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Chairman of the Board,  
American Theater Organ Society

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Mr. Chairman:

The ATOS Communications Committee has previously addressed communications issues with respect to relatively specific populations, those of staff, members and chapters. The specific nature of these groups has permitted the formulation of a fairly direct set of suggestions with respect to improving communications between and among these groups. The next group being addressed by this report is a far less specific group, since it is composed largely of non-members with a relatively diverse of interests and often very limited knowledge about theater organs and music.

The Committee in their discussions decided that a review of marketing and communications had to be limited in some manner. This was primarily done due to the relative immense cost associated with a generalized untargeted marketing campaign, where the potential return-on-investment would likely be very low at best.

Therefore this report is focused on marketing to a targeted population of people that have expressed an interest, be that by attending a theater organ event or visiting either a Chapter or ATOS website. The potential to have one of these individuals take some information home or presented to a friend is also being considered as a targeted market could be viable as well.

### **Limitations and Opportunities**

With our focus on a more limited potential audience, we considered what opportunities would present themselves where some type of marketing initiative could occur. To a very large extent the opportunities were limited to some type of event either sponsored or supported by an ATOS Chapter. Thus, the major strategies discussed below are tied to a chapter's activities where either chapter members that are not ATOS members or the general public is in attendance.

In general, most of the tools and techniques discussed would be applicable to any non-member event attendee, however, a few approaches may work better for someone that is already aware of what a theater organ event is with respect to the sound, music and entertainment activities.

Before we look at specific activity initiatives that the Committee believes should be investigated, we first want to review the characteristics of the audience being considered and some of the criteria utilized in development of our suggestions.

## **Pertinent Characteristics of Candidate Audience**

In order to formulate a marketing strategy and approach it is important to define the characteristics for the target audience for which the appeal is designed. For the approach being proposed some degree of prequalification will have been performed since (except for those people initially visiting the website or reviewing a friend's literature) the candidates will be attending an event related to or including theater organ. The focus is to create an appeal to join ATOS as a proposal to benefit with an enriched experience and great value over more than an event itself. Thus the proposed approach provides multiple appeal mechanisms or opportunities to connect with a person's interest.

For example, it is more than just the sound that we should be marketing. Many people may look at attending a chapter event as much a social as musical event. That is, we have an experience and environment to market, not just an instrument. Naturally, the desire to be entertained is also involved. Today many of our members are retired and attend our events because they bring back memories of their childhood. For those under 50 years old or so, few have memory connections or prior childhood experiences. ATOS must look to some of these other criteria for the potential appealing characteristic and generate for the population an interest in being more involved.

The Communications Committee believes that Chapter event focused appeals are the highest value type of marketing effort, especially if those events present a varied set of programming materials. A concert only event will appeal to one type of potential member, however, other programing based upon either silent films, instrumentalists or vocalists significantly expands our potential audience.

The approach being proposed includes having a spectrum of events, more than just concerts. Additionally, the Communications Committee believes that the presentation and the venue's environment will also expand the opportunity for attracting either new members or individuals that will want to learn about or attend additional programming in the future. (The point being made here is that event attendance is as important to ATOS as just ATOS membership, since this more general population of individuals would be paying for tickets and supporting the viability of future events.)

The overall goal for any programming effort must be to satisfy and encourage repeated attendance by previous attendees while at the same time present opportunities with which to attract new attendees.

Although it is very easy to have identical types of events, consider how a performing arts center does its programming. They do not present an identical program each time nor the same artist at every event. Similarly, they keep records as to which programming attracts the larger audiences and keep track by feedback from attendees which event formats to repeat in the future. That is, self-assessment must be an integral activity to any programming activity.

## **Suggested Approach**

Considering the above issues presented by a Chapter's programming and presentation environment the ATOS Communications Committee has formulated a strategy and general plan that can be applied in multiple ways to many chapter event environments. If tailored with specific elements suited to address

specific chapter event locations, programs and increasing the number of repeating attendees vice new individuals that have no record of previous event attendance is expected to generate the greatest return for efforts involved.

A suggested approach is to develop an ATOS Membership Kiosk or table approach. The staffing of the Kiosk would be primarily the responsibility of the ATOS Chapter, as part of their responsibility to maintain their Charter and support ATOS. The specifics of what it could provide are listed in detail later, however, the approach is based upon having an ATOS marketing presence at Chapter events, most specifically for any event open to the public. Combined with a Membership Kiosk, we also have included suggestions to enhance Chapter events and expanding their audiences as well as distributing items or information that could indirectly increase membership value and thus membership appeal.

There is no better appeal than one made person to person. The appeal needs to be partially based upon perceive value, a component of this report. There is no better candidate for ATOS membership than someone that has made the effort to attend a chapter event.

In fact, each of the tools or items related to the Kiosk proposed will need to be piloted at one or two Chapter events suitable for their initial use in order to determine their usefulness and to detect possible changes need to make them more effective. These changes will vary from simple length or size and visibility to more complex and harder items to change such as content. Once piloted and adjusted, the items could then be utilized on a wider basis.

The Committee believes ATOS should adopt a “build as we go” approach. Put another way, some locations and suggested elements have greater utility for some types of events or are more flexible in the sense of location environment to allow for their use.

It should not be under estimated how important it is for a Chapter to present a professional and business like impression to the public when attending a Chapter presentation. Although people today have some flexibility with their entertainment dollars, they are very sensitive to value and appearance. Underlying the entire set of proposals being made by this Committee is that the every attendee needs to feel welcome and at home when visiting the Chapter’s events and venues. Put another way, it is the totality of the visitor’s experience that matters, not just how well a performer is presented. Attendees should be encouraged to return for future programs and events.

### **Specific Techniques and Initiatives**

The following represents a spectrum of items or elements which could be utilized to make ATOS membership appeals and many would support the Membership Kiosk approach. Additionally suggestions designed to enrich the event programming and ways to improve membership value are included. A few can be utilized by themselves, however, many are proposed to present a set of tools with which to appeal to potential members or at least to attend future chapter events.

#### **A. Membership Kiosk Marketing Components**

1. **Lobby Promotion Banner.** A banner that advocates membership in ATOS should be in the lobby or entry to any ATOS Chapter event. The banner should define the benefits of membership. It should provide contact information URL for the website and be located adjacent to a table for chapter membership.
2. **Chapter Membership Table.** Each Chapter event should have a Chapter/ATOS membership table in the lobby during the event, including the closing of the event. The table, next to a banner/poster should have a greeter, capable of discussing the value of membership and able to discuss the Chapter's schedule. The table should contain literature regarding membership, including copies of the ATOS Brochure. The value of a greeter that can welcome attendees cannot be underestimated. They provide a valuable social interaction with new people and can help with answering the many questions regarding the Chapter and its functions. A simple index card with a form to collect e-mail address and names would allow for follow-up and a chapter e-mailing list for future event.
3. **Brochures/Handouts.** The limited time with a lobby type of kiosk requires that attendees be able to take home information. At least two items should be available. They are an ATOS membership brochure and some type of printed information item with respect to the local chapter's activities and membership and contact information.
4. **Video Clips.** Numerous types of video promotion material should be available to chapters. They include an annual ATOS Convention promotion disk, USB drive or website downloadable file suitable for showing at a membership meeting or shown on a PC at the lobby table. It should have text overlaying the major message, so that audio need not be used. The ideal time of year would be the March to May timeframe. A number of chapters now have video projection capabilities. Another type of video would be a slide show promoting ATOS membership, again without the need of audio. (In this case, a DVD/downloadable video file from the ATOS website and the source file should both be available.) The slide set should be made available to chapters so they can insert pages to add their local information to the show. A third type of slide/video could be one designed to entertain, most useful for chapters that meet in members' homes or non-theater venues. Numerous topics could include a review of each year's ATOS Annual Convention, historical information about organicists such as Jesse Crawford, George Wright, and theaters, etc. Still another type of video is one design for promotion on local cable channels. It should be designed to permit a "voice over" type of script or suitable for text to be added extolling an event's information. Draft or suggested text and script should also be made available for Chapter publicity use.
5. **Membership Slide Promotion.** A specific type of video/slide promotion would be one designed specifically focused on advertising ATOS membership. At least two versions (in video and slide format) should be produced so that one version does not require audio to tell the story and suitable for a lobby kiosk type of presentation on a PC.
6. **Annual Report.** The ATOS must create an annual report and publish one each year in order to promote the organization's activities, successes and define its future goals. As with all annual reports it must review the financial status for the organization and include an appeal for donations to support the endowment fund, which should be one of the reports major messages. It should be published in hard and softcopy versions, so that it can be posted on the ATOS website. Every chapter should be provided with a printed copy. Copies should be

sent to potential donors as well as those that have pledged future support. Highlights could be included in the ATOS Journal with the link to a full on-line copy for those wishing to review it in detail

## B. Chapter Event Enrichment

Many chapters have organ concerts as their core type of event. However, from a public interest perspective, more than just organ performance is needed to attract new audiences. Programs such as organ and soloist is one of many possible types of programs. The goal is to provide a musical event which has more general audience appeal. It may even be advisable that the phrase “organ concert” not be used, but instead musical show or other term utilized so that the connotation of a concert not be presented when more than just a keyboard performance is being presented.

The enrichment of chapter events is designed to support the enrichment of the value for members as well as provide a mechanism with which to attract new members. This second goal will need follow-up between the chapter and the potential new members. The follow-up effort presents the highest potential for making a long term impact to membership.

1. Website Lessons Library. Not intended to be a specific component for a Membership Kiosk, this would be targeted at Chapters needing to understand how to create and promote theater organ related events. The Library would be a set of three to five page “lessons learned” reviews of how chapters “package” a theater organ event and event review promotion necessary to attract the general public potentially interested in the program. An example of such an article can be found here:  
[http://www.avakiancreativeworks.com/ACW/Outside\\_The\\_Box\\_\\_An\\_Inside\\_Perspective.html](http://www.avakiancreativeworks.com/ACW/Outside_The_Box__An_Inside_Perspective.html)  
The article reviews Nathan Avakian’s “Outside the Box” effort. Others such as from Dickinson High School, the Seattle’s Paramount Theater and other successful promotion activities could provide valuable input to Chapter event planning.
2. Webinar Tutoring. As with the Lessons Library, this component is intended to provide training to Chapters and specifically those that will staff the Membership Kiosk. The recently initiated Chapters webinars should have a series on event planning and promotion, utilized articles such as those available in the Lessons Library. Each should be presented twice, with the first one being recorded and available for playback from the ATOS website. Simple things such as running a chapter meeting should be included for those whose chapter leaders are needing help with the simple mechanism of how to have a meeting. The material should have examples including an agenda and meeting notice. Another potential webinar would be one designed to provide programming suggestions, especially non-organ concert events, be they in theaters or members’ homes. By advertising the webinar’s several months in advance contributors could be solicited, making it as much between chapters and just from ATOS.
3. Movie Promotion via artists. Have the artist’s directory specifically list a performer’s ability to accompany silent films so that Chapter programmers can see which artists to contact for a movie type of program.

4. Create Catalog of Lower Cost Silent Films. In order for a Chapter to present a silent film program, a catalog of previously researched as to rights and costs as well as film length and subject could facilitate a Chapter making a film program decision. The Catalog could also include suggestions with respect to selection, presentation and publicity recommendations.
5. Other Event Promotions. Many ATOS Chapters have members exist with homes as venues suitable to host many entertainment events other the presentation of the organ. Chapters should evaluate whether promotion at these events would be productive, understanding some types of promotions may be too costly, while others might support a Chapter promotion kiosk/table to expose others to the Chapter's events.
6. Theater Organ Tutoring Presentation. ATOS should promote the development of a catalog of presentations suitable for non-concert programming that would tutor or teach theater organ basics such as history, technology including unification and relay operations, pipe voices and wind chest operations. With audio on DVD, simple TV or video projection could be used.
7. Social Events. Although a component for the Membership Kiosk, it could be promoted at the Kiosk. The value of social events, whether part of a concert (such as done by Dickinson High School' on-stage "cookies and punch" gathering) or a chapter meeting in someone's home will provide a strong reason for someone to join a chapter and ATOS. Concerts themselves, other than an intermission, provide little time to discuss someone theater organ interests while many people wish to share photos, stories and discuss their interests and experiences with others. Programming material for a home meeting should not be all business, but have an entertainment component. Either local chapter members or a member from a near-by chapter could make a presentation. ATOS could provide less than one hour (30 to 45 minutes most ideal) video/DVD material to chapter's for their use. If a piano is available, be it real or a midi device that could be used to entertain if someone in the chapter plays popular music. The whole idea would be to have the members engage with each other and expand the value of their chapter membership. A good social event can go a very long way to providing the needed follow-up mentioned at the beginning of this section. People like being invited to participate, be that cleaning leather of pneumatics or baking cookies. Theater Organ Tutoring Presentation.

#### C. Membership Value Expansion

1. Mailing List (Members and Public). The least expensive and most dynamic type of advertising is an e-mailing list. Many chapters do not have the resources to operate such a resource. ATOS should develop and provide this capability via their website, allowing anyone to become a members of the e-mailing list, specify what type of area they would like to be included in for responses and even include comments or choice boxes with respect to desired programming. (It would be best that a policy of not selling or sharing the address would help assure the privacy of the individuals.) Chapters could draft e-mail messages for presentation to those on the list and ATOS handle the mailing. ATOS themselves could infrequently (not to wear out our welcome in their in-box) also promote ATOS membership. With an ATOS members-only capability, it would be possible to "know" if a list members was an ATOS member and tailor messages as well. A periodic (perhaps monthly) notice to

- everyone about the latest updates to the website could help to keep the list fresh and engage everyone that had shown an interest.
2. Logo Merchandise. Each ATOS Convention presents some unique ATOS Logo merchandise. A member with a logo item can create interest in others. The ATOS website needs to have several ATOS logo items such as coffee mug, cocktail or juice glass and wearing appeal for purchase. With a members-only website, member discounts and promotions could be provided. Someone looking of a relatively inexpensive gift would be a candidate for purchasing items. It could be promoted as part of a monthly ATOS News type of e-mailing. Exactly how this capability is created will require working with third party vendors to determine whether ordering will be though the supplier or whether ATOS will have to inventory the material for later order/shipping.
  3. Website Introduction (Feel the music). It is true that a website's and PC's dynamic range is limited over a full fidelity stereo system, however, videos such as the current YouTube hosted "Watch and Hear" home page menu item can help with explaining the phrase "Feel the Music".
  4. Instant Membership. The ability to provide instant membership cannot be underestimated with respect to young people. Today with ITunes music on-line music selling, Amazon shopping and software downloading as a major approach to marketing, having to write a check and mail in membership means that there are many days between joining and having membership benefits. The ability to become a member instantaneously captures a member when they are showing interest and not give them a reason to do it later.

## **Going Forward**

As previously indicated, each Chapter needs to have an effort toward growing their audience along with an effort to track their successes and failures. Remember that some things are outside a Chapter's direct control, such as weather. However, once any negative influence is identified, efforts must be taken to avoid repeating that negative influence on success. Similarly, when a particular activity is acknowledged with positive responses from attendees, every effort should be made to maintain that activity integral to every events planning and execution.

Most Chapter's and ATOS's available operating funds are limited. Therefore, resources of people's time and some cash must be allocated to marketing and promotion. The goal for this report's suggestions is to develop and implement activities that have maximum benefit with minimum expenditures or investment.

The ATOS Communications Committee believes that ATOS will need to go slow with any implementation effort with respect to marketing and will need to encourage volunteers to assist with the overall marketing efforts. Not ever Chapter is a candidate for all of the above suggested efforts, with some having some of the activities already in place and serving as a model for other chapters.

It should not be underestimated the positive impact that some of these efforts can have on existing Chapter members. The fact that Chapter's leaders are working to improve the organization can go a long way to encouraging potential members join the movement and participate in a manner which is available from handing out literature assisting with organ restoration to baking cookies. A Chapter can grow itself by engaging existing members and getting them to commit their personal time.