

A Guide to Amateur Theatre Publicity



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Sandgate Theatre Inc. March 2004

Note: This guide was written for Sandgate Theatre Inc., but if you're from another theatre group feel free to adapt it for your needs.

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IF THE JOB OF PUBLICITY OFFICER HAS SUDDENLY BEEN DROPPED INTO YOUR LAP A WEEK BEFORE OPENING NIGHT, GO TO THE 'EMERGENCY PUBLICITY' CHAPTER AT THE END OF THIS GUIDE.

“What should the theatre be? The theatre should be full.” – Giuseppe Verdi

The role of the Publicity Co-ordinator

The task of publicity is a very important one. Even though an amateur theatre group shouldn't be motivated by profit, the size of the audience is often used as a measure of the play's success. More importantly, with the ever-increasing costs of running a theatre it is essential that a production should at least cover its costs.



It is the aim therefore of the Publicity Co-ordinator (PC) to get the public in to see our plays (and increase the profile of the theatre group) *using the most cost-effective means.*

Co-operation and cost-effectiveness are the keys to being a successful Publicity Co-ordinator

The Publicity Co-ordinator *co-ordinates* all publicity tasks – this word is important. You make sure that everything has been done, but you don't have to do everything yourself. This ensures that (a) you don't become overworked or burnt out; (b) others get experience in this area and can take over if needed, and (c) variety and fresh ideas are constantly introduced into the publicity area. Like a director who uses the cast, crew and theatre resources to create a play, the PC is not a one-man band but the leader of a team.

The Publicity Co-ordinator must be a year-long position (elected at the Annual General Meeting), rather than someone who falls into the role for each play. Many of the PC's tasks are ongoing. When performances for one play are in progress, the auditions for the next one are being held and these have to be advertised as well. Other events need to be promoted as much as plays – such as workshops, street theatre, or the seeking of subscribers or drama festival entrants. Some magazines and newsletters come out every few months rather than every week; it's therefore necessary to send your publicity material months in advance, often in the midst of a previous play.

A publicity officer who works throughout the year is also more likely to pick up on unusual opportunities. During 'The Year of the Volunteer' the *Northside Chronicle* did a series on volunteer organisations. Our publicity officer sent them some information on our group, and as a result we got an article. Several new members joined after seeing it.

An article from a magazine titled "Year of the Volunteer" with the sub-headline "Treading the boards". The article features a photograph of four people: a woman in a white dress, a man in a top hat, a man in a dark suit, and a woman in a blue dress. The text of the article describes the history and activities of Sandgate Theatre Inc, mentioning its long history since the 1950s and its current offerings of comedies, dramas, and one-act plays. It also notes the group's membership of over 80 volunteers.

Year of the Volunteer

Treading the boards

SANDGATE Theatre Inc has been performing amateur theatre under various names since the 1950s.

They present six performances a year at the Sandgate Town Hall with a mixture of comedies, dramas, one-act play festivals and theatre restaurants.

Over the years STI has been known by various names including Stage Two Theatre, Sandgate Little Theatre Group, and Sandgate Revue Company.

STI has more than 80 members with its volunteers covering all ages, many of whom joined as actors or backstage crew. But

● Sue Ruthford, Gregory Sliverman, John Midgley and June Tretheway at Sandgate.

First tasks

If you are appointed Publicity Co-ordinator there are several things you need to do straight away.

1. Get your hands on an up-to-date membership list, a crucial tool. Your most important resource will be your members. The list provides their names, phone numbers and addresses.
2. If you haven't already got them, the basic publicity materials you'll need are a box of 500 pre-stamped envelopes from Australia Post, and at least 2 reams of A4 paper. It's best to have these items ready in advance. You should also have a copy of your theatre's logo. This can be either a rubber stamp, or a letterhead on computer disk. For putting up posters you will need thumbtacks or map pins, and 'Magic Tape' or blutack.
3. Get together with the person who handled publicity before you. Have they already done anything to advertise the upcoming play? Make sure they've handed over all publicity materials such as the Publicity Folder, contact details of media outlets, patrons list, stamps and envelopes, copying paper, photographs, etc.
4. Ask the previous PC about people who have proved useful; e.g. with photography, designing posters or just general willingness to help.
5. Check the list of media outlets you've been given. Are the contact details accurate? For instance the Entertainment Reporter of a large newspaper frequently changes. Ring up and confirm (remember to keep a list of phone calls you make to give to the treasurer).
6. Get acquainted with your theatre group's archive. It should contain previous examples of posters, programs and publicity material that you can use for inspiration.
7. Ask your theatre president what plays are being performed this year, who is directing them, and their audition and performance dates. Find out when the next committee meeting is, as you will now be expected to attend them.

Recruiting

A Publicity Co-ordinator needs to keep his or her eye out for the following people. **Always find more than one person who can do these roles.** Few people are available year-round, so you will always need a back-up.



1. Photographers. If no-one in your group has photographic skills there is usually a Photography Club close by. Club members are usually glad to have someone to practice their skills on if you are willing to reimburse them for costs. Photographers can also be borrowed from other theatre groups or from local newspapers (see **Publicity Photos**).

2. Painters for banners and signs. Usually these will be the same people who paint your scenery.
3. People who own computers, especially with peripherals such as printers, scanners, digital cameras and internet/fax connections. Several software programs such as MS Publisher include 'wizards' – computer templates that help you design posters, banners, brochures and letters.
4. Creative people who are good at drawing or designing. These people can help you create posters or programs. Ideally they should have access to computers but this is not compulsory – posters can also be hand-drawn.
5. The unemployed and retired. These people have a most important commodity – spare time, especially during weekdays. They can get photocopies done, put up posters, distribute flyers and help with mailouts. Keep an eye out especially for those who live close to the areas where you want to put up posters.

Ask for volunteers via the theatre newsletter, but your best results will be from direct recruiting. Either use the phone (now you know why you need the membership list!) or look for occasions when you have a large number of people together. Auditions, working bees and social events come to mind. The best time is during rehearsals for a production with a large cast and crew, such as a theatre restaurant. You have lots of new people whose enthusiasm and camaraderie is high as they're working together to make the play. Remember that not all your volunteers have to be members of the theatre. Members might know friends or relatives who can do the above tasks. Such people should be rewarded with free tickets, or advertising in the play's program if they have their own business. Either way, don't forget to thank them in the program for their efforts.

When you look for volunteers, be thorough. You should know from your publicity timetable (see **The Job**) when things need to be done, so check that your volunteer doesn't have a university test or holiday coming up at that time. If someone asks to do photography or the program, do they have the equipment needed? Do they know what's required? Photocopy the relevant section of this guide and give it to them. Having someone new to the task is not a problem (and should be encouraged). Give them examples of what has been done before. The archive is a rich source of ideas – use it!

The key to getting people to do something is to break down large tasks into small ones. Have someone whitewash the publicity banner one week, and another person paint it the next. Another way is to give a helper three posters to put up rather than twenty. If you give them twenty, more than likely they won't do anything at all, but three is an easy target for a busy person.

The Job

Here's a list of what you need to do publicity-wise for each production. It's not all-inclusive, nor does everything have to be done in this order.

1. Read the play. This should be done as far in advance as possible. Note down any ideas that come to you regarding posters, publicity photographs and clipart keywords. Write a short synopsis of the play.
2. Do up a timetable so you know when things need to be ready. The timetable should cover all aspects of publicity – magazines, photographs, newspapers, banners, the program, other theatre groups, radio stations, websites, and local festivals where flyers can be handed out.
3. Look at the deadlines for the magazines and club newsletters. Does anything need to be sent out immediately?
4. Meet the director. Get information on the cast – who is playing what character (check the spelling of names!). Find out which suburbs the director and cast come from (see **newspapers**). Work out a date for taking photographs and tell the director which actors will need to have their costumes ready (see **Publicity Photos**). Get a copy of the script if possible, as you might need it for reference or to show to your poster and program designers. Issue biographies (with a 'return by' date on them) to the actors and director.
5. Start calling around for people who can take photographs, do the posters and programs (see **Recruiting**). Ideally they should read the script, or at least your synopsis.
6. Prepare a standard publicity sheet (using your synopsis) and a rough draft of the poster. Include details on upcoming workshops or auditions for the next play. If possible, write special articles to target newspapers outside your local area. Show this publicity material to the director for his or her comments.
7. Collect the bios. If the information in the bios is not thorough enough, talk to the actor directly. If you want to include their phone number in your publicity material, get their permission first.
8. Buy any stamps, envelopes, paper, tape/tacs etc needed.
9. Do up the patron's letter. Ensure it is photocopied and mailed out to everyone on the theatre mailing list.
10. Photocopy posters (usually 150) and flyers (usually 500).
11. Take and develop publicity photographs. Arrange for reprints if you don't think you have enough photographs.
12. Mail or email the publicity sheet to magazines, community newsletters, theatre groups, radio stations, websites, schools and clubs. Attach photos for those newspapers and website that will



show them. For theatre groups, schools and clubs enclose both a poster for the play and a poster advertising your next audition or workshop. Book paid advertisements if you feel it necessary.

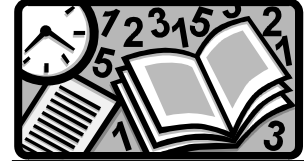
13. Ensure that the play is promoted (including photos) in the theatre newsletter and website.
14. Arrange for banners or signboards to be white-washed, painted and displayed. If you have a noticeboard outside your theatre, make sure it has information on upcoming theatre events.
15. Get the cast and other theatre members to distribute posters and flyers in your local area and neighbouring suburbs.
16. Arrange for a photographer to take photos during the final dress rehearsals. Use these photos for your 'last chance' article and the theatre archive. Make sure the cast has a chance to purchase these photos as well.
17. Make sure the director, cast and crew see a rough copy of the program and make any corrections.
18. Send publicity to local newspapers and radio stations timed to appear in the final week of production, reminding the public that this is their last chance to see the play.
19. Send your expense sheet (including receipts, bills, and photocopies of paid advertisements) to the treasurer.
20. Put aside a poster, program, publicity sheet and newspaper cuttings for the archive. Select a couple of good photographs for the photo archive.
21. After the play is over, tell theatre members via the newsletter to take down any posters they see. Arrange for the banners and noticeboard to be taken down.
22. Get hold of the script for the next play and begin the process again.

Now let's go over some of these points in more detail.

Read the play – You must read the play so you know what you're selling. Apart from the fact that you will be asked to describe the play by various people you run into, you'll also be asked for your opinion on poster design and publicity photographs. Reading the play (and writing the synopsis) should be done while the previous play is rehearsing, as you may need to send out advance publicity.

Once you have read the play and know what it is about, mention in the newsletter (and tell people with computers or internet access) that you're looking for relevant clipart for the posters and program. Give a list of keywords for them to search for. For instance for a murder mystery you would search for CRIME, MURDER, or DETECTIVE under *free clipart*.

Timetable – The number one mistake made by publicity co-ordinators is not working out in advance when they need publicity. **Do these calculations at the start of the rehearsal period, not three weeks from the opening night when you feel that ‘I should start doing publicity now’.** First, work out when you want your publicity to start appearing.



Draw up a timetable

Say you want articles on the play to appear in the newspapers two weeks before the performance begins. In that case you need to mail out the publicity sheets *three weeks before* the event, while publicity photographs may have to be taken *four weeks before* in order to be ready in time.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	Photos taken by this date		Photos developed			
Publicity sent to papers						
		Newspapers come out				
				Opening night of play		

These are the sort of calculations you need to make. Similar calculations have to be made for other forms of advertising – banners, magazines, posters, radio, etc.

Newspaper articles on the play should appear 2-3 weeks before opening night. This gives people time to think about coming to see the play, but not so much time they’ll have forgotten all about it. If you stuff up and get the publicity in late, don’t lose heart. A survey by Sandgate Theatre Inc. showed that even when publicity came out a week after the performance began, it still got results.

Magazines – Your publicity file should have information on when magazines and club newsletters come out, and what their deadlines are. If you don’t have this information, call up the magazines and clubs and ask for their schedule for the year.

The Director should be free to concentrate on their play, and not have to worry about whether it’s being advertised properly. That means you must report to the director on what you’re doing. For instance, before you put out the publicity sheet and the posters, show them to the director first. Some directors have a particular vision of what their play is about and might not feel this is adequately reflected in the posters and publicity. Don’t just say, “*Tough mate! What you see is what you get!*”. See what you can do to comply with their wishes.

Auditions and workshops – I’ve found that the best way to ensure large numbers of people turn up for auditions and workshops (A&W) is to put as much effort into advertising them as you would a play. To cut down on the workload this creates, just piggyback your A&W publicity onto your play’s publicity. For instance, all publicity sheets and patrons letters should include a paragraph on any upcoming audition or workshops. You should also create an A&W poster to be put up along with the posters on your play.

When you hand out the posters for your members to distribute, tell them to put up an A&W poster every time they put up a poster for the play. When you send posters advertising your play to other theatre groups and schools include the auditions/workshop poster as well. Use double-sided flyers with an advertisement for the play on one side and A&W on the other. Such methods can also be used to publicise a call for new members, or anything else you want the public to know about.

Of course there’s nothing to stop you from sending an A&W publicity sheet (photo included) to the newspapers. Just send the information on a different week from the publicity about your play, otherwise the editor will squeeze the two articles together anyway.

Biographies are used to gather information for the program. They are also useful when you want to put something in your publicity about an individual actor (see **newspapers**). Basically they ask the actor for information about themselves, their previous theatre experience, and their opinions of the role they’re playing. Examples of bios should be in your publicity file or theatre archive.

Sandgate Theatre Inc. has a mailing list of people (called **patrons**) to whom we send a letter out every time we put on a play (Note: some of the people on this list are also subscribers. By paying an annual fee they can see plays at a reduced price). The letter is sent out 3-4 weeks before the play starts. A large proportion of our regular audience is on this list. The patrons letter is similar to the standard publicity sheet (see **Publicity Sheet**) in the details it contains. You just say ‘Dear Theatre Patron’ instead of using a headline.

Using a standard publicity sheet that you can send to radios, magazines, clubs, etc saves you a lot of time and effort (keep in mind that you can always ring up a newspaper, radio or magazine and ask them for advice on the best format for the material you send them). However you cannot use a ‘standard’ publicity sheet when you are sending material to newspapers outside your local area.

Local weekly **newspapers** are second only to the mailing list and word-of-mouth as a source of advertising. At the time of writing (using Sandgate Theatre Inc. as an example) there are two such newspapers, *The Bayside & Northern Suburbs Star* (closest to Sandgate, and therefore most friendly

and most likely to publish articles) and the *Northside Chronicle*. There are newspapers that cover regions adjacent to the Sandgate area ('outside' newspapers), but they will only do articles on matters of 'local' interest. At the time of writing these papers are:

1. The *Redcliffe & Bayside Herald* (covering the Redcliffe Peninsula).
2. The *South Pine Echo* (a monthly newspaper) and *Pine Rivers Press* covering the Strathpine/Pine Rivers area; and the *Northern Times* (Pine Rivers and Caboolture areas).
3. The *Northern News* (covering the area between Nudgee and the City).



Give news-
papers a
'local' angle

In short, the *Bayside Star* and *Northside Chronicle* will publish an article on a Sandgate Theatre play because Sandgate is part of the area they cover, but the *Redcliffe & Bayside Herald* will not UNLESS you present a local angle¹ to the story.

To provide this 'local angle' find out where the cast and director live. Quest Newspapers provides a simple map showing which of their newspapers cover what suburbs (note: non-Quest papers such as *The Bayside Star* are not included). Say you have an actor who lives in Clontarf. This suburb is covered by the *Redcliffe & Bayside Herald*. Gather some information on this actor (from their bio) and write up a special publicity sheet: "*Local Actor in Comedy*". It helps to include a publicity photo of the actor as well (see **Publicity Photos**) and their phone number (but not without their permission) so a reporter can contact the actor for more details.

When your final performances are approaching, send a reminder to the newspapers and radio stations ("*Last chance to see The Last Man on Earth!*"). This gives a spur to attendance numbers by letting people know that time is running out. You can ring up the Community Diary section of your local newspaper and put in a small notice, or send in a photo-article (use a photograph taken during the production this time). Just remember, you must send newspaper articles the week before the final week, or they will arrive too late.

Radio stations have Community Announcements that you can advertise in for free. Publicity material should be sent to radio stations at the same time that you send it to the weekly newspapers (except for the 'last chance' publicity'). Include a request that they mention the show throughout its performance run of several weeks.

¹ Needless to say entertainment magazines/newspapers such as *Perform*, *Scene* and *Time Out* do not need a local angle. Neither do newspapers which cover a particular audience (rather than a particular area) and have an entertainment section (e.g. *The Courier Mail* or Qld University's *Weekend Independent*). Some Brisbane papers and magazines (e.g. *Brisbane News*) also mention our plays as Sandgate is a suburb of Brisbane.

It's not unknown for a radio station to call up asking for someone to interview, so be prepared for this. If you are unable to do it yourself you need to find a cast member (or director) who can. Sometimes these interviews are conducted on the phone, sometimes in person. And there's nothing to stop you from calling up a radio station and arranging an interview yourself. Note: If someone is going for an interview, please make sure that they have clear directions on how to get there.

Don't just send publicity information off to any radio station or newspaper at random. First, get out the Yellow Pages and ring up the media outlets listed there. Find out if they are willing to promote an amateur theatre production in the first place. If so, in what way (interviews, community noticeboards, photo-articles)? To whom should your publicity material be addressed? If you're already got a list of media outlets, check the details to ensure they're accurate as this information can change over time. Make sure you keep a list of the calls you make to give to the treasurer.

While you're looking in the Yellow Pages, look up 'schools'. Check the addresses against a street directory. Which schools are close to your theatre? Ring up and ask if they have drama classes and if so, how should a letter to the drama department/teacher be addressed? A tip: it's better to use a title rather than a name, as it saves you having to ring up every year to check if the teacher has moved on. Don't forget nearby TAFE's, universities, and drama colleges as well. Always send posters to schools, not publicity sheets – the teacher is likely to put up the poster where students can see it. Not only are schools a good recruiting ground for your auditions, there have been several occasions when entire classes have booked to see a play as part of a school assignment.

Banners should be hung in areas where a large number of vehicles pass by, preferably near traffic lights (because drivers have to stop) or stretches of road where all their attention doesn't have to be on driving. If possible, there should also be noticeable advertising at the venue where you perform your plays.

Free **photocopying** can be arranged through your local government office. In Sandgate we use the Ward Office located behind the Sandgate Town Hall, or the Electorate Office of our local MP. You will be expected to supply your own paper, and they may prefer to do the photocopying themselves. If you need a guillotine to cut flyers then commercial printers will do it for a nominal sum. Sometimes they will even help you for free, in the hope of attracting future business. Note: if a business does you a favour, make sure you take one of their business cards and give it to the person doing the program so they can put in an advertisement. Tell the business you are doing this.

Your local council library has free (or at least inexpensive) internet access, though if you want to send information or photos you have stored on disc you'll need to use an internet cafe (remember to

keep the receipts). Find out the email address of the media outlets you are using (with newspapers, ask for the email address of the Entertainment Reporter). This can save you a lot of stuffing letters into envelopes. Clubs, theatre groups and schools though should have posters mailed to them.

Do your best to confirm that your publicity *is* out there. Get hold of the magazines and newspapers when they come out, either directly or via theatre members who live in the areas they are distributed. Not only do you need clippings for the archive but it also confirms that you are doing your job properly. If a magazine for instance consistently refuses to print information on STI plays then perhaps they regard amateur theatre (or your local area) as outside their field (ring up and find out). If this is the case, then you can stop wasting time and money sending publicity to them.

The amount of space newspapers and magazines give you will also vary. For instance *The Courier Mail*, *Time Out*, and *Scene* will only print the barest details of amateur theatre plays. *Stage Whispers* might print photo-articles if you're lucky, whereas local newspapers definitely will. So don't waste your time sending photographs and specially written articles to a media outlet that will only do photo-articles on professional theatre productions.

One way of ensuring that your publicity will appear is paid advertising, but it is expensive. Always keep cost-effectiveness in mind. If you do pay for an advertisement it must be in a media where it will get results, and don't pay for advertising if they're likely to do an article on your play anyway.

If you purchase a paid advertisement make sure the bill is sent directly to you. Mistakes have been made in the past and our theatre nearly ended up paying more than it should have. You, as Publicity Co-ordinator, should know what has been purchased (and for what price) and what hasn't. This is another reason why you should try and verify your publicity. If you've paid for an advertisement, a photocopy of the page it's on must be given to the treasurer along with your expense sheet. The treasurer will need it when the accounts are audited at the end of the year, to show that there really was an advertisement purchased.



The archive is a highly useful source of ideas, with examples of past programs, posters, newspaper articles, and photographs.

Publicity Sheet

The publicity sheet should have (in this order):

1. An official theatre letterhead (not necessary for emailed publicity).
2. “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” or “FOR RELEASE ON (such-and-such a date)”. In short, can the newspaper use the information immediately or would you prefer they wait till a certain date, e.g. the last week of production.
3. Headline (make it **Bold** and in CAPITALS). This is so anyone looking at the publicity sheet can see instantly what it is about – a definite advantage to a journalist with a big pile of paperwork on his or her desk. You can have more than one headline. Most newspapers will make up their own headline anyway, but sometimes you can think of a catchy one yourself. For instance with the comedy *Boeing Boeing* the heading *Local Actor Takes Off in Boeing* proved popular.
4. Local content. You don’t need this for your standard publicity sheet but for ‘outside’ newspapers this is where you say why they should be interested. *Redcliffe actor Ima Knutkase will be frightening audiences with his chilling performance in “Hannibal Lektor’s Lunch”*. Include the actor’s phone number so the reporter can contact them for more details.
5. Synopsis of the story – a brief description of the play that doesn’t give away any surprises. Here’s where you peak the interest of your potential audience, so write this part carefully. Yes, a journalist will rewrite it anyway but they tend to use the words and phrases you’ve given them. If you don’t know how to word your article there should be newspaper clippings in the theatre archive. Or you can also look up articles in your target newspaper on other amateur productions.
6. The essential details. These are: the title, author, what kind of play (comedy, thriller, surrealist), dates and times, booking numbers, ticket prices, and venue. Don’t assume that everyone knows Sandgate Theatre Inc. plays are held in the Sandgate Town Hall. It doesn’t hurt to mention that the Sandgate Town Hall is located on the corner of Brighton Road and Seymour Street either, for non-local audience members.
7. Any upcoming auditions, workshops, etc. Keep it short. *Sandgate Theatre Inc. will also be holding auditions for the comedy ‘Bored to Death’ on (dates) at the Sandgate Town Hall, 7.30 pm. Wanted are boring men and women, aged mid-thirties and above. Call (director) on (phone number) for further details.*
8. Contact details. IF YOU WANT FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT blah blah. Put this in a box marked NOT FOR PUBLICATION or some silly sod will put your contact details in the article instead of the booking numbers (yes it has been known to happen). You should use either the Publicity Co-ordinator’s name and phone number, or the director’s. If an actor is the subject

of the article include their phone number as well (but get their permission first). These must be daytime contact numbers as local newspapers tend to work 9-5 hours.

9. If you have a photograph with the article write 'Photograph enclosed' at the bottom of the page (or 'Photo attached' for emails) then a left-to-right listing of which actors/characters are in the photograph, and/or what the scene is about. When mailing photographs attach a sticky label with these details to the back, or write on it with a felt pen or 6B pencil – something that won't mark the other side. Write the name of the play on the back as well; that way if the photograph becomes separated from the article it can still be identified.

Posters

A poster should have the following features. **Remember, check details thoroughly before you run off a hundred photocopies.** Always be cautious of names, phone numbers, dates, times and spelling.

1. Title of the play.
2. Author/s of the play.
3. What kind of play (comedy, drama, murder mystery, theatre restaurant).
4. An eye-catching design appropriate to the play. Try using the same design for all posters, flyers, advertisements, and programs. It helps get the play fixed in peoples' minds – when they see one advertisement they are reminded of all the others.
5. Any mandatory statements? e.g. *By special arrangement with Dominie Pty Ltd.* Another example is Ira Levin's *Deathtrap*, which must include the author's name as part of the title, no smaller than 50% the size given to the play's name. Any such mandatory requirements will be mentioned on the inside cover of the playscript.
6. Dates and times of the performances.
7. Ticket prices, including concessions.
8. Is the play licensed or BYO?
9. A telephone number to ring for bookings. If the phone is an answering machine, say so. Include an email address if you have internet bookings.



Put up posters as part of your daily routine – when you are going to the shops, for instance. This saves you time.

10. Venue: *Sandgate Town Hall, cnr Seymour St & Brighton Rd.* Always include the actual address, or directions if necessary. Remember that not all posters will be put up in your local area, so not everyone will know where your Town Hall or community theatre is.
11. Tear-offs. These greatly increase the poster's effectiveness because most people don't carry a pen and paper to write down details. Each tear-off must include the **title**, **performance dates**, **venue** and **booking numbers**. A tear-off with only a phone number is next to useless, as then people will forget what this piece of paper in their purse was about.

Options:

1. A subtitle (e.g. *'Writing a Play can be Murder'* for *Ira Levin's Deathtrap*, and *'A Tale Told by Idiots'* for *Farndale Ladies Macbeth*).
2. A brief synopsis of the play, e.g. *Billy Liar*. *"Billy is a lazy, irresponsible clerk who escapes from his drab life by pretending to be a successful man of the world. But when he becomes engaged to two women at the same time, Billy's troubles become more complex!"* This peaks the public's interest in the play. Each poster is like a newspaper article.
3. Any instructions? *Patrons must be seated ten minutes prior to performance;* or *Parking is available around Sutton Street;* or *A short walk from the Sandgate railway station.*

Ideally you should make both posters and flyers, though posters are more effective (providing they have tear-offs). Flyers are useful for handing out at local community festivals (more effective than handing them out on street corners), leaving in waiting rooms and letterboxes, or when a small poster is needed. Flyers should include all the above-mentioned details except the tear-offs. They should be half the size of an A4 sheet of paper so two flyers can be printed on each sheet, saving paper when photocopying. If you have an upcoming audition or workshop place an advertisement for it on the reverse side of the flyer. However, do not put an advertisement for two different plays on the same flyer. Your potential audience might decide to pass on the current play because they prefer the sound of the next one!

Posters are A4 size but it is worth running off a few A3 posters as well. They are awkward to handle, and many shopowners won't allow them as they take up too much space, but it helps to put up the biggest poster you can get away with.

As a rough guide I run off 500 flyers, 150 A4 posters and ten A3 posters. Naturally this will vary according to circumstances (and how enthusiastic your members are). For instance you may need more flyers if you plan to hand them out at a busy local festival or children's fete. When

photocopying don't just throw your poster onto the copier and run off 150 copies. Do a test copy first to make sure it comes out well. Try lightening or darkening the image. Don't hesitate to ask the owner of the photocopier for advice on how to use it, and don't hesitate to run off several copies until you get it right.

When putting up posters carry sticky tape (one of those small plastic tape dispensers is best) or blue tac (some shop owners refuse to have tape on their windows) plus map pins or thumb tacks for noticeboards. Magic Tape is preferable as it doesn't leave marks on windows. A cardboard mailing tube is best for carrying A3 posters so you don't have to fold them. When putting up a poster ALWAYS ask permission of the owner of the shop. Don't ask them to put it up, offer to put it up yourself. Not only is this polite, but owners can promise to put up a poster and then not bother. If they say they have to consult the boss first, just leave a poster with them and move on. You can best put up posters by either 'targeting' an area (e.g. the shops along the shoreline at Redcliffe, or near the railway station at Banyo) or by just carrying the posters around daily. We routinely go to shops, hairdressers, and corner stores during the week. It only takes a moment to ask the owner if they can put something up.

Once the play is over, ask all members (via the newsletter) to take down any posters they see. This isn't just tidiness. You don't want people looking at your posters and seeing events that are out of date. After doing this a few times they may stop looking altogether.

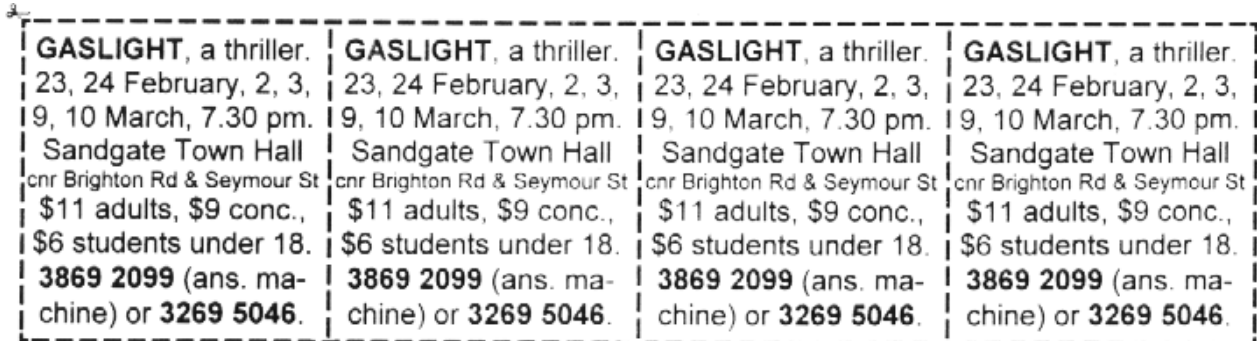
In 1999 Sandgate Theatre did a year-long survey of our publicity methods. We found that posters were not an effective means of advertising² when put against all the time and effort put into them. However when posters had tear-off sections their effectiveness jumped dramatically.

Another advantage of the tear-offs is that you can judge the effectiveness of a poster's location by how many tear-off have been taken. Don't forget to replace posters that have had all their tear-offs removed (and note that location as a good place to put the poster in future). Judging by this method the best place for posters is in an area where a large number of people enter or leave on foot (in Sandgate this means the railway station and the shops along Brighton Road, particularly Woolworths). However the posters must be on the outside of the window glass. Yes, sometimes hooligans will tear them down, but it makes the tear-offs easier to access by the public (and thus more likely to be removed).

However the survey also revealed that these tear-offs are only effective if they are pre-cut. People have a natural aversion to tearing or damaging things...unless someone has started the job already.

² Posters and flyers may however play an important subsidiary role in keeping a play in the public eye and gradually convincing people to come and see it. "I've seen the posters everywhere" was a common statement during the survey.

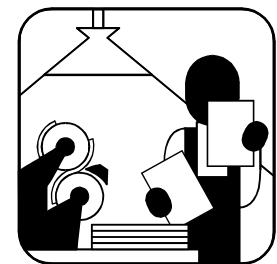
So an hour in front of the television with scissors pays off. Below is an example of a poster's tear-off section. Use the scissors to cut the *vertical* dotted lines only. All a member of the public has to do then is tear across in order to remove the tear-off.



Getting a professional printer to design and print your posters is usually not cost effective. Most home computers have software wizards that will help you design a more than adequate poster. Do keep in mind though that using colour in a poster raises the photocopying costs dramatically (from about 10c each to a dollar). If on the other hand you prefer a more sleek look to your posters, you can sometimes get a reduced price from printers as a form of sponsoring. A large organisation (not a small business) can afford to do a deal like this, but be careful as plenty of other community groups have the same idea! However most of these groups try to get the job done for free as they have little money. You're more likely to have success if you offer to cover say, 50% of the cost.

The printer will need a list of everything you want included in the poster (*check* these details before you hand them over!) and some ideas on design. For instance you might want to have the title, date and booking numbers in large letters. And don't forget those tear-offs!

Just something on the subject of posters versus flyers. Flyers tend to be handed out on street corners a lot, or shoved in mailboxes, but in my opinion this time is better directed towards putting up posters. Someone handing out flyers will do so for an hour or so, but a poster remains in place for weeks at a time. The 1999 survey revealed (to our shock) that even though hundreds of flyers had been given out to people on the street, only one person came in as a result of this. Using a professional distribution service was also shown to have limited effectiveness.



Paying for your posters to be printed and/or distributed is not cost effective.

When giving out posters to the cast and crew to distribute, don't just hand them a bunch. Tell them to take only as many posters or flyers as they think they can put up – that way they're more likely to

actually do so. Be sure to hand out posters before before rehearsals, as everyone quickly vanishes afterwards because they need to go straight home or avoid tidying up. Also, place a PDF version of your poster (if you don't have PDF software, there are sites on the internet that will help you create a PDF file for free) on your theatre website so other theatre members can print out copies if needed.

Programs

A theatre program should have (but not *must* have) the following features.

1. Title page with: **name of play**, **author/s**, **director/s**, and an **image** or design (preferably the same one used on the poster). The name of your theatre group. Any **mandatory credits** (*by special arrangement with Dominie Pty Ltd*). **Dates** of performance (include the **year** as some people like to keep the programs as memorabilia).
2. **When** and **where** is the play (or each act/scene) set?
3. List of **Acts** and **Scenes**. When (and how long) are the **intervals**?
4. **Characters** (in order of appearance), **description** of character, and the **actor** playing him/her.
5. A **picture** of the director, stage manager, and each cast member but only if the photos show up well after being photocopied (do a photocopy test first). Or if your programs are being printed professionally, make sure the photos are grouped on only a few pages (e.g. the centre pages of a book-type program) so the printers can use special glossy paper for only those pages.
6. Director's or President's **message**. Sometimes the President wants to welcome the audience back for another year or the director wants to express what the play means to them.
7. Any **advertising**? Ask the cast and crew if anything has been lent/donated to the play by a business in exchange for advertising. Check with the President/Secretary to see if any businesses have done your theatre any favours, or paid for advertising.
8. Any notices: **auditions**, **workshops**, invitations to join **mailing list/theatre company/singing group**, list of **upcoming plays** for the year. These things can be used to fill in space in the program, along with any relevant clipart (don't just put in any old thing to fill up space, because that's just how it will look). Ask people with access to computers/internet to look for clipart for you. Scan in publicity photos of the play (again, only if they photocopy well). Theatre facts, quotes and anecdotes can also be used to fill up space.
9. A short **biography** of each actor and the director.
10. The **crew**, and **thanks** to anyone who helped/built/donated stuff. To find out these details ask the heads of the various sections: the director, stage manager, wardrobe officer, Front of House co-ordinator, etc.

11. An advertisement for the **next play**.

If you have time, give a rough copy of the program to the director and cast/crew to check for errors or people who have been left out. **The program must look like it is worth the money the audience is paying.** Spelling mistakes, misspelt names, or photos so dark you can't tell what they are will not impress people. It isn't hard to make a program look special. Modern computer programs have all kinds of fancy borders and clipart that you can use. Stationary stores have custom paper (such as Geographics) or various textures that can be used as covers. Examples of programs can be found in your theatre archive. They can range from single sheets of paper or folded cards, to the more conventional 'book' design. There is no set type.

At a rough average one out of every three audience members will buy a program. Remember also that members of the cast and crew will want a copy (you'll need one for the archive as well). A good rule of thumb (for a three week production) is to run off a hundred programs for the first two weeks, then between twenty-five and fifty more in the final week, according to how many look like coming.

Always keep the master copies of your programs, flyers and posters in a safe place (e.g. in a sheet protector in the publicity file) not just shoved among a bunch of papers on a table where coffee can get spilt on them. You never know when you have to run off more copies.



Drama Festivals

Drama festivals are notorious for their poor attendance (except for youth entries when all the parents show up) even though the quality of performance is much higher. Nevertheless if your theatre offers such a festival the public still needs to know about it, lest your poor attendance become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Everything done to advertise a 'normal' play must be done with the drama festival. Your patrons have a right to know about *all* your theatre's events, whether they decide to come or not.

Sandgate Theatre's drama festival is called Yarrageh. It takes place in two parts – the Intermediate Session (for actors under 18 years), and the Open Session which takes place the following week. That means the Publicity Co-ordinator must send out two separate publicity sheets to the local

newspapers, both of which have to be sent out before the festival starts. This can be seen in the following diagram. Note that the newspaper article on the Open Session also acts as your ‘last chance’ article.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	Send out publicity on Festival					
		Newspapers come out				
	Send out publicity on Open Session			Intermediate Session starts	Intermediate Session	Intermediate Session
		Newspapers come out		Open Session starts	Open Session	Open Session

As the drama festival always takes place a few weeks after the theatre restaurant the Publicity Co-ordinator is kept pretty busy. You can reduce the workload by having a separate Festival Publicity Officer, but the two need to work together to ensure publicity for the festival is not interfering with the publicity for the next play. One trick is to give out drama festival posters for the (large) cast and crew of the theatre restaurant to put up, but make sure this happens a suitable time after they’ve been asked to put up posters for their own play.

Early in the year (before the entry forms are sent out) get together with whoever is organising the drama festival. Have them add the following condition to the festival entry form: *For publicity purposes all entrants must provide a short synopsis of the play and, if available, a good photograph.* I’ve found that while most festival entrants don’t have photos of their plays, at least one entrant is likely to have a good photograph you can use. The synopsis is essential as people inevitably ask what the various plays are about – it would be nice to provide patrons with a schedule of events, perhaps on the theatre website. Be sure to stress however that there may be last minute changes to this schedule.

Regardless of whether you’re the festival publicity officer or the Publicity Co-ordinator, be sure to send out publicity early on in the year saying that your theatre is looking for plays to be entered into its drama festival. Use all the resources you’d use to advertise an upcoming production – posters, radio, mailouts, patron’s letters. Place an add for festival entrants on the back of a flyer for the next play, or have an auditions poster also advertise for festival entrants. Schools with drama classes are a rich source of entrants, but be sure to inform them early in the year so they can work it into their curriculum. Because you won’t have any photos at this stage, just use a photograph taken at the

previous festival (e.g. *Michael Gammon performs in the award-winning 'Silence of the Hams' at last year's Yarrageh Drama Festival*) for your photo-articles.

But when the drama festival itself is coming up, don't use photographs of a play that has already performed at your theatre that year (e.g. a play from the *Night of One Acts* that's now being entered for competition). Potential audience members will be turned away by a photo of a play they've already seen.

If a neighbouring theatre group has entered one of their plays, you can always arrange for your own photographer to go over and take some photographs. As it happens, news of that theatre group sending a play to perform in your drama festival is the 'local hook' you need to gain the interest of outside newspapers. Sometimes the newspaper will even send their own photographer to take their own publicity shots.

It doesn't hurt to have your theatre photographer take photos during the drama festival – not only for the photo archive, but for public relations. As mentioned, many entrants do not already have good photographs of their plays. Some choice photographs sent to them (courtesy of your theatre) will do much to foster good relations and encourage these groups to come back next year.

Publicity Photos

Publicity photographs are important because they attract the reader's attention to newspaper articles on your play. An article with a photograph is more likely to be noticed by someone flicking through the paper. Therefore even if the Publicity Co-ordinator has no interest in photography, they must still know what's required in order to advise whoever is actually taking the photographs.



Photos draw attention to articles on your play

The PC must sit down with the director before rehearsals start and work out a time for taking publicity photos. Photo shoots are best scheduled for weekends, because there's more time to spare and photos can be taken outside as well. If photos are to be taken during rehearsals, make sure the director is aware that the shoot may take up to an hour of their precious rehearsal time. It is important to find out which suburbs the cast come from. As mentioned previously, the best way to get an article in an outside newspaper is to have an angle such as a local actor appearing in the play. Therefore you must have photographs of the actor to go with that article.

The reason for planning in advance when you're going to take photos is because the costumes, background and props need to be ready by then. Costumes don't have to be what is actually used on performance night, just the approximate look. Likewise only the costumes of those people who are

actually going to appear in the photograph need to be ready. This is why the PC needs to have read the play in advance, so as to have some idea of what the publicity photo might involve. Whoever is taking your photographs (whether a newspaper photographer or theatre member) is unlikely to know the play, so it will be up to you and the director to advise on the setup of the publicity photograph.

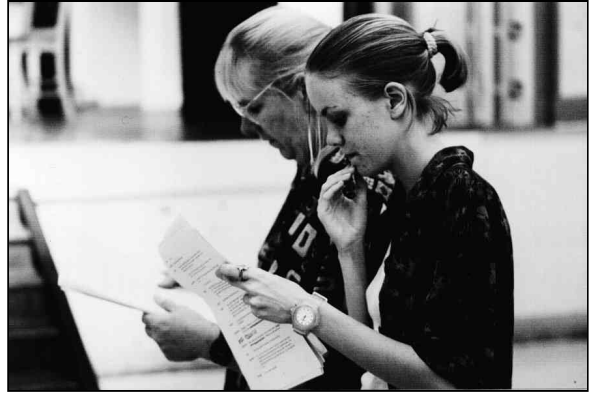
If you're paying for the expenses of a photographer, you need to agree beforehand how many photographs they should take. No good photographer only takes one or two shots. They're likely to use up a roll of film at least (if they're not using a digital camera). If you want additional photos taken (e.g. a mug shot of each cast member for the program) the photographer needs to know that in advance (as does your cast, so they can look presentable).

When taking posed photographs, avoid using more than four people (e.g. no group photos). Any more and the faces get too small when reproduced in a newspaper. For the same reason get as close as possible when taking candid photographs of actors rehearsing. No shots covering the entire stage; the photographer should focus on the performance of one or two actors.

If your theatre group doesn't have its own photographer, keep in mind that your local newspaper will have a well-qualified photographer on staff. Using such a photographer virtually guarantees the photo-article will appear in print. However there are a few things to keep in mind. Staff photographers only take photos for their own newspaper, so bring your own camera if you want some shots for other newspapers. Booking a photographer must be made a week or more in advance. Local newspapers work business hours so it is unlikely the photographer will turn up for a night rehearsal (though weekends are no problem). And most importantly, the cast must be ready in their costumes when the photographer gets there. The staff photographer will have other events to cover that day, so they don't like wasting time. Also, make sure you have the names (spelt correctly) of all those appearing in the publicity shot to give to the photographer.

One problem is when you need a publicity photograph at short notice, or to advertise something other than a play. A clever Publicity Co-ordinator can handle this with some prior preparation. If your theatre has its own photographer, get them to build up a library of stock theatre photos, both posed or candid shots. Auditions, rehearsals, set construction, makeup application, tech runs – all are good opportunities to take photos that say 'theatre' without being linked to any one play. Such photos can then be used to promote virtually any kind of activity, and can be stored in the theatre photo album.

As a member of the theatre committee, the Publicity Co-ordinator should know well in advance when workshops and auditions are to be held. There's nothing to stop the PC from organising a photograph of a workshop instructor posing next to a spotlight, or the director of a murder mystery with a deerstalker hat and magnifying glass.





A candid stock photograph (taken during rehearsals) that can be used to promote an audition, a play, or the theatre group itself.


Regarding cast mugshots for the program, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. First, remember that the program is going to be photocopied, which will degrade the quality of the photo. So don't photograph someone with dark hair or clothing against a dark background – it will look like part of their body is missing. Either use a light background, or have a spotlight shining on the back of their head to separate them from the background. Secondly, when using a digital camera 1M is a perfectly adequate pixel quality. You only need an image that's a little bigger than a passport-sized photograph. When you're playing with a dozen or so cast photos on your pagemaker software, you don't want the file continually locking up due to lack of memory space.

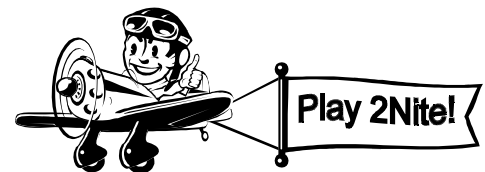
After the play is over it's the responsibility of the Publicity Co-ordinator to ensure that photographs of the production are put aside for the photo album. I usually put aside one good photo for a one-act, and up to four photos for a large or particularly photogenic production. If your theatre photographer didn't take any performance or dress rehearsal photos then it's likely a member of the cast or their relatives did – ask via the newsletter. Don't forget that photographs of auditions, rehearsals, set painting, makeup, backstage crew, front-of-house, etc should also go in the album.

A Few More Publicity Ideas

 Put a poster in the window of your car.

 Get a local supermarket to put flyers on their checkout counters and cigarette desk. They might not be willing to do this without permission from their head office, so find out well in advance in case you have to wait for someone's permission.

 Put flyers advertising your next play (or auditions), brochures on your theatre group, and copies of the theatre newsletter on a table during performances for the audience to pick up.



☞ For Sandgate Theatre Members Only – Flyers and brochures can be placed in the wooden boxes on either side of the main doors to the Town Hall. To have a poster put up in the glass display cabinet outside the Town Hall, slide the poster under the door of the office (to the left of the main doors) with the following written on the back – ‘Please put this poster up in the glass cabinet’.

☞ If you want to put posters up at railway stations without having to travel to each one, get some *use-again envelopes* from your local railway station. These are envelopes designed to be used multiple times. Put a poster in each and address them to the Station Master of each railway station, with a note asking him/her to put them up. Give the bunch of envelopes to any train guard. Note: Queensland Rail often cracks down on non-rail posters in their stations so be prepared for the occasional disappointment.

☞ When inviting audience members to join the theatre mailing list (see **patrons**) make sure there’s a column for email addresses – it will save your group a lot of money on postage.

☞ Always keep an eye out for newsletters and bulletin boards/websites by community groups. Get in contact with these groups and see if they will mention your plays. Local government is always looking for ways to promote the culture of the region (and what’s more cultural than the theatre?). They’re always organising festivals, events, brochures on the local community, web pages, etc. Keep your eyes open and don’t miss a chance to promote your theatre, especially if the council is paying for it!

☞ Be aware of festivals. Sandgate alone has several festivals during the year (Einbunpin, Blue Water Festival, etc). They are a good opportunity to hand out flyers as a large number of people from the surrounding area will be in one place. Get actors to hand out flyers dressed in the costumes they wear in the play. You can also organise some street theatre, but this needs to be done with caution. Like any production, street theatre needs to be planned and rehearsed; it should not be organised at short notice.



☞ A publicity survey can be conducted to find out how effective your publicity methods are – especially if your group has spent a lot of money on it (e.g. paid distribution of flyers). Have a specific person sitting Front-of-House to ask patrons as they buy their tickets how they found out about the play. Ideally this job should be the Publicity Co-ordinator’s because the PC knows where publicity material has been sent. For instance if someone replies vaguely “*Local paper*” the PC can name the local newspapers to jog their memory. Do NOT give this task to the person selling the tickets or doing some other Front-of-House task because they will be too busy. Remember in

conducting your survey that some publicity measures can take time to generate results. Don't be too quick to write off a method as ineffective.

One final point. The best publicity for any theatre group is to perform good productions. First time visitors will not come again if they do not like the quality of their entertainment. Poorly-done sets, actors consistently forgetting their lines and bad direction or technical co-ordination will not impress audiences. As the Publicity Co-ordinator you and your team may have a lot to do with the production itself or very little. But no member of the theatre should avoid doing something simply because it is not their usual task. Every member should be prepared to help out whether asked or not. It's better that many people do a few small tasks without being asked – searching for or donating a prop or item of costume, helping put away chairs or pull down the set, putting up a poster – than a few doing the bulk of the work. That is the message behind this Publicity Guide.

Emergency Publicity

Sometimes the job of publicity is given to someone at the last minute who has no experience, or has very little time for the task (such as the director). So the following is butcher job publicity. Use these methods if you have limited time or helpers, not as a matter of course (*if you have limited time or helpers as a matter of course, start doing something about it!* – see **Recruiting**). The following tasks are the least you have to do. Do them even if you think there's not enough time before opening night, as late publicity can get results.



1. Write a publicity sheet on the play. The sheet should include a brief description of the play, where it is performing, dates and times, booking numbers, and prices.
2. Some theatres have a mailing list of patrons to whom a letter goes out telling them of upcoming plays. Ask your theatre committee who has this list (and if things are so chaotic the committee doesn't know, ask people who've been in your theatre group for a while). Find out if a letter about your play has been sent to these patrons. If not, you have to get your publicity sheet photocopied and mailed out to everyone on that list. Sandgate Theatre members should know that free photocopying can be arranged at the Ward Office (behind the Sandgate Town Hall) or the Electorate Office. You are expected to provide the paper. Other theatre groups should also try their local government office. If not, most printers offer cheap photocopying for bulk amounts.
3. Send your publicity sheet to the local newspapers (for Sandgate Theatre that's the *Northside Chronicle* and *Bayside Star*). The article on your play is more likely to be noticed if it has a

photograph attached, so find a cast member who's got a camera and take a posed shot of your actors (no more than three or four actors in one shot). Include the actors' names (from left to right) and the characters they're playing.

4. Look in the Yellow Pages for local radio stations, schools, newspapers and magazines. Call them up and get their mailing address and email (while you're doing so, make sure they're interested in promoting an amateur theatre production in the first place). Mail off your publicity sheet. Don't forget the Courier Mail's entertainment section.
5. If you have time to get posters done up (see **Posters** in this guide for the details you need to include) concentrate your efforts in your local shopping area. You need to find places that a lot of people are going to walk (not drive) past every day, preferably places they are actually walking into (e.g. train stations, supermarkets and cafes). Don't waste time handing out flyers on street corners or making letterbox drops. Posters are more effective.
6. Most people come to plays because a member of the cast told them about it. Get every cast member (and every theatre member you can find) and give them posters or flyers to hand out or put up.
7. Pick a club or organisation (e.g. a retirement home or the local branch of the Salvos) in your area and offer them a special low price for a group booking. A single direct approach will be more effective than sending letters to a hundred clubs. Even better if you can find a member of the theatre who also belongs to that organisation. They can do the pitching and organising for you.