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Green help is at hand . . .

Today, most people recycle as a matter of course. Many have made conscious decisions to leave the car at home and cycle or use public transport instead. Some have made capital investments in equipment such as water saving devices, or installed solar or wind power generation. Others turned down the central heating by a degree or two this winter in a bid to save money. So why, when we have so quickly learned to be more environmentally responsible at home, is it so hard for us to make similar advances at work?

Sarah Rushton-Read talks to
Sian Alexander of Julie's Bicycle . . .

UK - The answer perhaps lays in the sheer scale of waste, energy use and natural resources our workplaces demand. In theatres and venues the systems and people that manage our buildings can seem complicated and the opportunity to change things seem beyond our wherewithal. This leaves us feeling frustrated, overwhelmed and asking, 'where do I begin to reduce the impact of my work on the environment?'

One organisation that has already asked that question and many more besides is Julie's Bicycle - a trailblazing, not-for-profit company established to encourage the creative industries to coordinate, share and catalyse best practice in sustainability at work. What this means is you don't have to start from scratch. Julie's Bicycle already has enough answers and online resources to ensure any creative business can get on the road to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions immediately.

To find out more for *LSi*, Sarah Rushton-Read spoke to Sian Alexander, Associate Director for Theatre, Julie's Bicycle . . .

LSi: For those that don't know, what is Julie's Bicycle and what is its primary mission?

SA: Julie's Bicycle comprises a broad coalition of music, theatre and scientific experts who are committed to reducing the environmental

impact of the creative industries. We help organisations understand their carbon impact and enable them to take responsibility for reducing it. We provide clear, practical advice and support, based on the best available research, and offer free energy use measuring tools and resources. Building on our extensive work in music, last year we launched an initiative specifically targeted at reducing the theatre industry's environmental impact.

LSi: How exactly does that work and what is the desired outcome?

SA: The theatre programme was launched in June 2010 at the National Theatre. We wanted theatre people to recognise that reducing the theatre industry's environmental impact is a business-critical issue. Until recently it wasn't being addressed with the speed and pervasiveness required.

LSi: How is the programme structured?

SA: A key principle of the programme is to encourage collective action to reduce theatre's GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions. We're working with groups of venues, festivals, organisations and people countrywide to collect, collate and analyse information relating to energy consumption and waste. From this we will develop clear strategies that the industry can adopt to reduce GHG emissions.

LSi: For those working in the theatre, does taking action to reduce GHG emissions mean a lot of extra work and will it cost a lot of money?

SA: The simple answer to those questions is no, it doesn't have to. Julie's Bicycle offers plenty of cost-free resources - advice, research papers, online measuring tools and links to other helpful organisations. We can assist both individuals and organisations to make informed and sensible choices. (See:)

LSi: What ensures this programme is specifically relevant to the theatre industry?

SA: We have a UK theatre advisory group that has brought together key people from both the subsidised and commercial theatre sectors. The group, chaired by Nick Starr, executive director of the National Theatre, includes senior people from the world of theatre, opera, architecture and design (see *URL*, p.32).

Having such a group of informed, influential and knowledgeable people allows us to start industry relevant conversations about the strategic issues the theatre industry faces and what we need to do to address them. At the same time, each individual is ensuring that their own organisations take action to reduce their own environmental impact and feeding that back to the group.

LSi: Has this group formulated an agreed plan of action?

SA: It's still early days. What they are doing is sharing data so that we can increase our understanding of what's really going on in the theatre sector and set realistic targets for reductions. By combining that data we can identify trends and solutions to commonly

shared problems. Nevertheless, it's certainly not a case that one solution will always fit all and flexibility is always required.

LSi: Are any other organisations involved?

SA: Lots. For example, we're working with the London Theatre Consortium, a group of 12 producing theatres including the Young Vic, the Royal Court, The Tricycle and Hampstead Theatre. In the autumn we will be running a sustainability project with them. We also host regular sessions to bring venues' green champions together to share information and look at practical actions they can take in concert such as joint procurement, set exchange and recycling.

The Ambassadors Theatre Group is working closely with JB, across the whole of its estate. They actively take steps to reduce their energy use, have appointed green champions in most of their venues and they host an annual green award.

LSi: What do you see as the main barriers individuals and venues face when taking action to reduce their GHG emissions and what can you offer to help them get over them?

SA: Knowledge is the main barrier and we overcome this by sharing as much information

as we can online and through events and forums. This enables us to fast-track best practice and it means people aren't constantly reinventing the wheel. Instead they can use JB resources as a real shortcut to action.

Another perceived barrier is money. However, addressing environmental concerns is a no-brainer in this context. After all, we have a number of case studies that prove it doesn't have to cost money to save money.

Time can also be a barrier. In an industry where the intensity of putting on the next show or running a building is high, it can prove challenging to imagine where one might find the time to put another process in place - even if in the long run it might streamline operations and strengthen the organisation.

LSi: How can data sharing help JB and theatre practitioners?

SA: There are more than 250 organisations using JB's data capture tools. We have enough people sharing data to allow us to predict what the energy spend for the sector might be across a period of time. This enables us to identify where quite specific savings can be made. Between 2007 and 2009, we measured the energy use of 12 organisations, not just in theatre but also music and arenas. From the

Opposite: The Julie's Bicycle team, L-R: Catherine Langabeer (operations director), Helen Heathfield (associate director, Energy & Environment), Christina Tsiarta (Research and Industry Green), Alison Tickell (director), Catherine Bottrill (director of research), Sholeh Johnston (admin, comms and projects officer), Sian Alexander (associate director, theatre).



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results we were able to recommend actions that saved those 12 organisations over a million pounds.

LSi: Julie's Bicycle has recently set up a networking website - Green Theatre Network - where people working in theatre can get involved in discussion and debate. How do you envisage this working?

SA: We see it as a way to expand and grow the conversations we've been having during our theatre networking events. People with questions can make direct contact with others who have the answers. Individuals and organisations can share solutions to common issues. People can also start their own blogs and form their own common interest groups.

LSi: In terms of the measuring tools that Julie's Bicycle has made available to the industry - what are they and who is using them?

SA: Our tools include a practical guide to Green Theatre, the 'IG Tool' - a free carbon calculator developed specifically for the creative industries; SMEasure - a building energy monitor that measures energy use against weather conditions, plus a number of publications and guides to legislation - all available online.

Venues of all types are accessing these tools including iconic national institutions such as the National Theatre, The Royal Opera House, the ATG venues, Glynedebourne and Wembley Arena, as well as smaller fringe venues like the Arcola and The Bush. The Theatres Trust's EcoVenue initiative is also using our tools across 48 small London venues, so they work on all scales.



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LSi: Over the last eight months has anything surprising come to light?

SA: It's both surprising and delightful that we could pull such busy and influential people together to consult on this issue. It's also really interesting to see how fast things are shifting as people make changes within their own organisations. The advisory group really understands the industry and is in an ideal position to advise us on what's needed and how we go about making change happen.

LSi: What do you most enjoy about your role at Julie's Bicycle?

SA: There are some real trailblazers in the advisory group and in the wider theatre industry. Many are organising themselves into collaborative groups of like-minded organisations. It's galvanising and very rewarding to see this happen so quickly.

Conclusion

Reducing theatre's environmental impact is about creating networks of people and organisations, discussing the issues and then sharing information and outcomes with the wider world.

What it isn't is a compromise on creativity, artistic vision or quality. We therefore have to challenge ourselves on every aspect of our work and exploit our creative and inventive minds to reduce our GHG emissions. This should be something theatre people are really good at. After all, in many ways, they've been doing exactly that, in some form or other, for many years.

> www.juliesbicycle.com
> www.greeningtheatres.com

Visit us at
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Messe Frankfurt
6-9 April
Hall 8.0 Stand C76



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