

## La Boite Theatre

[www.laboite.com.au](http://www.laboite.com.au)

November 2003

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### Interview with Tamsin Roseveare on using the Internet to conduct e-business

#### 1. The business

La Boite is Queensland's oldest theatre company. It was created in 1925 as the Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society, and developed steadily, moving several times, until 1967 when the company changed its name to La Boite, to reflect its new location.

From its amateur beginnings, the company became fully professional in 1993. Today, La Boite has a national reputation that is based on its commitment to Queensland artists, the development of new Queensland works and overall support for Australian plays.

The company now has outgrown its La Boite premises, and is about to move to a new location, from which it will operate in 2004.

#### 2. The idea

La Boite began its online adventure in 1998, with a basic website that contained information about the organisation. In planning improvements to the site, it was decided that the organisation should use the online medium to advertise itself and its programs more extensively, and make it easier for patrons to access information about the company. It also wanted a facility to enable patrons to book and pay for seats online.

In 2002 the site was expanded considerably, to incorporate these features. In addition to a wide range of general information about the company, its activities and its programs, an online booking facility and a virtual tour of the theatre were introduced.

The site also includes a subscription section, which offers a range of packages designed to appeal to a range of patrons. Benefits include discounted ticket prices, free programs and after-show discussions. Patrons can access a downloadable PDF application form, select their preferred package and return it to the company, with the appropriate payment.

La Boite distributes news and coming events to patrons through a mailing list. Patrons can add themselves to this list using an online form.

Day-to-day maintenance of the website is carried out by Front of House Coordinator, Tamsin Roseveare, who estimates that it takes her about an hour per week. The technical maintenance of the site is carried out by ToadShow, the website host.

The website is promoted through all theatre advertisements and publicity, and through signs at the theatre itself. In November of each year the site is updated and re-launched, ready for the following season.

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### 3. The e-business

La Boite was originally an amateur theatre, with close links to the community. Since 1993, when it became fully professional, the company has worked steadily to extend those links. The website is used by theatre patrons and members of the public interested in contributing, in a professional or voluntary capacity, to the work of the theatre, either on stage or backstage. They do this through an **Artists' Register**, which allows interested members of the public to register interest, using an online form.

The e-commerce facility offered by La Boite enables patrons to book and pay for seats on the website, through Tickets.com, a company that offers a specialised service in online ticketing. Patrons click on **Bookings** and move to a new window that connects them to Tickets.com. This provides a list of La Boite's attractions, with information on the availability of tickets to performances. A performance is selected by clicking on the **Buy tickets** button, which allows users to specify the number and cost of tickets they require. Confirmation of the order follows, then patrons provide their personal and payment details on an online form, which is submitted to complete the transaction. Patrons then collect their tickets at the Box Office prior to the performance.

### 4. The challenges

The main challenge faced by La Boite is keeping the website up-to-date. Information often changes quickly, sometimes unexpectedly. Since the public has come to rely on the site for current information, it is essential that it appears on the site as soon as possible. Staff training has not been a major issue, because the website has largely been an information source for the company. The main issue for staff has been to ensure that they are aware of the site and its functions, so that they can direct enquiries to the website and, where possible, collect email addresses from enquirers.

### 5. The results

The theatre box office operates in normal business hours. The website is a 24 hour a day operation, allowing customers to check performance details and book seats at any time. The website makes it possible to advertise any last-minute changes virtually immediately—and to provide instant information about the organisation's operations.

Patrons are provided with a feedback form at the theatre, allowing them to comment on aspects of the theatre's operations. The online booking facility is enthusiastically praised. Patrons find the website useful, informative and user-friendly in its design and function.

The website has greatly improved the provision of information to the public, and the day-to-day operation of the theatre. Many enquiries are now directed to the website, and email enquiries are increasing steadily.

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### 6. The future

La Boite moves into new premises before the end of the year, from a 200 to a 400 seat venue. The challenge for them will be to maintain contact with customers and members during and after the move. The website will play a major role in this period.

There are no plans to change the site's basic structure and function. It works well and patrons like it. Tamsin emphasises the importance of good website design. Many users have limited experience of the Internet, so a balance must be maintained between the modern and up-to-date appearance of the site and its user-friendly design and function.

### 7. The advice

Tamsin believes that the most important advice for those planning to move into the world of e-business is to start small and keep it simple. The original site was a tentative step, designed mainly to provide an online presence for the organisation. Once this site was in place the organisation was able to plan a more sophisticated site which would meet its needs, and develop that site in conjunction with a professional web development company that could provide the specialised services they required.