

*Business to Arts*  
Developing Creative  
Partnerships



**DeVosInstitute**  
of Arts Management at the Kennedy Center

## Business to Arts/DeVos Institute Case Study— The Ark

### Building “Family” through Membership

The Ark was founded in 1995 as part of the Irish Government’s regeneration of the Temple Bar area of Dublin as the city’s Cultural Quarter. The Ark was chosen as a descriptive title which neatly encapsulated the spirit of the mission of the building: safe, adventurous voyaging. The vision for The Ark fired the imagination of many funding bodies, and attracted many visionary corporate partners. With their support and through the support of grants from the Arts Council of Ireland, Dublin Corporation, the Department of Education and the Ireland Funds among others, The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children, opened its doors in September 1995.



#### The Ark’s Mission

The Ark creates original cultural programmes for children in a purpose built venue in the heart of Dublin. We seek to achieve the highest standards of arts practice for children aged 2-12 through performances, exhibitions and workshops with leading Irish and international artists. Our work evolves through partnerships, touring and research as well as professional development workshops for teachers and artists. The Ark aims to facilitate access to its work for all children.

#### The Challenge—Building The Ark’s “Family”

##### *Evaluation*

At the onset of the Business to Arts/DeVos Institute programme, The Ark identified the need to build its “family” of donors, partners, and supporters. As with many cultural organisations, it found itself overly-reliant on too few, major sources of revenue. The loss of one major source would have a deleterious impact; the loss of two or three major sources could effectively cripple the organisation.

After a period of evaluation, Ark leadership determined a primary way to achieve this goal of resource diversification was to enhance its *Ark Angel* membership scheme (a multi-level annual giving programme).

At the time, this programme encouraged philanthropic donations at multiple levels in exchange for benefits, primarily free tickets to events. The starting point for *Ark Angel* membership was €125.

However, Ark leadership sensed that a shift in structure and strategy could significantly increase both *revenue*, and the *value* of this programme as an engagement tool. Beyond the revenue a larger membership roster would bring, the Ark desired a closer relationship with its members. Therefore, leadership set itself on the task of determining the changes required in order to achieve both goals.

## A. Strategy One—Launch a Powerful, Entry-level Membership Scheme

### Low-cost, High-value Structure

The first action taken was to lower the threshold for involvement; at the relatively high entry level of €125, Ark leadership sensed it was “leaving money on the table”, especially in the context of an economic recession. Recognising that the goal of any membership is to engage patrons with whom the institution can subsequently build a more intimate relationship—even if the initial buy-in is relatively low—the Ark set about to re-structure the lower end of its giving programme with the ultimate aim of building an increasingly diverse, financially potent family over time.

As a result, The Ark established a *Family Membership* at the more modest price of €60. Even as the financial threshold for engagement decreased, benefits were re-structured to provide increased value for the patron. Those benefits were designed, however, to cost the organisation little to provide but offer a high level of “insider” engagement with the organisation. These low-cost benefits were “experience-based” (providing access to special experiences rather than actual physical goods with real cost to The Ark) and were designed to produce a high margin, even though the purchase price was relatively low.

New benefits included:

- Priority booking period for all programmes throughout the year. (*Free to provide*).
- Unlimited, free access to Ark exhibitions. (*Free to provide*).
- 20% discount on tickets. (*Free to provide*).

- Regular free access for members’ children’s best friends. (*Free to provide*).
- 10% discount at the Irish Film Institute’s Cafe Bar (next door to The Ark). (*Free to provide*).
- Members-only communications with advance information on members-only special offers and events. (*Free to provide*).
- A Unicorn puzzle welcome gift. (*Very low cost to provide*).

**Types of Membership**

| Family | ArkAngel | ArkAngel Gold | Guardian Angel | Guardian Angel Gold |
|--------|----------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|
| €60    | €125     | €250          | €500           | €750                |

**Family Membership includes:**

- Priority booking period on all programmes throughout the year
- Free access to exhibitions at The Ark for your family
- 20% discount on all tickets for you and your family
- Regular opportunities for your child to bring their best friend to The Ark for free
- Exclusive 10% discount at the Irish Film Institute’s Cafe Bar (on orders over €10), situated next door to The Ark
- Members-only ezine with advance information on our events and Members-only special offers.
- Unicorn puzzle welcome gift

**Become part of The Ark’s family with your family**

Ark Adventure Days in May–June for members. Absolutely free!

**BUY MEMBERSHIP**      **GIFT MEMBERSHIP**

Ark.ie

### Marketing

The Ark also understood that in order to build the membership roster, it would need to create a culture shift within the organisation, activating all Ark personnel and access points as ambassadors on behalf of the membership. This strategy included the development of:

- A dedicated membership page on *The Ark.ie*.
- Updated print materials.
- Training for Ark personnel in the details of the membership, especially welcome desk attendants and other public-facing staff.
- Inclusion of membership information on every online event page.
- Membership-specific posters and postcards around and outside the venue.
- Inclusion of a flash mark on all print material for major programmes, highlighting the benefits or discounts available to members.
- Utilising press contacts to push the membership as an ideal Christmas gift.

The *Family Membership* was launched in October 2012.

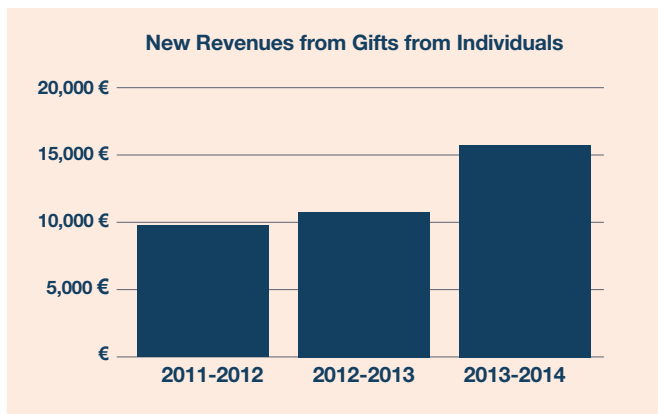
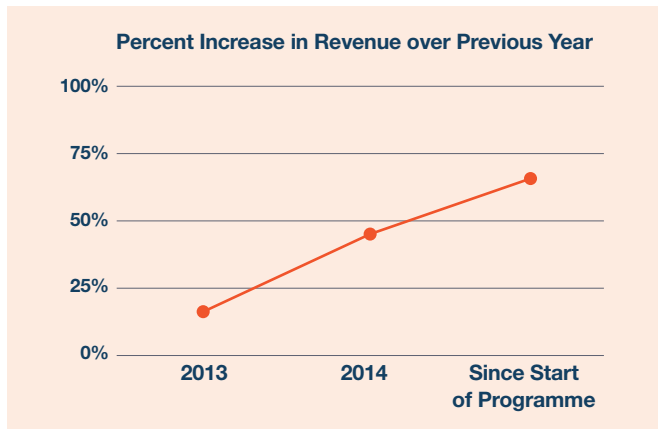
## The Outcome

The year one goal for the *Family Membership* was to sell 100 memberships. The Ark surpassed this goal, selling 110 memberships in the first twelve months.

Since the launch of the *Family Membership* programme in 2012, the organisation has sold 181 memberships.

Overall, this figure represents an increase of 14% in individual giving from 2011 to 2012, and a further increase of 46% from 2012 to 2013.

| Year      | Individual Giving | Increase on Previous Year |     | Increase since start of Programme |     |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 2011-2012 | €9,823            |                           |     |                                   |     |
| 2012-2013 | €11,194           | €1,371                    | 14% |                                   |     |
| 2013-2014 | €16,360           | €5,166                    | 46% | €6,537                            | 67% |



## B. Strategy Two—Creating an Authentic Bond to Encourage New Members to Renew Again and Again

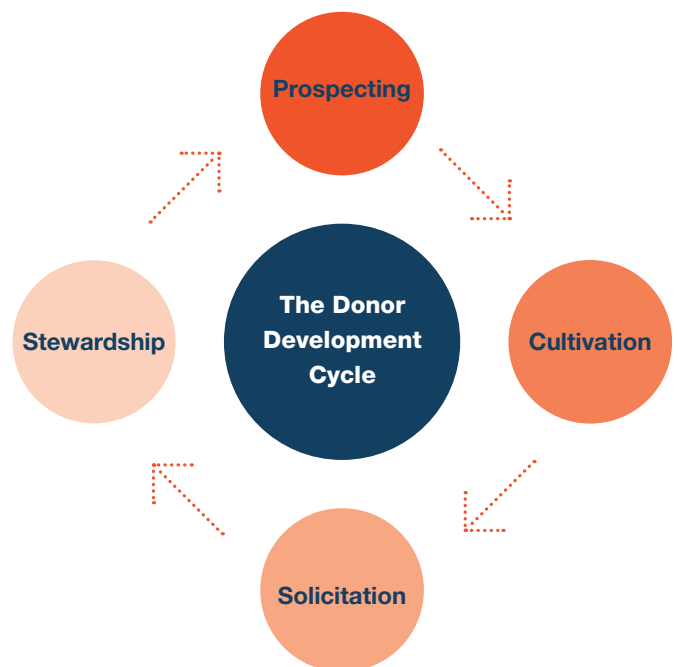
The December following its launch of the *Family Membership*, The Ark offered the membership at a significant discount to readers of a local newspaper, marketing the membership as a Christmas gift for friends and family.

Initially, the offer was successful, selling 63 *Family Memberships*.

In the fall of 2013, The Ark contacted its 2013 members to encourage a renewal in 2014. A vast majority of members solicited through direct contact with The Ark's programme and staff chose to do so.

However, *none* of those solicited through the Christmas promotion (mostly as gifts from friends) renewed.

As a result, The Ark discovered a fundamental law: to ensure a high level of renewal, an equally high level of effort was required *following* the purchase of the membership, in what the Institute refers to as the *donor stewardship* process. An authentic bond was required to achieve a reasonable level of confidence that The Ark could count on member support in subsequent seasons; simply because a family enrolls in year one does not mean it will renew in year two.



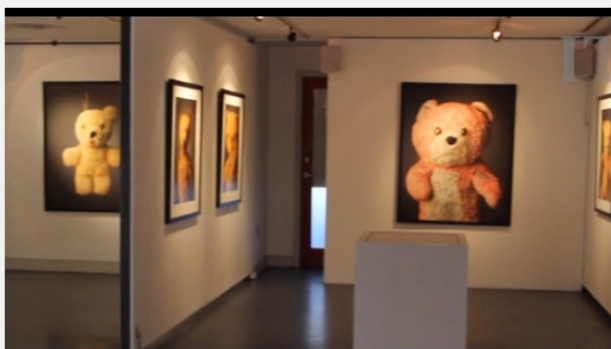
The Ark knew that a culture of customer service, or *stewardship*, had to be taken more seriously. The Ark quickly set upon a path to enhance this effort.

Additionally, Ark leadership realised it stood a higher chance of renewal success if it focused on acquisition of new members through high-touch, high-impact interactions; it would place less emphasis on one-time promotions.

A key strategy was developed: The Ark would **actively leverage highlights in its annual programming** to promote the membership.

The Ark quickly identified *Teddy Bear Story*, a 2014 blockbuster exhibition in partnership with the V&A Museum of Childhood, as a key opportunity. It would time its solicitation of potential members to capitalise on the enthusiasm created by this bold, transformational exhibition and the institutional marketing used to promote it in the press, through special events, and a high-profile partnership.

Members of **The Ark's Family Membership** scheme get in to *Teddy Bear story* as many times as they want for **free**. A family of four would only have to visit 3 times to save the equivalent of the €60 membership fee! [Join today to activate the benefits.](#)



Ark.ie

Over 10,000 patrons attended the exhibition. Seizing the opportunity, day in and day out, The Ark pushed membership aggressively, through multiple vehicles, including:

- Poster, postcard and email campaigns, outlining the benefits of free entry to the exhibition, and other benefits.
- Up-selling the membership through the Box Office to patrons purchasing tickets.
- A targeted e-mail campaign thanking patrons for their participation, and including a retrospective offer where The Ark offered a discount on *Family Memberships* equivalent to the amount they spent on their *Teddy Bear Story* tickets.

### The Outcome

The *Teddy Bear Story* campaign enrolled 52 new *Family Members*, and encouraged 4 renewals, resulting in increased revenue of €3,030. The effort successfully replaced the majority of lapsed “discount campaign” members.

### The Takeaway

While the number of memberships sold through the newspaper offer was high, The Ark struggled to develop an authentic relationship with these patrons.

A new strategy—to solicit at the height of the “enthusiasm cycle” created by great art and aggressive marketing—proved, through the *Teddy Bear Story* campaign, that a well-timed campaign leveraging the artistic programme can be just as successful as a newspaper discount. Time will tell whether this bond proves to be lasting, resulting in a higher rate of renewal.

By the end of 2014, the Ark’s target is to retain 200 family members; by 2015, that goal increases to 300.

While revenue from this programme is still relatively modest, its significant growth in one year alone argues forcefully for the future impact of a properly-resourced effort.

With the aim to diversify the number of financial sources on which it calls for support, The Ark’s emphasis on individual giving offers a promising snapshot of a business model on the move.