

ARTS AUDIENCES: BUILD YOUR AUDIENCES 2011
REPORT ON

LUNASA AT THE MODEL

**AT THE MODEL, HOME OF THE NILAND COLLECTION
SLIGO, CO SLIGO**

AUGUST 2011

Prepared by The Model with Annette Nugent
October 2011

Arts Audiences: Build Your Audience scheme

In January 2011, **Arts Audiences** invited submissions from arts organisations outlining projects where the services of marketing consultant Annette Nugent would be of assistance to them in a particular cultural tourism audience development initiative. From submissions, three organisations were selected to receive free consultancy. This document, produced by Lisa Hallinan of The Model and Annette Nugent is an outcome from this process.

Arts Audiences is a partnership initiative of the **Arts Council** and **Temple Bar Cultural Trust**, further information about these organisations and this scheme is available at www.ArtsAudiences.ie

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

The Model, home of The Niland Collection, in Sligo town, is one of Ireland's leading contemporary arts centres. Built in 1862 as a Model School, the present building has been extended twice and re-opened to the public in mid 2010.

This award-winning building is home to the impressive Niland Collection of art, one of the most notable collections in Ireland and features works by John and Jack B. Yeats, Estella Solomons, Paul Henry, Dorothy Cross and Louis Le Brocquy, among others. The building boasts a café, a bookshop, a wonderful gallery circuit; a purpose built performance space (244 seated, 400 standing), and a suite of impressive artist studios on the top floor with enviable views of Sligo town and County.

The Model is unique in the area with regard to its focus on visual arts, and its unique selling point is the presentation of modern and contemporary art. It also acts as the town's arthouse cinema, and presents live performances, music in particular, in a theatrical environment. It is one of the most attractive and historic buildings in the area to visit, and is well placed to be a key visitor attraction in Sligo and the North-West.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Model's main objective in participating in the Arts Audiences: Build your Audience scheme 2011, was to assist in achieving a goal set out in our Marketing Strategy 2010-2013, which identified Sightseers as a target audience segment. Programming and promoting a series of events in August 2011 was a key step in engaging with this audience segment.

In addition, The Model hoped to use this programme to engage in a marketing programme that would assist in 'knitting' the venue back into the local and visitor fabric of the town after its extended closure for refurbishment and to generate substantially increased traffic through the centre in 2011 and beyond.

The programme devised was **Lúnasa at The Model**: a month long celebration of the arts, with a heavy emphasis on visitor-friendly events, programmed towards the end of each week in August, when more visitors are in Sligo and locals have more free time.

The programme featured a series of surf films - including a national premiere; Saturday night music and comedy gigs with high profile acts; a specially designed summer-camp for children, **Soundstation**; and extended lunchtime curator's tours and group guided tours free to the public.

In addition, The Model's visual arts exhibitions **The Celtic Twilight**, drawn from the Niland Collection, and Harun Farocki's **Recognition and Tracking** were featured as part of the programme.

ABOUT THE VISITOR MARKET

Visitors to the North-West of Ireland overwhelmingly originate on the island of Ireland: of 1.4m visitors to the North West, just 403,000 were overseas tourists. 142,000 of those came to Sligo, mainly from Great Britain (37%) and Mainland Europe (44%). With less than one in four visitors from overseas markets, the domestic visitor market is vital to Sligo and The Model.

Visitors tend to be travelling alone (42%) or as a couple (34%), with a small number of families (15%). Demographically, visitors to the North-West tend to be overwhelmingly ABC1 (managerial / professional / white collar), which matches with a tendency for arts appreciation and attendance.

The main reason for visiting the area is outdoor activities such as surfing, walking and golf, which go some way to explaining the high percentage of those travelling alone. Many stay with friends/relatives (44%) with hotels (26%) and guesthouses/B&Bs (18%), the next most popular accommodation. If not staying in Sligo town, many are based in Rosses Point and Strandhill.

** Source: Failte Ireland North West, 2009 (most recent available)*

VISITOR MARKETING STRATEGY

Working with Annette Nugent, we developed a marketing plan for the project in May 2011 – see Appendix 1. Target audience segments identified as being important to The Model through this programme included locals – to re-engage with the local population after the refurbishment closure; urban dwellers – particularly in Dublin; domestic holidaymakers – particularly activity-loving visitors, such as surfers, and hopefully, international visitors interested in cultural activity.

An important element of the planning process was setting objectives, to identify targets and to have a benchmark against which to review the outcomes of the project. In addition to broad objectives such as maximising media coverage and increasing the number of visitors to The Model, we also set objectives that were **SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-specific**. This process was emphasised by Annette, and the existence of a written plan and week-by-week timeline proved vital in keeping the marketing activity focused through the challenging resource issues that emerged.

Resources available to commit to the project were very limited, and subsequently were even more limited than initially envisaged. A very modest budget was available to deliver *Lúnasa* and the corresponding marketing plan. With this in mind, The Model planned to take a very collaborative approach to their marketing, working in partnership with accommodation providers, other arts organisations and local businesses.

Furthermore, another resource ‘bump in the road’ occurred, in that The Model’s Marketing Coordinator, Aoife Porter and Marketing Assistant, Anne Mullee, both concluded contracts in early June 2011. Aoife’s replacement, Lisa Hallinan, was appointed mid-June and an intern, Zoe Dunne was taken on board from Sligo IT’s PR & Event Management Degree Course to work specifically on this project, also in June. This new team took on the baton of promoting this programme in incredibly difficult circumstances, with a very short lead-in time and reduced resources.

Nonetheless, much of the marketing was rolled out as per the Visitor Marketing Strategy. However, as the lead in time for the new team was significantly shorter than anticipated when drafted, there was not enough time to implement all elements.

With this in mind, following is a summary of their activity and the outcomes.

PROGRAMMING

While the general programme was outlined at the start of the summer, a number of positive programming initiatives were later initiated to maximise engagement with new audiences, which worked very effectively.

In particular, a collaboration with a local artist and surf professional, Easkey Britton, to programme a surprise screening (an Irish premiere of an eco-surf documentary) as part of the *Lúnasa at the Model* film programme attracted well over average numbers to the film and resulted in a sharp spike in activity on The Model’s website and social media platforms around and as the film’s title was announced.

In the Music and Comedy strand, programming an up-and-coming act from Boyle/ West Sligo resulted in a large number of new visitors from those areas, introducing a new local audience to The Model and raising awareness of our music and gallery programmes.

PRINT PROMOTION

130 A3 **posters** were distributed in Sligo Town, County and border counties at the same time as the flyer. Six **A1 posters** were installed in key locations around Sligo town including the Tourist Information Office.

Six **road signs** were designed and installed on all access routes to Sligo Town in the first week of August. These were to have a large visual impact for visitors to Sligo in the lead-up to the August Bank Holiday weekend.

An attractive, full-colour, A5 promotional **brochure**, similar in style to The Model's print promotional items but using bright colours much more prominently, was produced. 2,500 of these flyers were printed in July and distributed in early July throughout Sligo town and county and the border counties by The Model's usual flyer distributor. While the print run was too small to significantly extend the distribution to new outlets, a web version of the flyer was created and circulated via email and social media to broaden its impact.

An initial peak on ticket sales (monitored by the Model's box office system) was recorded immediately after the programme flyer drop with a corresponding peak in Facebook post views of 58,367.

Another visible impact of this brochure was the numbers taking part in Curator's tours: promoting the free lunchtime tours by The Model's curatorial team in the Lunasa brochure led to numbers on the tours trebling during August.

ADVERTISING

Full page **advertisements** were taken out in local newspapers the Sligo Champion and Sligo Weekender. Audience surveys carried out towards the end of August found that 8% of visitors surveyed heard about *Lúnasa* through press advertisements.

CO-OPERATIVE MARKETING

Shortly after the new Marketing Officer was appointed, the team became aware of another Sligo event called *Lúnasa*, which took place over the August bank holiday weekend. The Model contacted the organisers and worked in collaboration with them to cross-promote and communicate a joint *Lúnasa* message for Sligo in August. This involved The Model drafting and both parties issuing a release incorporating information on both programmes, cross promotion on each other's website, social media platforms and radio segments as well as on online news rooms such as *Sligo Today*.

The Model worked with its hotel neighbour, The Glasshouse Hotel, to create and promote a package consisting of a pair of tickets to The Gloaming concert, a night's stay and an evening meal at The Glasshouse Hotel as an Irish Times Reader's Offer. This offer received 300 responses and indicated a real appetite for packages of this kind going forward.

MEDIA (PRINT AND BROADCAST)

The new team is particularly comfortable with generating media coverage and had great success in this regard. Two-three page articles appeared in local press publications, Sligo Weekender and Sligo Champion when the programme was announced and further articles appeared in the lead-up to individual events. Four feature segments were broadcast on local radio station Ocean FM, *Lúnasa* was highlighted in a Newstalk interview with The Model's Director and the Irish Times covered it in The Ticket listings and a special Sligo supplement.

Surveys found that this coverage and online media contributed to 8% and 12% of new visitors respectively.

LIAISING WITH TOURISM PROVIDERS

A *Lúnasa* Preview event was held on June 20 for hoteliers, hotel personnel and tourist information staff in Sligo to provide advance information on the programme, print and promotion materials and a tour of The Model and its current exhibitions.

This event was organised following an initial meeting with the local Fáilte Ireland office, who provided The Model with a recommended list of hoteliers and tourist information points throughout Sligo, as well as mentor support on the event. Representatives from all the hotels in the area were then invited to the event, with a 50% attendance rate.

The format of the event was a meet and greet, an run through of the programme, a discussion of possible cross-promotion opportunities and a tour of The Model, its facilities and some of the exhibitions featured in the programme. *Lúnasa* programmes and posters were also provided for display in respective hotels and offices.

This worked very well and for some it was their first time to visit. Relationships were established and future collaborations were discussed. An eagerness to work together was clearly expressed by hoteliers: after this event the joint promotion with the Glasshouse Hotel was set up and run together with the Irish Times.

In addition, possibilities around conference opportunities were discussed with two Sligo hotels as a result of the preview event, which may indicate the beginning of a beneficial relationship for The Model

Local activity employers were targeted through social media for the season of surf films. A number of the local surf schools in Strandhill and Bundoran did promote the screenings through their own social media platforms, particularly the Irish surf documentary premiere.

ONLINE PROMOTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Model is very active in online promotion, both through its attractive website, regular email newsletters and substantial social media activity. The social media activity in particular is shared very evenly among all departments within the Model, and so the gap in marketing resources in late May / early June had little impact on the Model's online profile, which was well served by all other staff in the organisation at this time.

Having said that, the *Lunasa* at the Model programme did provide 'things to talk about' to a new audience. Particularly successful was the online conversation generated by the Easkey

Britton surf film event: there was a real online conversation going on, and interaction and comments at a level not previously seen by the Model's social media activity.

The Model also tried to ensure that Lúnasa at the Model information was included on visitor facing websites, particularly the discoverireland.ie website, and on hotel and visitor attraction websites, such as discoversligo.ie and adventuresligo.ie and through sligotourism.ie. Sligo Tourism in particular were extremely helpful in promoting the event, as a relationship had been established through the other *Lúnasa* event, which they were involved in running.

OUTCOMES

From The Model's point of view, *Lúnasa at the Model* went well, particularly taking into consideration the limited lead-in time for new staff and resources available to deliver the project. Many of the specific objectives set out in the Marketing Plan were reached, as outlined here.

Note: the following outcomes were measured via the ongoing statistics/data collected by The Model's website and social media platforms and also from direct audience surveying done by Zoe Dunne in the third week of Lunasa at The Model. Surveys were handed out to attenders at events between Wednesday August 17 to Wednesday August 24 to capture information on who was attending Lunasa and how they heard about it.

Audiences achieved: in person

Lúnasa at the Model set out to attract a steady flow of daytime visitors to the Model during the month of August, in similar quantities to the Yeats exhibition (2-500 per week). **This was ACHIEVED: numbers visiting The Model Galleries during August was 1,264.** It is worth noting that this Gallery figure is for just three weeks in August, not the entire duration of Lunasa, as the exhibition, which had been programmed at the start of the year, finished on August 21. Hence, this figure – 400 per week – is comparable with the Gallery attendance at the Jack B Yeats exhibition presented earlier in 2011, which was the busiest exhibition the Model had experienced since re-opening.

While overall visitor numbers to The Model were on target, numbers at specific evening events were only partially achieved:

The *Lúnasa* film premiere of *Minds in the Water* had an audience of 83, just over the target of 80, but reaching targets on film screenings did not happen across the board.

The comedy event, *Craic in the Box*, reached its 40% capacity target (41% to be exact).

By far the largest evening audiences were for the music programme. But targets for the music events were also more ambitious, at 80% of capacity. All music events except the opening event hit this target. *Lúnasa* opened with Jerry Fish and the Mudbug Club at the start of August: we feel that this event suffered from the fact that not enough marketing activity took place in advance of August.

We also believe that an opportunity was lost due to lack of resources: we would have loved to have better leveraged this opening event to “kick start” the programme with opening night celebratory event. This would have provided a PR opportunity to generate awareness of and interest in the programme from the start, which would have benefitted the entire programme that followed.

Regarding audience breakdown, we hoped to attract 50% of overall August attendance from the Model's current regular attenders, 20% from the local Sligo population, either first-time or lapsed attenders and 30% from the visitor sector (urban dwellers, domestic visitors, international sightseers). **Audience research undertaken towards the end of the month indicates that this was almost exactly reached: 70% of the audience was from Sligo and its surrounds, with the remaining 30% from further afield: 15% from other parts of Ireland (with a significant 9% from Dublin), and 15% international.**

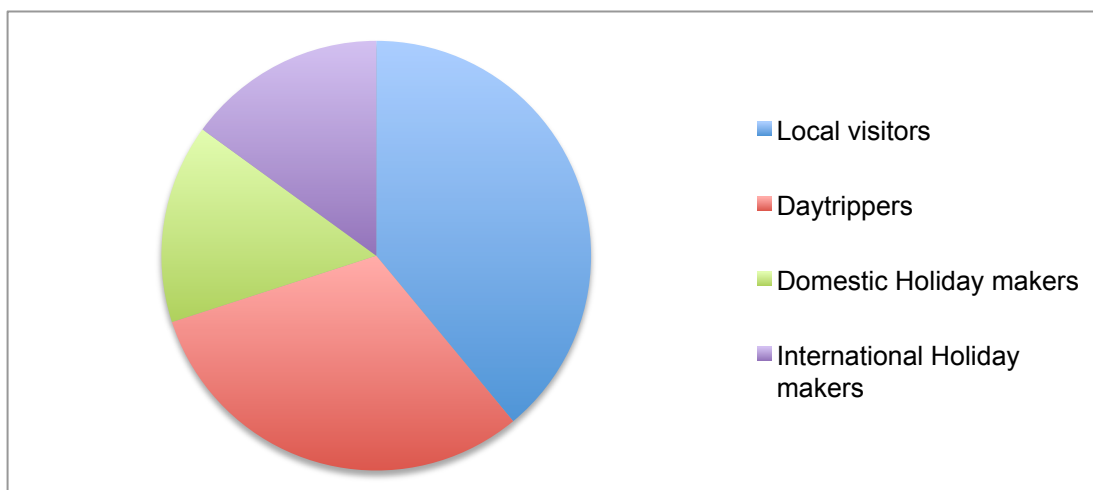


Fig 1 –*Lúnasa at the Model* audiences by geography

The surveys also revealed the interesting outcome that just 27% were first-time visitors to *The Model*, which suggests that some of those non-local attenders return regularly to Sligo and *The Model*. The fact that 73% of attenders had been at *The Model* before might indicate that *Lúnasa at the Model* has been successful in attracting locals back to the refurbished arts centre.

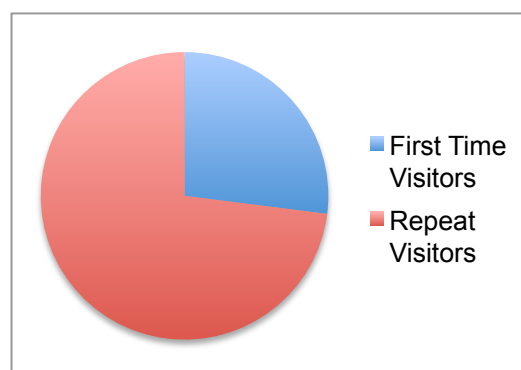


Fig 2 –*Lúnasa at the Model* audiences by frequency

While we set an objective to convert daytime visitors to evening show attenders, this was not specifically measured. It can be speculated that the large numbers of attenders who stated they heard about the event through ‘word of mouth’ might have heard about it while in *The Model* during the day.

Audiences achieved: online

Lúnasa at the Model had a significant impact on *The Model*’s online audiences. Google Analytics showed a 24% increase in visits to the site throughout August, compared to the previous month with 60% of visits being new.

Large peaks in visitor numbers were also recorded in the lead-up to the surprise screening premiere, and two main music gigs (*Tucan* and *The Gloaming*). *Lúnasa* also generated interest in *The Model* as an organisation, with visits to the About Us page up by 141% in August.

The numbers of international visitors to the site was also up with the largest numbers being from the UK (up 31%), US (up 44%), Germany (up 16%) and Canada (up 41%), France (up 49%) and Italy (up 45%). These suggest a strong case for using the site in a more targeted way for international promotion, perhaps even including a multi-lingual facility.

Sharp increases in social media activity were also recorded around main programme announcement and highlights, particularly on Facebook, with a huge number of post-views (125,240 in August v. July 58,367) and 192 Feedback posts.

Sources of information

Surveys indicate that visitors heard about the programme through word-of-mouth (33%), with print materials (posters & programmes) being next most effective (27%), then online (21%), followed by media and press (16%).

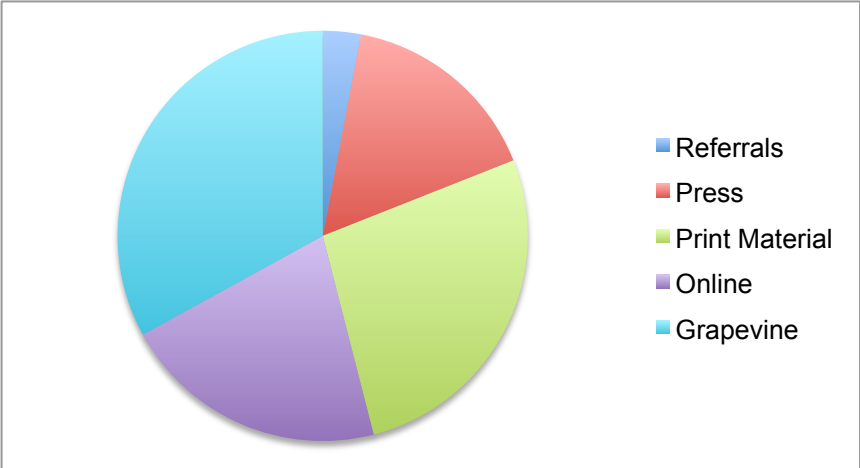
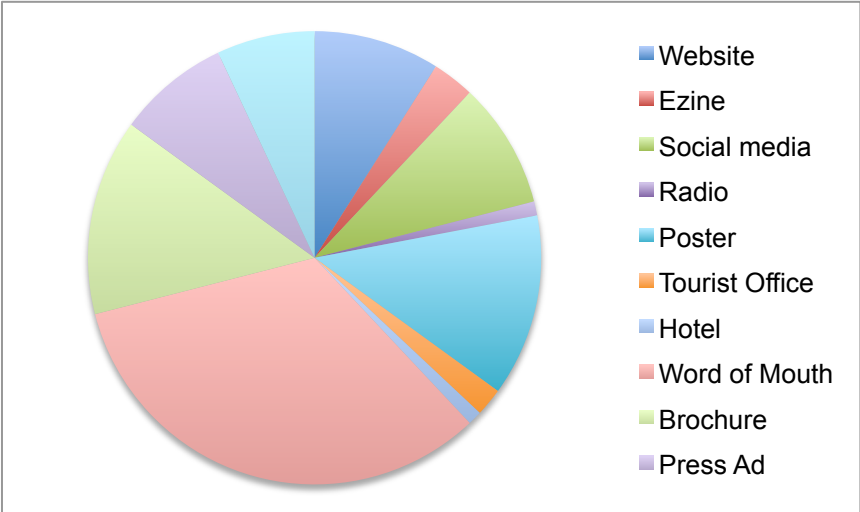


Fig 3 –Lúnasa at the Model audiences sources of information

When pressed more specifically, the brochure was revealed to be slightly more effective than the poster (14% and 13% respectively) as source of information. Interestingly, social media emerged as important as the website as a source of information (both 9%), with just 3% of respondents finding out through the ezine. Press advertising (8%) was as effective as articles and radio coverage (8%).

Fig 4 –Lúnasa at the Model audiences sources of information - detailed



Just 3% of respondents heard about the programme through the Tourist Office of their hotel. This indicates that there is still substantial work to be done in ensuring that these outlets are aware of the programme of events at The Model and confident to recommend their clients to such events.

LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The insights revealed through the *Lúnasa at the Model* programme and the Build Your Audience process have been very useful to the incoming marketing team, generating real and accurate audience knowledge and learnings at the start of our tenure. A number of key findings from this project will inform The Model's marketing activities going forward.

The potential to attract new visitors to The Model through targeted specific programming was definitely enforced by this project. Curator's tours and an exhibition programme targeting the visitor market, together with a strong music programme of locally and nationally significant acts, appear to be extremely attractive to visitors to Sligo and should be a strong focus for summer seasons going forward.

We found that cinema and education programming, however, was not as attractive to the summertime visitor market. Cinema numbers generally fall during the summer due to regular audiences being away, and this was not made up by the visitor audience generated by *Lúnasa*. The education programme was even more of a disconnect: at other times of year, such programmes are communicated through schools and third level education institutions, which obviously cannot be deployed for summer activity. The summer is also a key period for planning the delivery of The Model's education projects, which follow the academic calendar. Consequently, we would not create an education element in future summer programmes.

Further development of relationships with Sligo tourism bodies and providers is key to building visitor numbers to The Model and these nascent relationships will be built on, particularly in the forthcoming *Sound+Vision Festival* in November and on future summer programmes.

The value of personal relationship-building - collaborations with local personalities and corresponding target groups - to connect with new audiences was highlighted here. In the future we hope to expand our network of key opinion formers and influencers to act as ambassadors/ collaborators for The Model's programmes.

Insight into the benefits of efficient targeted use of social media and online communication tools to target domestic and international visitors was gained through this project, providing a focus on where our active engagers are located, their level of engagement and the potential for growth in visitor numbers and Box-Office.

Unfortunately, our in-house box-office system, installed this year, was not optimally used to capture data on visitors during this project due to limited in-house expertise and the departure of staff familiar with the system. Training to gain this expertise will take place in the immediate future and we plan to use the system to encourage a culture of advance sales, which currently does not exist in Sligo and could greatly influence the marketing of The Model's events in the future.

ENDS