

# Multi-million dollar investment: “You don't want to just guess.”

## Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

### *The Background*

In 1944, Henry Sopkin came to Atlanta to direct the Atlanta Youth Symphony Orchestra. Within ten years and on a budget of just \$5,000 he had developed the youth symphony into a full, professional adult orchestra, the beginning of today's Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO). Just over sixty years later, Sopkin's ASO, now of world renown, is poised to take a big step forward in the construction of its second outdoor venue.



Since 1972 the ASO has provided an informal and much-loved concert experience at Chastain Park in Atlanta, Georgia. Performing in an outdoor amphitheatre, people are encouraged to relax, bring a picnic along, and enjoy music in an informal atmosphere.

Building upon this success, the ASO announced plans in 2007 for a second outdoor venue, the Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre (VWA) at Encore Park, north of Atlanta in Alpharetta. This will seat 12,000 people and include a partially covered amphitheatre.

### **timely, actionable market intelligence**

### *The Issue*

There were many concerns with the project, however. Chief amongst these was how to avoid cannibalisation of Chastain's established audience. With VWA being just twenty miles north, it could not be seen simply as another, maybe better Chastain.

"Understanding what our audience perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of each venue is critical to our success," says Charlie Wade, Vice President of Marketing for the ASO. "Without proper research we were really just guessing. And you don't want to just guess with a project of this size!"

So, while still in the planning stage, the ASO turned to Alexander Babbage.

### **The science of *Experience Measurement*<sup>SM</sup>**



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Case Study: Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

## *The Solution*

To ascertain the answers that the ASO needed, Alexander Babbage needed to get a firm grip on the trade areas and demographics of the two locations. They had to understand why people attended Chastain and why they would attend VWA at Encore Park. What was their experience and expected experience of the venues? What part did details like food, dining or the type of concerts play? And, of course, how to market to the target audience?

Understanding what you need to know determines how you go about gathering the information. In this case, a range of methods had to be employed:

- ◆ **Intercept studies:** over 400 interviews were carried out at Chastain, at concert time, while people were "in the moment."
- ◆ **eSurvey** to the ASO ticket base: an extended survey completed by over 700 respondents that took approximately 10 minutes to complete.
- ◆ **Telephone study** of VWA market: 350 telephone interviews to the potential customers living in the area around the new amphitheatre.
- ◆ **One-on-one, in-depth interviews:** to elicit more subjective, qualitative information.

Charlie Wade, Vice President of Marketing for the ASO, on working with Alexander Babbage: "We were impressed by your thoroughness, your desire to really understand our challenge, the insights that you brought to our discussions, and the use of technology to speed up the process. We look forward to working with you again on future projects."

## *The Result*

One area of analysis concentrated on the trade areas and demographics of the two sites. Through complex cross-referencing and analysis, Alexander Babbage was able to assess the potential impact and projected cannibalisation of the audience at Chastain to VWA. Alexander Babbage presented a best and worst case scenario with a range in-between.

It was an interesting finding. The worst case was not insignificant. But, it was not as dire as some had predicted. And, it is not going to be just left to chance. The rest of the study dealt with ways of driving towards the best case scenario. Recommendations were specific. They included points of differentiation in areas such as design, facilities, and services.

The actions suggested by Alexander Babbage's research would help support the success of the new amphitheatre. And, that is just how the ASO is using them. The recommendations have been passed to the architects who are now working them into their design. They will, in turn, also inform the marketing and operation of the new venue in due course.

Scheduled for completion by May 2008, the multi-million dollar project is off to the best of starts and looks set to become another much-loved mainstay of Georgia's culture. Henry Sopkin would be amazed to see how far his \$5,000 has taken the ASO.