

LIVESTREAMING & MARKETING GUIDE



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PRODUCING A MONETISED THEATRE LIVESTREAM

project

A report for Project Arts Centre
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Introduction

This document is a guide for producing a monetised livestreamed broadcast, based on *The Approach* by Mark O’Rowe, presented by Landmark Productions and broadcast live from Project Arts Centre on 21, 23 and 24 January 2021. The show was also available to watch on demand for a week following the live broadcasts.

There are many different ways to live stream an event and this guide is intended to provide a foundation from which to start. Depending on the event and circumstances, there are differing needs and budgets, and it's always possible to scale up or down. This guide, while not a comprehensive manual, will hopefully offer some practical tips on how to get started, and what you might need to consider.

The Approach was filmed by Seismic Events and was broadcast through TicketCo, a cloud-based platform with an integrated paywall streaming service. The livestream was presented by Landmark Productions and was overseen by Hugh Farrell, Digital Producer for Landmark.

This report is part of a larger research project, commissioned by Project Arts Centre, which centered around the livestreaming of *The Approach*. [Download full report here.](#)

TICKETCO



After investigating the various options available, it was decided to use TicketCo for *The Approach*. It is an easy-to-use digital platform for event organisers to livestream their events, or present them on demand. This is combined with the company's ticketing platform to monetise digital content.

The livestreaming and video on demand feature is built on broadcasting grade technology from Amazon Web Services. When you livestream or upload your content into TicketCo's Media Services the content is encoded and made available on a CDN (Content Delivery Network).

TicketCo supports Geo restrictions and Digital Rights Management to safeguard that you are on top of your copyright and licensing issues.

[Find out more about TicketCo here.](#)

'Online broadcasting has provided a robust, reliable and secure platform for theatres to monetise performances and grow engagement figures.'

Source: TicketCo website

PRODUCING THE LIVESTREAM

Finding the right team to produce your livestream is a major factor in determining a successful broadcast experience for the company, and for your audience.

The digital capture process involves collecting the different video and audio feeds for your show into a broadcasting software. These are then put together by your livestream team into a single feed that gets broadcast to your audience via a streaming platform; in this case, TicketCo.

You may have a team in-house that can do this for you, or you might have to bring in outside help. The capture process is one of the biggest contributors to the quality of your stream and having someone in a producer role for this process is integral to ensure clear lines of communication and a smooth process for all involved.

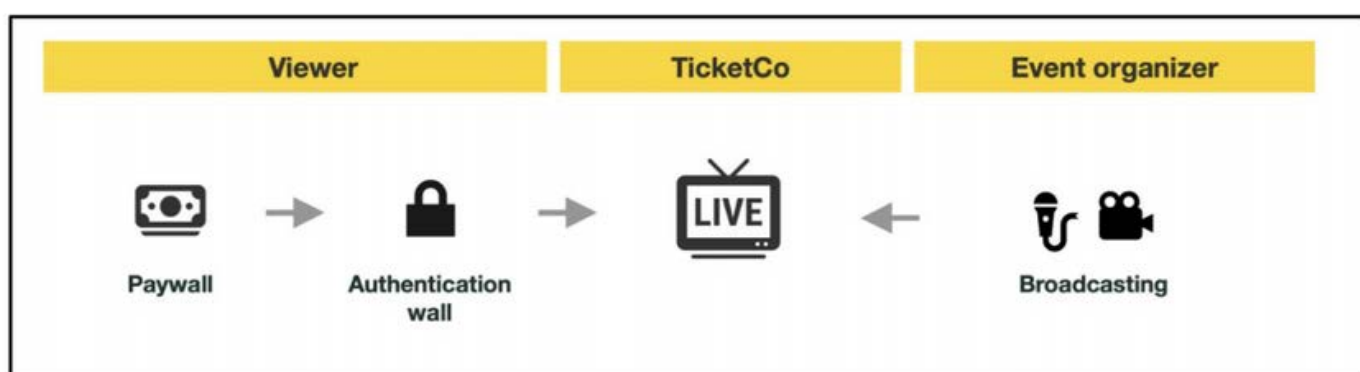


Image source: TicketCo



THE LIVESTREAM PROCESS

Production Process

1. Choose the show you'd like to livestream
2. Choose a venue/location to broadcast from
 - This requires a dedicated broadband line with minimum 10mb/s upload speed
 - Test the internet connection at the exact same time of the week that you intend to broadcast
 - Hybrid: if there is an in-person audience, how will you adjust the set-up accordingly?
3. Negotiate rights agreements for livestreams and video on demand
4. Define parameters of presenting partner agreement, if they exist
5. Agree how the box office is managed
6. Set the theatre production process in motion

Digital Capture Process

1. The film company

Request quotations from film production companies with the capacity for livestreaming and check their availability for required dates. It's also important to assemble a capture team you feel will work well with the entire company.

Some companies provide a solution for capture, encoding, streaming, captioning and recording as well as all equipment rental. It is also possible to bring in these services on a contract basis.

2. The set-up

Determine how many cameras and microphones are needed to capture the show. Ideally this is a conversation between the theatre director and the broadcast director or Director of Photography.

3. Planning and Lead-In Time

For an existing show, allow a 1 month lead-in time to set everything up. For a new show you might want to allow a longer lead-in time; possibly two months. Note that crew availability will require a generous lead-in time as society opens up.

LiveStreaming Platform and Paywall

Choose a livestreaming solution that integrates a secure paywall. Factors in this decision include price, user experience, data analytics, integration, white label branding and customer service. Platforms used on a regular basis in Ireland and the UK are TicketCo, Citizen Ticket, Dice, InPlayer, Vimeo OTT and TicketSolve.

The streaming solution will host your livestream on their servers and integrate it directly into your event page on their platform.

With all paywall platforms, the livestream can only be accessed by ticket holders. The platform will recognise and block anyone attempting to access the livestream, without a verified ticket.

Path to On-Sale

Setting up the Event

Having chosen a platform, set up the event pages and develop the assets and copy to populate the user journey from purchase to performance. Test the booking process on multiple device types with a wide range of bookers before going on sale.

Producer Decisions

Decide your ticket types, prices and group discounts. It is advisable to have a range of ticket prices on offer to maximise box office income and to provide choice.

Design

Design the relevant assets for the chosen platform. Ensure show blurb has all necessary information about running time, captioned performances etc.

Filming Team Quote Preparation

Below you'll find examples of questions the stream team will ask prior to drawing up a quote.

- Will the play be livestreamed or made available as video on demand only? There are different equipment and personnel requirements for each option
- Is there a paying audience in the venue?
- Is the hosting and dissemination platform in place? If no, maybe they can quote for this. If yes, the film crew needs to talk to the team to find out about the technical set-up before quote sign off. Different set-up and equipment and personnel hours for each option
- Is there a ticketing and box office service in place? Is it through the production company or the venue? If no, are they to quote for this? If yes, they need to talk to the team to find out about the technical set-up before quote sign off. Different set up and equipment and personnel hours for each option
- Does the client want a back-up stream in case of any technical issues?
- Does the client want a recording of the stream?

THE BRIEF CHECKLIST

Below is some of the information you will need to include in your brief for the filming team so they can adequately prepare the quote and plan for the livestream.

If there is an available budget figure, it is best to communicate that to the supplier so they can advise if what is being requested is realistically achievable.

Checklist

- Title of play and author
- Has the play been previously produced?
- Proposed performance venue
- Key creative team
- Duration of play
- Language
- Information re. parts of play and if there is an interval
- Number of performers and gender
- Is there live music in the performance? If yes, number of musicians and details re. the music element.
- Are live captions required? Or are captions required after the livestream?
- Will there be an audience in situ?
- Is the performance a stand-alone run or, for example, part of a festival/showcase or part of a tour where there are multiple stream dates over a number weeks or months etc.
- How long is the actual run of performances?
- How many streamed events are required?
- Dates of stream
- Times for stream presentation

BRIEF

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Stage, lighting and audio design are usually requested at stage two when the film company is firming up on budget
- Information about the internet service in the venue is also required. The film crew almost always do an on-site check if they have not worked at the venue in a while ,or previously. They will need the venue's technical contact to arrange this
- If a recording of the previous performance is available, they will request it for the broadcast team to review before a final sign off of the budget.



BRIEFING THE FILM CREW

- Advise the Broadcast Director to read the play prior to the first meeting. They may have some ideas of their own to bring to the meeting
- There are different vocabularies between film and theatre. Important to 'translate' these terms where necessary
- Define who has control over the technical rehearsal and the communications pathway between the Broadcast Director and the Stage Manager. For example, one or other may need to interject during the process and will have to communicate with their respective teams and agree when to restart. This will help to communicate more effectively on the day
- During technical rehearsals, the Broadcast Director and Director need to discuss the filming approach. The camera sees things differently to how we see it with our own eyes in the theatre so it's important for the Broadcast Director to understand that the Director might need to adjust to seeing the play quite literally through a new lens.

Film Crew Personnel

When assembling the film crew, the following team is advisable to ensure a smooth process.

- Project Manager
- Broadcast Director
- Technical Director
- Camera Operator (min. 1 person for remote cameras. Multiple for handheld cameras.)
- Sound Engineer*
- Captions Operator – if doing live captions

*If show is already mic'd you will already have a sound engineer as part of your team. If it's not mic'd, then you will need to mic everyone so that the cameras will pick up the sound. This is where the sound engineer comes in.



BROADCAST PREPARATION

1. Broadcast director and theatre director meet to discuss mood, shots, feel of the show

- Plan and rehearse camera shots, and plan a camera script and rehearse with it
- Think of angles you'd never normally see
- Sound is important - get the sound team to do their best for the show

2. Venue Internet test

- Requires a dedicated broadband line with minimum 10mb/s upload speed
- Test the internet connection at the exact same time of the week that you intend to broadcast

3. Production meeting with film crew and design team to discuss:

- Camera types, quantity, and positions
- Lighting implications
- Audio capture
- Costume, hair and makeup implications for microphones
- Opening, interval and closing credit sequences
- Opening, interval and closing audio
- Scheduling

4. Communications

- Agree plan for pre-show whether that's a series of information slides, pre-roll video, countdown clock or shot of set
- Design closing credit slides and allow time for sign-off

Technical Rehearsal

- Test opening slides and closing credits
- Sound check
- Broadcast director and theatre director develop language of camera angles and shots
- Cue to cue for lighting levels (run parts of scenes)
- Set camera white balance and adjust lighting
- Push the livestream through your chosen platform and adjust for audio delays
- Check and test redundancies
- Test live captions (if using)
- Test audience comms (chat function, reminder email, emergency text etc.)

Team Communications

- Stage Manager and Broadcast Director are connected by comms and in charge of respective teams. Broadcast Director requires local comms with their camera crew and calls the shots from a sound-proofed room
- Sound Engineer is in the auditorium and mixes the QLab feed with live mics
- Stage Manager has ultimate control
- Schedule of broadcast to be signed off by both parties each day.



BOX OFFICE

- If you've previously sold tickets through another venue, you will now have to operate a box office. While the streaming platform will sell the tickets, and offer a certain degree of customer support, you will need to have a box office person/s available to deal with other queries
- Prepare a 'How to Watch' FAQ document to address any questions in advance
- Prepare a series of responses so you are ready to deal with queries on the day of broadcast in a timely and efficient matter
- Be prepared for queries in the hours prior to the show and try to have someone available to check emails throughout the live-broadcast period. When the email account is unattended, set up an auto-reply with a link to the FAQs doc
- Set up a dedicated email address for queries.



BUYING A TICKET

- *'Delight people with simple solutions'* and ensure the ticket-buying transaction can happen in three simple steps:
 - a. Customer decides to buy a ticket
 - b. Enter payment details
 - c. Customer receives an email with a link / code to view

Try to avoid complex sign-ups, subscriptions or passwords during the booking process

- There is usually an option to create a branded box office on the streaming site; you can link to this page from your site or embed a booking widget on your own page



COMMON QUESTIONS / ISSUES

Based on feedback that came into the dedicated email account for *The Approach*, and the chat function on the nights of the live-streams, below were the most common questions, or technical issues, customers had.

- How do I find my ticket? / I can't find my confirmation email
- The stream isn't playing / My screen has frozen. This was usually related to the customer's broadband connectivity
- I can't hear anything. This usually required the customer to click the sound icon on their screen
- How do I cast to my TV?
- US-based customers had some issues completing their bookings as their transaction was flagged as potentially fraudulent when they were making a booking outside the US. This required them to contact their bank

Accessibility:

Captioning and Audio Descriptions

Live Captioning

There are a number of options when it comes to providing live captions for the d/Deaf community.

1. **Live-Stream:** Captioned slides are cued by a captions operator during the live-stream. These are provided by breaking the script down into slides of 2-3 sentences formatted to a standard left-align with white text on a black background. An extra cost needs to be factored in.
2. **On Demand:** The captions can be added to the recording afterwards and offered separately on demand.

Audio Descriptions

For patrons who are visually impaired, an Audio Described Introduction serves as a spoken programme.

Audio descriptions can be scripted internally and distributed through Sound Cloud. You will need an actor to record the description and a Sound Cloud account. A transcript of the description in word format should also be available on your website. (These can be read by e-readers)

TicketCo has a function for toggling closed captions on/off for a livestream as do other platforms. In some instances, it may be necessary to create a separate event for the closed captions performance.

[See Arts and Disability Ireland's website for further resources.](#)

Monetising Online

There are some opportunities to monetise online beyond the ticket price itself.

Ticket Prices | Group Bookings

- Having a range of ticket prices ensures accessibility and allows those who are willing to pay more to do so. It does rely on an honesty system whereby individuals select the price they're willing to pay. The 'Standard plus Support' ticket option includes a donation for the producer towards future projects
- Group discounts for drama colleges, active retirement groups, corporates etc could be offered to maximise box office income

Upselling

- As consumers become more versed in this new online model, there may be opportunities to consider upsells for:
 - Post-show talks
 - Watching back a livestream for a nominal fee (separate to the on demand ticket)
 - Behind-the-scenes content
 - Donations
 - Show programmes - these appear to have been freely available up until now

Gift Cards

- There is potential to maximise the gift card option. Developers are still fine-tuning this offering but it does open up access to the gifting market

Donations

- The option to make even a nominal donation during the booking process should be worked into the customer journey

Other Considerations

Geo Restrictions

You may want to restrict which countries your audience can view from. Ensure the platform you select has this capability.

Video on Demand

It's important to factor in that it can take approximately 24 hours of processing time after recording a live performance to upload it before the on demand is available to watch.

Back-Up Plan

Live is live and just like with live in-person theatre, things can go wrong. It is essential to have a back-up plan for live-broadcasts in the event of any technical hitches. This includes having a recording available to offer to customers as well as a pre-prepared slide announcing 'technical issues', should any arise.

Enhancing the Experience

Additional touches like pre-show announcements, post-show talks and downloadable programmes enhance the experience for the viewer. Anything that can bring it as close to the real-life experience should be factored in where possible.

Some streaming platforms have a built-in chat, or reactions, function to enable viewers feel part of a shared live experience.

MARKETING GUIDE

MARKETING GUIDE

The following marketing recommendations serve as a guide for future online broadcasts.

Touchpoints

- Think about the customer touchpoints and consider mapping out the customer journey to inform your campaign. This can help reveal untapped marketing opportunities. Your brand exists beyond your website and marketing materials.

Website

- Clear layout of information on event page. This is the first port of call
- Remind people they can book up until show time, if this is the case. What may be obvious to you is not to them
- Clear explanations about how both the live-stream and on demand works
- Be mindful of the language and terminology being used - is it accessible to everyone?
- Offer an FAQ section to address common questions

Campaign Planning

- Many people still rely on traditional media to find out about shows. Be careful not to overlook traditional media when planning online events
- Reminders are particularly important for online shows where people are not making the usual arrangements associated with going to the theatre. Consider revisiting the timing of newsletters and social posts in line with your broadcast schedule
- Clear, timely and helpful communications are key
- Research has shown that a large percentage of ticket sales occur in the final days, particularly in the final 48 hours. Consider a stepped up focus on communication during this period - both online and in the mainstream media
- The on demand offering is becoming increasingly appealing to audiences as society opens up. Ensure sufficient budget for social advertising is held back for that period
- There is strength in numbers. The power of collaborating and developing partnerships has been clearly demonstrated for other online shows. Developing strategic partnerships will help to broaden the reach and engagement.

Digital Marketing

Social media is now a two-way conversation and we need to prioritise engaging with our followers. Never before have we had the opportunity to develop more meaningful conversations with our audience online.

- Engage with follows on social media and build relationships. Monitoring and responding in real-time is very important
- Consider all timezones and post throughout the day - particularly on Twitter
- Amplify all content as much as possible across social channels
- Schedule consistent and timely reminders about the show - even right up to 10 minutes before show time
- Think outside your usual audience on social media; consider creating new audiences based on interests and locations. You are now on a global stage
- Who are your champions? Reach out to them with suggested copy and assets. Make it really easy for them to share about your event
- People love behind-the-scenes; what can you share to bring them closer to the process?
- Promoters - consider promoters in your messaging. For example, could you include something to say - "Do you know someone who might be interested in this event? Simply forward this email ..."

Language

- It's important to use language that is universally understood. For example - 'concessions' is understood in Ireland but not by a US audience
- Captioning is widely understood by disabled audiences but causes confusion for people who aren't familiar with the term in this context
- Spell it out. For example it may be necessary to state that live-stream is - "*a real-time, ticketed performance that can only be watched live at the exact time it is being performed and streamed.*"

Acknowledgements

This *Livestreaming and Marketing Guide* came out of a larger research report, which was commissioned by **Project Arts Centre** and funded through the **Arts Council's** Capacity Building Support Scheme. The research set out to understand the opportunities, impact and reach of digital theatre, namely the live broadcast of *The Approach* by Mark O'Rowe, presented by **Landmark Productions**, and how best to engage the widest possible digital audience. See Appendix 1.

Project Arts Centre is grateful to audience members who shared their experiences and offered feedback through interviews and detailed online surveys. Special thanks to Landmark Productions, who facilitated this research through the presentation of *The Approach*.

Additional thanks to Hugh Farrell, Digital Producer for Landmark's livestreamed shows, and to Jessica Fuller at Seismic Events for providing valuable insights and information for this livestream guide.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Link to main research reports

To download the full research report, and/or the executive summary, please click on the links below.

[From Stage to Screen: Understanding the opportunities, impact and reach of Irish Digital Theatre. A report for Project Arts Centre by Sinead McPhillips.](#)

[Executive Summary - From Stage to Screen: Understanding the opportunities, impact and reach of Irish Digital Theatre. A report for Project Arts Centre by Sinead McPhillips.](#)

APPENDIX 2

Additional Resources

Arts Council Digital Toolbox

Online resources to help make and present work digitally

TicketCo

10 Steps to Streaming Success

The Space, UK

Live streaming for the arts: lo-fi and low cost options

The Space, UK

Toolkit to develop your Digital Audience

TicketCo | Case Studies

Five UK theatre companies that went global via live streaming

Simon Baker for TicketCo

Hardware and software considerations for a live stream event

Event Industry research on ticket buyers' appetite to pay for online content

Digital Programmes: interest, willingness to pay and customer journey