

# DIE FIBEL

*A Primer for Independent Theatre*



**COMMUNICATION**



## Editorial



You have a sparkling idea for a theatre project of your own and no clue how to set about it? What does it take to realise a piece or a performance? How to finance your production? What's the best way to advertise and make the press write about you? And what legal regulations do you need to adhere to?

Lower Saxony is big and colourful – the Independent Theatre scene in particular is very lively and diverse. We welcome you to this community! The Association of Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony (*Landesverband Freier Theater in Niedersachsen, LaFT*) and the

*Theaterhaus Hildesheim (TH)* know their way about the scene and give advice on all matters at hand. Now we have distilled our many years of experience and created ***A Primer for Independent Theatre***, a concrete practical instruction guide in several brochures for Independent Theatre professionals. The Primer offers first steps for newcomers but is also suitable as a definitive update for the advanced.

Good luck from: Martina von Bargaen, Maria Gebhardt, Uta Lorenz, Ulrike Seybold, Carola Streib.  
English translation by Mark Roberts.

## Signets

We have flagged certain sections in ***A Primer for Independent Theatre*** with pictograms to indicate notes we wished to highlight, definitions, or tips. Aspects you should give special atten-

tion to when creating your project are marked with the pictogram 'attention'. The authors chose simplified icons of the respective sign language words.



Attention



Example



Definition



Note

## Gender

***A Primer for Independent Theatre*** was written in gender aware language. After conferring with a diversity consultant at the university of Leipzig, the authors chose a language model that was meant to allow self-recognition to a maximum of readers and to avoid the 'gender-gap'.

Aiming to reach the same goal in the English version of the Primer, the translator consulted a professor at the university of Hildesheim and has attempted to follow her advice.

### Gender



*In order to do justice to all gender classifications, readers should be given the opportunity to classify themselves.*



## 1. The basics

Theatre should be a shared experience. In order to get all the people out there interested in your production and to get them to attend a performance, you will need to communicate. Marketing, public relations, advertising, press and media work – to stop you losing your head and communication pleasure in this confusing variety, here is a brief overview.

The term marketing is taken from business administration and initially refers to all of an organisation's relationships with the market, i. e. with (potential) customers or consumers. When applied to culture, the concept loses its profit-oriented flavour, because in cultural marketing everything centres on the product or production: Theatre people mainly wish to create a great play for themselves and other interested people. Competition, economic profit and growth are of secondary importance. But even artists must make decisions regarding the famous 'four Ps' of the marketing mix: Product, price, promotion (i.e. communication) and place

(i.e. distribution). Marketing includes the following areas: 'Public relations' describes the long-term development of an internal and external identity. It should not only target potential buyers, but also the company itself and its employees, other interested parties, and society as a whole. The aim is to create a consistent image that should naturally be as positive and sympathetic as possible, to build understanding and trust, and to increase long term awareness. 'Advertising', on the other hand, means direct, short-term communication regarding a specific product or event with the clear purpose of increasing sales. To this end, the organisation broadcasts a subjective message which is intended to influence customers' purchasing behaviour. Examples of advertising efforts include placing information in online and print media or distributing specially made flyers and posters. To a large extent the level of complexity you can allow for an advertising campaign depends on the financial means, as advertising inevitably costs money. Quite differently,

press and media work operates without or with a low budget and primarily addresses journalists. Media work is identified by the fact that, as a rule, material is merely made available – while the respective editors decide what will be published and in which form.

This illustrates the possible dimensions of stepping out and approaching the public. In practice – and for you – the different areas are not so clearly separable. Not least this is because often a single person is responsible for all functions and thus will simultaneously

work on advertising and on media and public relations. A personal union of this kind has its advantages. After all, a consistent image is to be conveyed. And this is achieved excellently if a house is represented by one person with one face and one voice. It makes sense for Independent Theatre groups to name a contact person for these tasks. He or she needn't necessarily produce all the content personally, but feel responsible and act as a representative of the group to the outside world.

## 2. Advertising and public relations

Although it is possible to define advertising and public relations as separate entities, as described above, they are interdependent areas in practice: Your Facebook account is equally suitable for announcing concrete events at short notice as it is for continued storytelling about your ensemble over a course of years. A flyer can refer to a single event and still influence public perception

and recognition through the way it is designed. Whether you call it an image or an identity, in the end it is two sides of the same concern, namely to present SOMETHING externally and internally. Or rather: to be SOMETHING. Being 'better' may be one thing, but being 'different' is more important, i.e. having the well-known unique selling point. You needn't be all-rounders and cer-



tainly you don't need to reinvent everything. Unique specialisation and/or unique combinations make the difference! Contours take time to develop, a core must grow naturally. But the question 'what makes us stand out' is one you should be asking yourself all the time, because it is the foundation on which you place your advertising and public relations activities. Analysis of facts, clear definition of (partial) objectives, and strategic actions have their place also in the world of culture and theatre. Especially when you are looking to be professional. So before you start tinkering with flyers, you need a picture or message that you wish to convey!

### 2.1. PRINTED MATERIALS

Even though printed publications are often predicted to be losing their leading position as advertising media, flyers, brochures, posters and the like are still popular means of communication. Whether advertising material in paper is good for your project is best decided according to context, occasion, ecological conscience and budget. So as to avoid your information ending as waste paper or becoming a public nuisance,

you should make sure that you design and distribute with care:

#### 1. LESS IS BETTER THAN MORE

Keep the text on advertising media down and focus on key data. If you must add further explanations, put them on the back of the flyer. Concentrate on a single or a few meaningful motives for the pictures, and on an unusual, eye-catching combination of colours. Place your material in places you know the target audience can find them. Even if a flood of posters and flyers will undoubtedly attract attention, you risk frustration of your audience and overreaction from those responsible for tidiness and cleanliness in the respective locations. They may then happily eliminate all copies at once.

#### 2. NOT ALL IS PERMITTED

Avoid property and copyright infringement when designing and placing print products: For all used texts, fonts, photos, logos, brand names and so on please make sure that you either create them yourself, that you get permission to use them, or that you have acquired rights of use (→ DIE FIBEL | A Primer

for Independent Theatre: Legal Basics). Check that you have met all the requirements (e.g. references, imprint) and that you have listed all the funders with whom this was agreed. You are dealing with publications that can be traced back to you.

#### 3. IT'S EASY TO STAND OUT

You're not limited to A6. If you don't want to try your own creations (stamp bread bags, recycle flyers, or reprocess wallpaper) modern printing houses offer you a wealth of equally inexpensive alternatives. Lots of parameters can be varied: format, substrate, colours, surface finish and much more. Choose a form that stands in deliberate contrast to what usually appears at the locations you have chosen. Or look for unusual distribution media in the first place: round rather than rectangular, neon paper rather than process-colour printing, postcards instead of posters, bottle tags instead of leaflets, outdoor instead of pocket-size stickers.

#### 4. MAKE IT CONVENIENT

It's fun to be unusual, but make sure that your printed material remains meaningful and manageable. Through all the creative thoughts, don't lose sight of the main goals: attracting attention and giving information. Check that all service data are listed: time, location, age recommendation, type of performance, duration, intervals, accessibility, prices, ticket information... Ensure that articles intended to be taken away or collected are actually reachable or designed for filing, and that objects meant to be mailed don't surpass postage limits. Choose a style that you can stick to for a while but that is expandable and varied enough that you and your audience won't get bored. Make sure that recipients see a consistent style, recognise your publications, and can find them in similar places. Collect the addresses at which it was easy for you to leave advertising products, as well as the number you were able to get rid of. When distributing, join forces with other cultural initiatives to avoid double effort and, most importantly, save time.



## 2.2. ONLINE ACTIVITY

In many places digital products and programmes are nowadays replacing or supplementing traditional printed materials. Computers and the Internet open up an almost unfathomable number of possibilities with the unquestionable advantage that they are usually more flexible, faster, and cheaper and that they also offer an incredibly long range. Classic online activities are mailings, websites, and social media.

### MAILINGS AND NEWSLETTERS

As long as address lists are still relatively small, recipients are pleased to receive customised emails containing personalised greetings. Circular mails are easier to handle, but also less effective. Large address lists are the basis for mass mailings. You should differentiate between groups of recipients according to the content they are interested in and the level of formality appropriate. Always place all recipient addresses in blind carbon copy (BCC). You may want to check out applications that simplify the creation and distribution of mailings (e. g. MailChimp, CleverReach or Newsletter Genius).

Choose a meaningful subject, use sub-headings, and divide your message into short paragraphs. Remember that attention spans when screen-reading are even shorter than with analogue texts. Never ever forget to check the spelling and formatting before you send a message. And to prevent other people's mailboxes from clogging up, keep attachments small or use active links to related websites.

If you have more than one topic or concern, newsletters are an alternative to circular mails. Don't post more than once a month or less than once a year, because otherwise either the recipient's reading pleasure will fade or the whole context will be lost. Offer subscription of your newsletter to your audience, be it digitally or traditionally by means of analogue lists. Always provide a return address and always offer a possibility to unsubscribe from the newsletter. When you receive an unsubscription: IMMEDIATELY delete the corresponding record from ALL your lists.

For legal reasons, newsletters, like other Internet content, must include an imprint that is 'easily recognisable,

directly accessible and permanently available'. So you must give the name of the editor, for instance in a footer or signature, with his or her postal and email address as well as a 'quick contact' (e. g. telephone number). If your group has chosen a legal form, this information should also be in the imprint (including your tax number (→ DIE FIBEL | A Primer for Independent Theatre: Legal Basics)). Simply linking to the imprint of your website is not enough!

### WEBSITE

How to set up a website in an appealing and appropriate way depends on so many factors that are in constant change – and not least on your own taste – that it is difficult to give general advice. We will therefore stick to some relatively self-evident and legal notes at this point:

**Interactivity:** Make a conscious decision whether you want your website to be interactive and in what form. Things like guest books, commenting functions, forums, etc. engage visitors in a dialogue, but at the same time require a great deal of care. And if they don't get used or are used for wrong purposes, they

quickly become counterproductive. It is therefore sometimes more reasonable to keep your website relatively static and to use social media applications to 'interact' with the audience.

**Content:** Theatre groups' websites are typically divided into four to six sub-pages for news, plays/productions/projects, ensemble/about us, schedule/tour dates, press/downloads and contact/imprint. Again, don't infringe anybody's copyright (→ DIE FIBEL | A Primer for Independent Theatre: Legal Basics) or any other rights.

**Imprint:** As already explained for the newsletter, any Internet content you post must bear an imprint. The rules for this are both expansive and vague. However, if you compare the texts of other websites, you will notice that they are almost identical. Simply choose the elements that are relevant for you and copy the wording found. Mandatory information is generally the name of the person in charge (your ensemble name is usually not sufficient) with an address and two contact methods (e. g. email and telephone number). The imprint must be accessible from each sub-



page via a maximum of two clicks, i. e. it should appear in the main menu or in a static footer or header.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

Depending on the type and age of your target group, your presence in Web 2.0 may be more important than all flyers and emails together. The frequency, currentness and interactivity of social media are much higher than for any other media. This also means that setting up a Facebook or Twitter account incurs a certain amount of overhead and extra time – but can still be worthwhile for many groups. Social media are ideal for storytelling about your ensemble. Through them you can do justice to all humans' natural interest in other people, by telling a light and easy story about the individuals behind

the characters, the faces behind your group name. In addition to relevant service information about your plays and playing times, the audience also appreciates more personal posts.

At the same time, your social media presence must keep a professional appearance – financiers also like to inform themselves about applying groups on Facebook! So take a moment to check your messages and see if you really want to send them and whether you are allowed to do so. It is difficult to fetch back what is once made public because, as is well known, the Internet never forgets. So always keep in mind that you speak for the entire ensemble and are therefore committed to the professional standards and moral ethics of your group.

(cultural) journalists and other opinion formers, whom you thereby provide with material for their editorial work (which you can then no longer influence). Hoping for benevolent articles, you will provide them with material about your group or production, be it in writing or by spoken word.

*and snappy. The challenge is to approach the press on suitable occasions, i. e. whenever something occurs that is new, curious, exciting or otherwise relevant for the wider public, and to keep the right balance between absolutely clear facts and the persuasive "certain something".*



*Journalists are flooded with requests from many sources every day. In order not to be lost in the sheer quantity, the information must be short*

### 3. Press and media relations

Press and media work is primarily directed towards the editors of newspapers and magazines, radio and tele-

vision stations, online magazines and Internet platforms. The target audience is therefore not end users, but





Typical channels for young theatre groups are:

- *Print media*: local daily newspaper (culture, local, education, leisure/ events, children), city magazines, cultural newsletters and supplements
- *Radio*: local and community radio stations (culture, news, event tips)
- *Internet*: online event calendar (city, district, cultural scene, etc.), online platforms for culture and theatre (e.g. [www.kulturium.de](http://www.kulturium.de) or [www.laft.de](http://www.laft.de)), blogs

Mind you don't lose yourself in servicing the media oversupply. First ask yourself what you enjoy reading, listening to, and seeing, and where you get information about cultural life. For each incident, think carefully about who you can best communicate it to and through which channels. External relations are important, but you should ensure the right cost-benefit ratio and, above all: don't let too much of your energy slip away from your artistic work.

### 3.1. PRESS CONTACT AND PRESS MAILING LIST

Be it official press releases or more informal emails – any form of communication with media editors should specify an easily accessible, permanent press contact person. That way, this name will stick in the journalists' minds, which saves time when they have direct queries or want to arrange (interview) appointments. The press contact includes:

- The contact person's first and last name
- Name of the theatre ensemble or group
- Email address
- Telephone and/or mobile phone number, if applicable
- Homepage or other Internet presence, if applicable

Which contact data you share is ultimately up to you. Provided you check your email regularly (at least every 1-2 days) this address is sufficient, but a telephone or mobile phone number is also welcome.

If you wish to take root in a new city or region, it is worthwhile to establish long-term contacts with the local media people. Initially this means collecting names and shaking hands: Keep your ears open as to who might be interested in you and your productions. Ask people involved in your project and others you know if they can connect you to central control points. Search online to find out who is responsible for culture in the local press or who has a private passion for Independent Theatre, and introduce yourself either in person or on the phone. Document all addresses acquired in this way in a press distribution list, which you constantly update and systematically expand. In this way you will gradually build a useful network of concrete people that you know personally and by name – and which on the other hand know you and follow your work.

### 3.2. PRESS AND MEDIA RELEASE

Press and media releases are an offer of information to editorial offices. There is no guarantee of publication. Rather, it is up to the respective journalists whether they use the texts offered as a whole, in parts, quoting, or merely by

following the spirit. The more appealing and concise the materials are, the greater the likelihood of a reaction.

#### FORMAL CRITERIA

- One to (max.) two pages (approx. 1500 characters)
- Simple overall composition ('press release', headline, subline, key data, text, additional information, contact)
- Readable structure through subheadings and paragraphs; sparing use of highlighting
- Uniform design according to your corporate identity or with your own writing paper and logo
- Language tailored to target group, accurate spelling
- Descriptive file name (e.g. [Date] PressRelease[Group]\_[Production], without umlauts and other special characters)
- Universally readable file format (no formats specific to certain software manufacturers or operating systems)



## STRUCTURE

The general structure of a press release isn't subject to any binding rules, but there are certain conventions that you can follow or adapt:

- Right at the top, the words 'press release' identify the type of text and addressee, usually followed by the date and, if applicable, place of writing.

- Ideally, the press and media editors can directly reuse the headline as an eye-catcher. It is concise and may even be funny or unusual.
- In contrast to this, the subline (or: teaser) lists the essentials in a few words: who, for whom, what type of event. E. g.: Theatre X showing Y-piece 'Z')
- The actual press release text provides more detailed information in three to five paragraphs, covering who?, what?, when?, where? etc. and written in the third person. You may want to stick a bold-faced lead in front with a short summary, newspaper style. In any case, the text follows the inverted pyramid principle: most important things first and then, towards the end, the less important information.

Quotes and rhetorical questions etc. can be used for illustrative purposes – but needn't be.

- For the sake of clarity, you could then list the key points once again and, in the case of Independent Theatre productions, name cast members and other participants, financiers and sponsors, ticket prices and reservation possibilities. Here you can also insert direct links to further (online) information.
- Additional information follows where appropriate – such as the ensemble's profile, a brief description of the context (venue, event series, festival, etc.), the biography of an important person involved, a quote from a previously published newspaper article on production XYZ... Keep it short enough so as not to surpass the overall press release size. Alternatively attach a separate appendix to which you merely refer within the main text. Photographs, films, or sound files are only ever attached or linked, and their authors are always named (→ DIE FIBEL | A Primer for Independent Theatre: Legal Basics).
- Right at the end, name the press contact person.

**Contents:** No press release can convey more than one or two important messages, so you shouldn't attempt to relay the course of the entire theatre production from A to Z. It is better to contact the media several times during the process, whenever a new milestone is reached. This keeps the attention awake and makes the journalists' job easier, because it allows them to sometimes place just a short message. Your press releases should make it easy for the editors to copy from them, textually and technically.

**Language:** Be authentic and credible! Your language needs to be appropriate for the target group, their age and education – so accordingly you should avoid all too top-heavy or offhand phrasing. Although press releases are of course intended to highlight handsomeness and attract attention, they are not advertisements! Avoid banalities and phrases like 'the time has come again at last' as well as abbreviations and formal gimmicks with exclamation marks, dots or capital letters in the title, which the editors may not understand or copy incorrectly.





## PRESS PHOTOS

They say a picture paints a thousand words, so it is worthwhile to provide the editors with good photographic material. Besides simple composition (not too restless, not too much small detail) and high contrast (not blue on blue), the correct image quality is important. The best way to find out what quality the respective editorship needs the photos to be is to ask, because this varies greatly depending on the intended use and printing process. Always send photos separately (usually in JPEG format), i. e. not embedded in PDF documents or text files, and use meaningful file names, possibly in accordance with the media release filename (not: press-photo.jpg or DSC\_012345678.tiff). Always include the photographer's name in the text, the group and piece name, as well as any copyright information, and a separate caption (e. g. name of the depicted from left to right). Photos are protected by copyright law and it is a nice service if you inform the editors by means of a copyright notice that you are the owner of the copy and exploitation rights and that under certain conditions (e. g. naming of the copyright owner, payment) you allow

certain types of use (e. g. duplication, distribution, processing, public display, lecture / presentation).

 *Example 1: "© Flo Tografer, Hildesheim 2015. All rights reserved."*

 *Example 2: "Copyright: Flo Tografer, 01.01.2015. Replication allowed free of charge only for the announcement and coverage of the performance shown, provided that the theatre and photographer are named and a sample copy is sent to Theatre XY, Theatrestreet 1, 11111 Laftcity. Store only for the duration of the production."*

## DISTRIBUTION

Press releases are usually sent by email. If you are announcing an event you should send it to the daily press and radio stations about ten days in advance, more for weekly newspapers or monthly magazines.

There are two options for sending emails: Either you include the press release text directly in the email or you write a short cover letter asking to take note and to publish from an attached

document. Variant 1 is best sent as HTML-mail, because this allows insertion of pictures and logos, and text highlighting, although the design options are somewhat limited. Variant 2 usually uses the PDF format. However, you should then additionally provide an unformatted version of the press release. For example, as a text document or below the cover letter in the email body.

The following should be noted for both distribution options:

- When mailing to more than one editorial office ALWAYS place addresses in blind carbon copy (BCC).
- Small attachments (rule of thumb: total maximum of 3 MB, otherwise prefer separate download links or reduce image sizes)
- Meaningful subject, e. g. press release [event title] by [ensemble] on the [date]. (Editors can better judge the urgency if you include the date in the subject.)
- Active links to downloads, your website/Facebook and other online services
- Signature or press contact details



*Dear Mrs. McArt-Culture,*

*Please find attached the current press release for the premiere of the children's play "ABC" by our theatre ensemble "XYZ", which will take place on 01.01.2016 at the Theaterhaus, Langer Garten 23c. Also attached are two photos from the dress rehearsal (© Flo Tografer), which can be reproduced if credited.*

*It would be kind of you to publish an announcement and to include the date in your event calendar. We would also like to invite you to visit and review the premiere!*

*A short notification or a sample copy would be welcome if anything about our event appears in the General Newspaper. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

*Many thanks and kind regards,*

*Thea Turr*

*for "XYZ"*

*Theatrestreet 1, 11111 Laftcity*

*info@xyz.de, 01234 56789*



### 3.3. PRESS TALKS AND PRESS CONFERENCES

In contrast to the press release being sent out unilaterally by you, press talks and conferences are dialogue-oriented. Although you still present the group and production from your point of view, you are also available for questions and discussions.

Press talks usually take place in a small group and informal setting and can be combined with a meal, rehearsal visit or any other (cultural) extra. There can be many reasons, for example an approaching premiere or the announcement of a prize won. A press conference, on the other hand, is only organised if content of higher complexity needs to be explained or several people wish to give their perspectives. This is common practice in city and state theatres, for example when the artistic director changes or the annual programme is to be presented. Independent groups rarely have reason or even desire for a large conference. Because, as the name suggests, these tend to be rather serious, official and prosaic, while the Independent scene perhaps prefers more open, relaxed conversations.

### 3.4. PRESS INVITATION

In addition to informing the media editors of an upcoming event in writing or verbally, it is customary to invite representatives of the press to attend, usually at the premiere. The word 'invitation' here means free entry to the performance for those addressed. It follows that invitations of this kind should be issued with consideration, especially since you always have to reserve two free tickets or free places: for the journalist and a photographer.

### 3.5. MEDIA COLLECTION

The outcome of your press and media work – i. e. the actually printed articles and broadcast radio or television features – will hopefully not only bring you a large audience, but will also serve as a personal memory and reference for future projects. Therefore, you should analyse and archive the media response well.

To a certain extent it is you that influences which of the media report about you, by sending out press releases or organizing press conferences. When talking to journalists you can already

ask them to provide you with sample copies of the published news – they even sometimes do this of their own accord. Nevertheless, you should keep an eye on the most popular local newspapers in particular, which may publish something without your knowledge.

So you should archive all press reviews, noting the respective newspaper, author or originator, and the date (and possibly also the section and the page

number). This may be an analogue collection or a digital archive. Often newspapers make their content available online – though sometimes only after a certain period of time or only for a certain duration – so you can save buying printed editions. Here too, you should name text and image files immediately after copying or saving them and also record the Internet address (URL). (→ DIE FIBEL | A Primer for Independent Theatre: Legal Basics).



## 4. Corporate Design

While you develop your own identity in theatre aesthetics and questions of content a uniform appearance will also emerge in your external communication. The so-called corporate design forms the creative framework for all marketing activities described above. You can spend a lifetime reading up on how to best set about it. At the beginning an easily recognisable ensemble name is most important for you,

together with a distinctive logo and maybe an unusual colour and characteristic font. Once you have found a visual layout that suits your artistic identity and appeals to you personally, it can become a common theme in all your publications: these elements can reappear on flyers and Facebook, media releases and merchandising products, posters and paper cups, stickers and stamps – in short: wherever possible.

## 5. Last but not least:

STAY  
TRUE  
TO  
YOURSELF!



# DIE FIBEL

*A Primer for Independent Theatre*

DIE FIBEL – A Primer for Independent Theatre is a cooperation of the Association of Independent Theatre in Lower Saxony e.V. and the Theaterhaus Hildesheim e.V.  
[www.laft.de](http://www.laft.de) • [www.theaterhaus-hildesheim.de](http://www.theaterhaus-hildesheim.de)

The English translation was supported by the extra programme for cultural integration of the Ministry of Science and Culture in Lower Saxony.

Design & Layout:  
[www.mindgum.de](http://www.mindgum.de)



Niedersächsisches Ministerium  
für Wissenschaft und Kultur



Landesverband  
Freier Theater in Niedersachsen e.V.