Great customer service is dependent on the marketer mastering the art and science of patron knowledge and understanding. The science is in the database and all the market research undertaken to better understand customers’ attitudes, preferences, interests, and behavior. The art is in how this information is used in designing and improving the customer experience.\(^1\)

All the strategies, tactics, and principles for marketing the arts can be encapsulated in one phrase: *focus on the customer experience*. Too many marketing departments focus primarily on their products and services, without realizing that the total customer experience is what matters most in attracting, retaining, and delighting customers. Focusing on the customer experience requires marketers to think holistically about every single customer touch point and every stage in the customer life cycle. It is the marketing director’s responsibility to ensure that every employee in the organization understands how he or she impacts the customer experience. And it is the responsibility of marketing to orchestrate the customer experience across every aspect of the organization’s functions and through all stages in the customer’s buying cycle.\(^2\)

It also means that relationship marketing is key. The marketer must take advantage of every opportunity to get close to the customers; to seek regular, direct contact with them; to anticipate their needs; and to develop a reputation for responsiveness—in other words, to build strong relationships.
Consumer Power

Being a marketer in the new information age means rethinking the role of the customer in the exchange process from passive receivers of the marketer’s offers to initiators of the contact and even active cocreators of the offer.

Say marketing experts Prahalad and Ramaswamy,

Business competition used to be a lot like traditional theater: On stage, the actors had clearly defined roles, and the customers paid for their tickets, sat back, and watched passively. . . . Now the scene has changed, and business competition seems more like the experimental theater of the 1960s and 1970s; everyone and anyone can be part of the action. What’s more, that dialogue is no longer being controlled by corporations. . . . Consumers can now initiate the dialogue; they have moved out of the audience and onto the stage.³

It is ironic that the performing arts, the very industry from which this metaphor was drawn, may be among the slowest to understand and respond to this dramatic change in how customers expect to do business.

For example, commonly, subscription brochures and telemarketing calls are not set up to accept single ticket orders. If a patron wants to buy tickets for two of five shows in a season, he or she has to wait for several months until single tickets go on sale. This situation is not uncommon in the performing arts, but to me it is as ludicrous as if a department store salesperson told me that if I want black socks only, I could purchase them in three months if any remain; if I want them today, I must also purchase blue and brown ones. Instead, the orders should be taken and patrons should be informed that their orders will be filled after subscribers are seated, rather than asking them to wait a few months, when they may have lost interest or when less desirable seats are available.

Say Smith, Clurman, and Wood in their book Coming to Concurrence, “With the emergence of self-invention, marketers must do more than simply customize; marketers must facilitate self-customization. Finding profitable ways of giving power to consumers is now the only way to succeed at giving consumers what they want.”4

Customers increasingly want to shape their experiences themselves and with their companions. Performing arts managers and marketers must understand that by involving their customers as cocreators of the marketing experience, they have the best chance of broadening their audience, building loyalty and satisfaction, and increasing frequency of attendance.

Customer Relationship Management

CRM has been seen as the panacea of marketing since the sophistication of databases has allowed marketers to capture detailed information about individual