobe. If something from the world of Guillermo del Toro was recreated on stage in some way—such as “Pan's Labyrinth”—the story blends an equal balance of deep storytelling and visual astonishment; these two things working together would help bring in a patron who typically is not attending a play they feel is merely humans talking to other humans in a realistic setting (i.e. New York City, Paris, Appalachia)

- ❑ **Sleeper Effect** - This theory of a message maybe not having influence up front but gaining influence over time applies to plays that might appear to be more visually-focused. At first, patrons may think while sitting in their seats, “Oh wow, that's cool! Look at that,” before being distracted by the next scene's visuals. However with time, the play's impressive-factor and ability to visually demand patrons to watch can begin to have a bigger

impact over time, causing patrons to continually reflect back on that time that x, y and z “amazingly” happened on stage, potentially causing them to return for another play to see what they experience in the next production they attend.

- ❑ **Objective 2:** Amplify the voice of Barter for advocacy and a diverse cultural representation, with 40% of plays having narratives around social issues and having cultural stories told by 2022.
  - ❑ **Strategy 1:** Host shows that have strong, thought-provoking messages on social issues.
    - ❑ **Tactic 1:** Have productions that advocate for the LGBTQ+ community (i.e. “Carol,” “Milk,” “Moonlight,” “The Danish Girl,” “Boy Erased,” “Philadelphia,” etc.)
      - ❑ **Theories:**
        - ❑ **Information Processing Theory** - This theory perfectly applies to this tactic because when an individual comes to the theatre, they are actively attending the space where a persuasive message will be presented for comprehension—and arguably persuasion. Thus by already having the audience attentive and focused on what happens on the stage, it is in the theatre’s favor to present a persuasive message that the receiver will process and take a stance on.



- ❑ **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** - This theory could be used to highlight intolerance and hatred, persuading the crowd to be more compassionate and intentional with their word choice. For example, “homosexual” is screamed in a derogatory manner at the queer leading couple of “La Cage aux Folles” by the biggotted antagonist. When this occurs, it is blatantly obvious that this behaviour is not okay and that the antagonist is without question in the wrong. Thus, it was powerful to display hateful language for audience members to literally show how hurtful it is and attempt to have the audience become more accepting and supporting of LGBTQ+ rights. This helped show those in the audience who are intolerant of the LGBTQ+ community how their behavior and language come across.
- ❑ **Social Judgement Theory** - This theory of individuals having set anchor points on an issue certainly relates to the topic of LGBTQ+ rights, especially in Southwest Virginia because of there being a large conservative presence. When a moving story is presented on this “issue” of homosexuality on Barter Theatre’s stage, a largely-condemning audience has the potential to shift to being able to at least accept individuals who are openly homosexual, even if they [the audience] will not go as far as to be an advocate. Baby steps.

- ❑ **Tactic 2:** Produce shows that highlight a character with a disability overcoming challenges in the world (i.e. “The Elephant Man,” “The Theory of Everything,” I Am Sam”)

- ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** - Again, this theory of language strongly applies to telling the stories of individuals with disabilities who are sometimes treated as less than human, even if accidentally done so. For example, people will talk *at* an individual with a disability rather than talk *with* them. Thus, if this contrast of language delivery is provided on stage, it could persuade audience members to be more understanding of how to communicate with those who have disabilities. Additionally, it can help teach the political correctness of how to refer to those with disabilities (i.e. I am using “individuals with disabilities” instead of “disabled individuals;” a patient in the medical community with Down syndrome is “a patient with Down syndrome,” not “a Down’s patient”—as I have unfortunately heard it said before in the medical community by an insensitive clinician, etc.).
  - ❑ **Heuristic Systematic Model** - This theory could go in two ways of advocacy for those with disabilities. The systemic route would be having someone centrally engage with the material because they are genuinely interested in the topic,

they have a disability, they have a family member that has a disability or so on. The story's message may take a more heuristic route if it mostly connects with an audience member on an emotional level rather than asking them to cognitively be engaged with the material and message. Thus, they may positively respond to the material strictly from an emotional standpoint, which would be a mental shortcut.

- ❑ **Tactic 3:** Produce shows that highlight social-talking points aspects of both national and international society (i.e. Martin Luther Jr. biographical play, a play that features a woman getting an abortion, plays that bring awareness to suicide like the movie "World's Greatest Dad," a play that focuses on looking to flee Latin America and immigrating to the United States, "Schindler's List," stories of mental health, etc.)

- ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Sleeper Effect** - Because a play can have intermingling moments of comedy, sadness, conflict and so on, it can be easy to be present and react in those emotionally-shifting moments as they are presented on stage. However, the actual message may not be digested until later on. For example, when I saw "La Cage aux Folles" this past summer, I thought it was extremely funny, sad and beautiful. It was not until days and weeks later, though, that the message of the play hit me on a personal level and

really challenged my way of thinking. Thus, the message did not deeply impact me on the front end, but over time, it caused me to start to consider my sexuality, level of self-acceptance and so on.

- ❑ **Social Judgement Theory** - This theory that argues that each individual has an anchor point on any given subject—especially if controversial—applies to this tactic because almost any audience member is going to have an opinion on suicide, LGBTQ+ rights, religion(s), abortion, immigration, mental health and so on. Thus, being able to present a story that humanizes a character enough that may be encountering one or more of these subjects on stage might help budge a patron's anchor point to a place that is more understanding.

- ❑ **Strategy 2:** Feature a rich representation of cultural diversity.

- ❑ **Tactic 1:** Hire more minority actresses and actors.

- ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Match-Up Hypothesis** - Obviously, to pull off a play that does justice for minorities, you have to have minorities. I believe there are currently only a couple minorities on Barter's stage, with the large majority of the actresses and actors—both residing and visiting—being white. You cannot cast a white female for the lead of an Indian woman. You cannot cast a white male as Martin Luther

King, Jr. Additionally, if there is a minority on stage to represent a lead, there are not enough minorities to play a diverse supporting cast. For example, it would be challenging to do a Civil Rights play right now because I believe there is only one African-American actor at Barter right now. Thus, having a Civil Rights rally could not be done because it would be a supporting white cast holding pro-Civil Rights signs while marching.

- ❑ **Social Comparison Theory** - This theory of learning about others by comparing ourselves to others comes to light when advocating for more minorities being hired at the Barter. When being able to have true representation on stage for plays that have a lead that is a minority, the opportunity to stifle “othering” can occur because an individual is able to recognize, “Oh, we are not so different after all. We both worry. We both have hopes. We both fail. We both are *human*.”

- ❑ **Tactic 2:** Showcase stories that tell the stories of individuals who are African American (i.e. “Fences,” “What’s Love Got to Do with It”), Indian (i.e. “Slumdog Millionaire”), Latina (i.e. “Selena,” or “Roma”), Muslim (i.e. a play featuring a Muslim woman or man who are trying to live peacefully in New York City post-9/11 when many Americans are displaying xenophobia towards Middle-Eastern and Muslim individuals), etc.

- ❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** - This idea of using language to persuade thought by directly addressing racist language, slurs and directed language that is insensitive to various minorities in an effort to help the crowd become more compassionate and choose to be conscientious about the language they use when talking to or referring to a minority person or group. Rather than merely saying, “Hey, don’t say the following...,” the crowd is likely to be more persuaded when seeing the language play out in real time and watching the emotional toll it takes on the characters on stage.
- ❑ **Persuasive Arguments Theory** - One could argue that this theory is appropriate for this tactic because plays telling the stories of minorities—whether in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, religion or so on—could present a wide range of points surrounding a character with various complexities in order to persuade the audience to be more compassionate, understanding, accepting, supporting, etc. of a often-marginalized individual or people group.
- ❑ **Strategy 3:** Dig into and tell the untold stories of Appalachia to better connect with the very region that the theatre is set in. Additionally, showcase the heritage and cultural roots of Appalachia.
  - ❑ **Tactic 1:** Reach out to Appalachian and local historians and authors to find the meaningful stories of Appalachia to present on stage.

❑ **Theories:**

❑ **Communication Accommodation Theory** - There are two ways that this theory can be used for this tactic. The first way is that a Barter representative might have to use communication accommodation theory to engage with historians and authors to get them to agree to letting Barter use the stories they share with that particular representative. One could argue that the second way this theory will be used is to gear plays towards the stories, culture, language, traditions and style of Appalachia.

❑ **Elaboration Likelihood Model** - Arguably, this theory would apply a more central processing approach for this tactic because the Barter representatives gathering stories from historians and authors would be need to be centrally engaged with the material in knowing if it could work on stage. However, one could argue that peripheral processing might occur when a story is told that is emotional, bizarre, warm or so on because it might have a more emotional impact on the Barter representative than an intellectual one (i.e. such as a story that had a deep moral or social critique).

❑ **Tactic 2:** During the month of November, host a special production for National Heritage Month to honor Native Americans who lived here in Appalachia before white settlers came to the Americas.

❑ **Theories:**

❑ **Impression Management Theory** - As badly as I feel to

put this in words, the Barter hosting a Native American cultural celebration during National Heritage Month would make the Barter look like they care about how Native Americans have been treated since colonization and the founding of the United States. Ultimately, companies and corporations team up with non-profit organizations and have advocacy programs or events to look good in the public eye and raise more money for themselves by being “a good steward.” The same could be said for Barter wanting to advocate for the voices, stories, traditions and cultures of Native Americans that have largely been marginalized. I think it is important to tell have Native American heritage represented on stage because of how marginalized they have been in our society. However, running a business ultimately comes down to making money and remaining in good standing with the public, which this could arguably do both of those things if done well.

❑ **Scarcity Principle** - This idea of persuading consumers to “get it while supplies last” amongst a limited availability is relevant to this tactic because this cultural event would only be a special production held once a year. The fact that



it would only be an annual event with so many tickets available would persuade patrons to think in terms of, “Oh, I better get tickets before they sell out!”

- ❑ **Tactic 3:** During the winter months when the theatre is not being used for productions—aside from Abingdon’s January Jams using the theatre’s main stage on Fridays and Saturdays for indoor concerts—Barter could have ticketed shows that hosted Appalachian musicians and storytellers.

❑ **Theories:**

- ❑ **Communication Accommodation Theory** - Both the hosted musicians and storytellers would have to use this theory in being able to connect with the audience better. The audience is going to expect to see Appalachian music, such as gospel, bluegrass and country. Thus, if a heavy metal band was booked, that would not effectively bring in the community that wants to see a sense of cultural pride on stage. Likewise, it would be unwise to bring in a storyteller who is vulgar, profane or disrespectful of Christianity because that does not align with the “moral majority” of the region. (To be clear, the storyteller would not have to be Christian; it merely is important to be sensitive towards your target audience when wanting to sell tickets.)
- ❑ **Language Expectancy Theory** - This theory mostly applies to an Appalachian storyteller in that they would

likely be using language and jargon that the mostly-Appalachian audience could relate to and understand. If the storyteller was mostly using terms and phrases from the New England area, the audience would perceive there to be a lack of authenticity in cultural representation of their surrounding communities and overall region.

- ❑ **Elaboration Likelihood Model** - This theory applies in this context due to a patron being able to centrally process the significance of the event should they be a fan of a particular artist or Appalachian culture. However, the peripheral processing component of ELM is heavily applicable in this sense because enjoying a concert or professional storytelling is likely to rope patrons in simply by it “sounding fun” and that it is “something to do” on a winter evening where activities are typically limited to the indoors.
  - ❑ **Scarcity Principle** - Again, the idea of “get it while supplies last” places a sense of urgency on individuals to act because that particular artist or storyteller will only be there for that one evening with limited seating because of the theatre’s capacity.
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### **Measurements**

To begin, the first measurement to implement would be ***conducting pre- and post-surveys on whether or not patrons perceive Barter Theatre to be an experience or not.*** This will allow for a compare and contrast to see if there has been an improvement in individuals perceiving Barter to be an experience. Surveys could be sent out at the start of 2020 to see where attitudes about Barter currently stand. Then, follow up with surveys at the end of 2021 to see if there has been an increase in perceptions of Barter being an experience rather than a mere destination. The goal would be to have 70% of participants agreeing that Barter Theatre is truly an experience when they come to the theatre.

The second means to measure the experience-focused approach and its effectiveness—particularly in regards to the “experience-driven” Millennials and Gen Zs—would be to ***keep a log of the number of social media followers on the various platforms.*** By being able to look at the number of followers on each account now compared to the end of 2021, the marketing team can see if people are engaging with their social media pages, particularly the younger generations. For example, if the number of social media followers grow on Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, then it is safe to say that the large majority of their base is the experience-focused Millennials and Gen Zs given the demographics of those sites. With Facebook, further research would have to go into seeing if the social media audience engaging with Barter’s social media posts are of the younger generations or if it is mostly older individuals.

Finally, the third measurement of this strategic plan would be to consider the second objective of increasing Barter Theatre’s voice of advocacy, along with social and cultural representation.

In order to accurately judge this, ***create a chart and corresponding pie graph of the previous year of plays and log the three upcoming years' (2020, 2021 and 2022) plays to see if social and cultural representation has increased by 40% by the end of 2022.*** Ideally, there would be a noticeable and quantifiable increase in the percentage (pie slice) of plays that feature social issues, minorities, those with disabilities, cultural stories and so on.

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Source used for theories: "Persuasion: Social Influence and Compliance Gaining," Sixth Edition.

Gass, Robert H. and Seiter, John S. Published by Taylor & Francis, New York, 2018. Print.