

Your Audience Lives on Mobile—Is Your Orchestra Meeting Them There?

2026 National Conference

ALEXA VALENTINE : We know that orchestras, and really all of the performing arts are at a crossroads, and they are anchored in these three areas that we really want to highlight. These are all the things that we already talked about just now. It's strengthening your core audience, reaching new audiences, and creating ways to drive sustainable revenue. Using a platform like easy-connect can really highlight each of these areas very well, as you'll hear from some of the presentations today. But really, I think we all know that your audience lives on mobile; 94% of U.S. adults have a phone and use it all the time—four hours a day or more, which is kind of sad if you think about it, but that's where we are. And 90% of that time is spent in mobile apps—so not browsers, mostly apps. You can think about just your own personal day-to-day use of your phone.

So with that, we say the basis of what we talk about at easy-connect is understanding your audience and using that understanding to drive how you communicate with them. That's identifying who your core audience members are, and that could be the most loyal. It could be based on re-attendance rates. It could be based on a number of things, but identifying who they are is the first step. Your casual attendees, maybe they come once, maybe they come twice, but they're another group that you should take a look at and see how you message them.

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And then your curious buyers, and those are your new audiences. Maybe they don't know a lot about an orchestra, or maybe they've never been, but they're curious about what's happening. And it's trying to talk to each of these groups in the way that they want to be talked to. Our approach is one app for every audience, and each audience group gets their own way in. And you'll see more about that as the presentation continues. So we talk about defining your channel and your messaging, and a lot of what we're going to share today is understanding your total tech stack. And this is just a part of what we would say is the overview, the strategic overview. We're not saying that native apps replace anything that already exists in your marketing, but it should complement what you're already doing.

We do have a lot of data across our whole client base that shows that people who download apps convert at much higher rates than people who come to websites. Obviously, push notifications convert at much higher rates than emails. So it's really almost just a more efficient and direct way of communicating with the people who are interested in what you're doing. The way that we do this in our apps is powered by personalization. So we have 60

trackable touchpoints across our apps, which is one differentiator from just a straight mobile website. We know who your constituents are or who your customers are, and we can track their behavior data—what they looked at, what they put in their carts, what they shared with other friends.

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And all of that becomes measurable data that you can use to fuel real-time messaging. So it's very important when a lot of our messaging is around time-specific events. A great piece to highlight from an easy-connect perspective is that we do this in an automated way. We all talk about AI right now, and without the behavior data behind what your audience is doing, it's really hard to fuel an AI strategy, and so an easy-connect app can be that next kind of intermediary step to doing that. And out of the box, the automated push notifications are a great, great tool.

And lastly, there are two slides left. Personalization we'll see in the presentations that are shared today by Jennifer and Unitey. We'll show you how personalization earns loyalty, and it opens doors for new audiences and really gives you the opportunity to cultivate new audiences, but also build stronger relationships with your core audiences. So we will show you some more about that in a bit. I just wanted to end this section here with one example of a friend and client of ours, Roundabout Theatre's conversion funnel, because I mentioned a little bit about how apps convert more strongly than mobile web, and I think this is a great slide to highlight that. Hiptix is—obviously they've raised their hand, and they've downloaded the app.

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It is a youth program, so it's already very specific. However, these conversion rates are encouraging because something like 76% of your traffic is coming from mobile. So we have to find a way to capture that in a streamlined fashion. And Hiptix is a great example of that, but we've got great examples across all of our clients, so we're happy to share more anytime. But for now, I will hand it over to Unity, who is just starting her journey with us, but I'm very excited to have her share her perspective.

JOHN KIESER: Thank you Alexa.

UNITEY KULL: Hi, I'm Unitey Kull. I'm the Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. I've been there for four years. Some of you may know that we just completed a major renovation and expansion. We reopened in September of 2025, and I love this picture. This is from opening night. What we've really been thinking about is how we capitalize on this incredibly transformative moment, the most

transformational moment in our history, and how that informs our digital strategy. We took the opportunity to do a lot at once. Not only did we reopen a Snohetta-designed expansion, adding 64,000 square feet, renovating our hall, which hadn't been renovated since 1968, but we worked with Pentagram to launch a new brand identity. We went pretty hard on publicity and worked with a new PR firm. We were successful in getting a lot of national press, and we also upped our game in the influencer space—not only locally, but we invited a lot of people nationally, which resulted in about 20 million impressions and a lot of great buzz online.

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So year-to-date, we are up 53% in ticket revenue. We've got 40% new single ticket-buyer households, 33% new subscribers, and we're worried about the sophomore slump. How do we keep that momentum going? We're already 5% ahead in subscription sales. Retention is really our strategy, as it has always been, as it is for you, too, but this is a key moment for us. And the other area for us is really in that diversification. We're reaching a lot of younger audiences, so we're thinking about how we meet these different audiences where they are. In addition to everything I mentioned, we've also been experimenting with programming and something that worked really well this season, a new symphony happy hour program, Playlist. We have had DJ sets following the Playlist, which again goes back to the expansion of having so much more space to socialize.

We've got musician meet and greets. The strategic community partnerships have been an on-going focus for us, but again, we've been upping our game in that area with the influencers. And ultimately, we're really just trying to create a sense of belonging for everyone. So we fully stole the idea of our digital presence being a second venue from Sree Sreenivasan, who used to be the Chief Digital Officer at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. And that's something that has really informed our ethos. We've been working on this intentionally for years and thinking about what we are doing in the social space, the storytelling on our blog, our website. We've had an app for a while, but we're trying to up our game in that area.

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So how do we sustain the momentum? How do we make the belonging feel personal? And then creating that virtuous cycle, bringing people in and then experiencing this online and coming back. So ultimately, our goal is to be more personal, more social, more seamless. Like I said, we have an app now. We are going to be working with easy-connect and looking at how we get more highly segmented. We love the social opportunities of bring-a-friend and wish lists and rush offers being able to verify student IDs, our Young Friends program. And then how can the purchase path itself be really seamless and frictionless? Right now,

we also implemented Seat Me for our website, which we love. You can see your seat, but mobile website, it's not very friendly. The website is still incredibly valuable, but then how do we have a completely different, easy, quick feature in the app?

So thinking about those unique paths, like I said, new audience growth is a big part of it, even in retention and deepening, the in-venue experience. I know a lot of people are talking about programs going online. Yes, we're thinking about that. We know that people love their paper, and we're not trying to move away from it. But how, then, do we communicate the perks? You've got your membership card for valet, for the donor lounge, for your parking. Ideally, being able to order your drink, and as AI just becomes more and more prevalent, how do we chat through the app? How do we have a deeper experience?

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So we're launching in September. What we're interested in looking at is do we have better conversion from TicketShare? We definitely want to capture those shadow audiences. It's really hard to understand who's coming when we only have the ticket buyer themselves. Does the segment-specific access change behavior? Does a better purchase path lift conversion? And do the social features drive group behavior?

So, for the table discussion, what is the difference between a digital presence that markets to people and one that builds community with them?

KIESER: Thank you, Unitey. Okay, you now have five minutes to discuss that question and answer it completely, of course. I was remiss to say that at the end, there will be an opportunity to register to get a copy of these presentations, and some of the presentations may be also more filled out with data. So don't worry about taking notes. If you register, then we can get a copy to you. So five minutes, and I'm starting now.

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[OFF-MIC TABLE DISCUSSIONS]

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KIESER: Okay, I'm very happy that these vibrant conversations are happening, but please welcome Jennifer Barton from the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

JENNIFER BARTON: Hi, everybody.

[APPLAUSE]

Oh, that's so loud for this morning. I want to first start by acknowledging the awesome presentation and work that's been happening at the St. Louis Symphony. Congratulations, Unitey, and good luck on your app journey. We're going to start a club. Okay, so the BSO faced the opportunity. You guys know about the BSO. Welcome. We're so glad to have you here. I'm Jennifer Barton. I'm the Chief Revenue Strategy Officer here. And the important thing to know about us is that in 2022, Jonathon Heyward came on as Music Director, which generated a lot of interest in our community. Our goal has been to maintain and grow from that, in addition to just welcoming people back after COVID. So to set the scene a little bit, our Marketing Team is pretty lean, but we have tremendous talent and even more importantly, curiosity. So we chose to take a multi-channel approach to building loyalty, instead of running in one direction or another. And this allowed us to braid together our digital strategies, and that's what I'm going to talk about now. If you're not sure about an app, we're just going to show you that it's a fantastic addition to your tech stack. The important thing is that we have put our strategy on serving patron loyalty needs, rather than trying to explore the many, many, many available features that came with the easy-connect app and all the other technology that we have.

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So if you haven't had a chance to yet, I hope you will download our app. Search for BSO app. I'm looking at Amy, who's our project manager on this. Baltimore Symphony, search for that. Okay, great. So when we talk about our audience segmentation and just overall what we're doing, we talk about four horizons of growth. Frequency, getting patrons to attend and come back. Loyalty, signing up for a journey with us to have a subscription or a ticketing program or a membership. Having volume, which is building critical mass in those desired products, using your loyal base. And then finally managing demand using inventory once that volume has been established.

So easy-connect helps us with this, by helping to add another layer to our tech stack. As I've said, the goals for us adding this were that, even with what we had, we needed to make, "What should I do next?" even more intuitive for patrons. We needed to enable on-demand personalization without expanding our team size. We needed to provide better delivery than email alone for timely information. We also needed to gain visibility into the behaviors that predict loyalty. And our overall objective has been get people in, keep that bar nice and low so that it's part of their identity, and then encourage them to add on and upgrade their relationship as they go and as they discover more on their journey. So we have this multi-channel tech stack. And hopefully this is the most affirming slide of this. If you're sending

mail, you're using technology, and you can leverage that with doing things like inkjet personalization that reminds people of available offers.

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Obviously our website is harder to personalize, but there are opportunities there with widgets. We use dynamic messaging in our emails that's integrated with Tessitura, which is our CRM platform, with automated workflow. We also have targeted marketing campaigns on our social media. So this is, for example, when renewal time rolls around, we can run a 90-day, "Your renewal is coming. Here it is. Don't miss it." And I have to give a shout-out to the Met in New York, the Met Art Museum, because they did this so beautifully. So anyway, if you are a member and then you lapsed, you'll experience what I did. It was great. [LAUGHTER] Support the Met. Okay.

So we also have TNEW, which is our basic account information lookup, and then finally our app, which offers so many features. So personalized content, offers on demand, and probably most importantly, ticketing pricing so that you know what you qualify for when you're using the app, and you don't have to sift through promo codes or other things that might be confusing. In our case, we took our different segments, and we said, "What are the offers that we want to reiterate to them?" So a great example is 15% off for members. We were really wanting to encourage them to add on to their second tickets or add on tickets as they went. So on every piece of direct mail, they get an inkjet message that says, "Remember, members get 15% off." That's something that's in hand for all of us, but it requires that you have segmentation. So if you take nothing else away from our discussion today, you've heard us say it, this is your encouragement and invitation. Please find a way to segment, even into a few different groups, your audience so that you can have at least a little bit more speaking directly to what their needs are in their journey with you.

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There were a couple of different slides that I've been moving around. So we can make sure that you get those after the conference. But the point is that we had outlined what the journeys were that we wanted to happen for each of our different patron segments. One of the most interesting impetuses for this program, is for the app to be used as our Passport. So the Passport is a pretty unique ticketing product. It used to be our Young Patrons program, but we took the age restriction off of it and upped the price to \$140 a year. We also made some clearer rules so that people knew what they could expect when they logged on to the site, and they could see what their various pricing rules allowed them to do. And what we're finding is that our Classical collection of concerts is being really utilized. People are loving showing up to that because they get it for free. They can also bring a friend for \$25, or they can upgrade their seat to a more premium section for \$40. They also have the Popular

Collection, which is a \$25 ticket, and then a \$40 upgrade. And then with our Celebrations collection, a 15% discount.

So if you're curious about what I mean when I'm talking about "Collections," we're actually talking about this later this afternoon at 1:30 in the Baltimore Symphony's "Building Resilience" session. So I'm going to skip through that, but we needed a way to really organize our products.

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So here's how personalization would work for a Passport member versus a subscriber, who—I think we all know what subscribers are like. So we're meeting two very different needs. One of them is can I book this? It's a question of how the product works, and then actually utilizing it; whereas subscribers have a need to have a concert kind of prepared, know-before-you-go experience. The goals between the two are that for our Passport holders, we needed to remove the friction that's associated with booking those tickets and the questions around them and the subscribers. We did not need to sell. We needed to help to advance that relationship by providing clear communication about their experience.

So one of the things that we have had a really interesting time with is trying to prioritize as we go, in a time when the needs of marketing have shifted so much just within the year that we created this kind of approach to—it's a roadmap approach to what we're doing. It's allowing us to be nimble and always make sure that we are prioritizing our work in a way that allows us to keep the most important values that we're trying to chase intact, to make our program successful. So this is how it works. Imagine a waterfall. If you've ever seen a diagram like that, where you have a coffee cup that's pouring over to the next one. If you run out of coffee, you maybe aren't making it to the bottom yet, but you've done a lot of great work at the top, at the thing that is the greatest leverage.

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So for us, that is communication and fulfillment. It is, after that, reducing those revenue-driving friction points, as I was just talking about. Subscribers and Passports have been our first two priorities. Then we have building experience value, our add-ons. And add-ons have been a major source of growth in the app. We've had a lot of good participation with that. And then finally trying to reach new people. I think that in the future, as we get more loyal people onto our app and it becomes a more regular part of our experience, this framework might change around a little bit. But what's helpful is that there are many of us coming from different points of view and different needs in our various strategies, and this allows us to really be on the same page about what gets the first crack at whatever kind of initiatives that we want to build capacity-wise.

Something else that's also interesting about this is that membership and fundraising have also been kind of a Phase 2 approach in the app. So for those of you who are wondering about how all of this applies, personalization matters a lot. We have our membership cards that we're starting to put onto the app. We also allow people to reserve their special member event access through the app. We send push notifications, and one of the coolest features is the Just for You reminders. Again, if you download the app for this week, you'll see that we have a Just for You for League participants—if you follow a certain link, right? Okay, great, cool. I'm sure that we will share that in one way or another.

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So we can put any kind of content that we want into the section. Some of the things that we've toyed with are notes about a special campaign that we might be running for additional gifts or a reminder about an upcoming benefit that is universal to members but is maybe timely instead of on-going. When people log on, they can also see just a reminder, you get the 15% off. We're always pushing that reminder to people. And so it's a really nice and fast way to send messages, to push messages for those who are on-demand. And also by being dynamic and changing on a regular basis, it helps people who are coming back to not always be seeing the same exact thing.

Something else that we've talked about is how we could expand content and donor storytelling on the app. It's incredible how flexible it is. It really is limited only by your team's imagination, and that's a huge credit to the easy-connect crew who has been just really side-by-side with us on envisioning what the BSO needs. And it has been a lot of fun because they bring a heck of a lot of technical expertise, too.

So how's it going? We're finding that 75% of our Passport holders are accessing their tickets via the app. We've actually talked about making Passport exclusively on the app. I think that that's something that we would be probably moving to in the next year because we've had an acceptable adoption rate, and we've gotten through the kinks here. And 47% of them are completing in-app purchases. And then our subscribers, these people are heavily using the app for information and not as much for the purchases. So you can see those 6% purchases in-app.

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And I keep looking at Amy Bruce, who's, again, our project manager on this and so much more. She has really been a tremendous member of our team in this. How old are these stats? These are pretty fresh, right? Yes, okay. So this would have been in February. So that's right. So they are. And I think—that's why I asked this, because since then we've done, and this was in one of the slides that I was going to share, but since then we've done an on-app

presale for our summer series, and that drove a lot of participation. We have also incorporated the app into more of our email strategy. Not that it wasn't there, but changing around the links to make sure that people were actually getting to the app was one of the conversations that we had as a team and had to implement. All of this is a lot of detailed discussions with team members, bringing them along about how the technology works. And so it's been a lot of fun to unlock one little upgrade at a time.

And something else that I'm really excited about is that we've received about \$50,000 in add-on and upgrade value in the first year. In addition to the ticket sales that are coming in through the app, we've made much more than this in the app over the past year. But I'm really proud of that add-on number because it shows us that our strategy is working. People are feeling bought-in, and then they're coming back around and finding new ways to participate with us. So finally, if you're looking for a little bit of a proof point in how we're approaching our tech stack, one of the things that I love to show is this pipeline of support for these various levels of engagement.

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So this was an analysis of ticketing, number of tickets, and the spend in the years from '22 to '26, and '26 is a projection based on current sales numbers and what our trends are for this year. We took the most recent '24-'25 season and did some analysis on it to create quartiles of engagement. This is not how we segment our people. It's an analysis opportunity. What we found is that we have seen a tremendous shift in our patron base from being more of that casual, light, learning, maybe trying the orchestra for the first time because they are interested in Jonathon or the programming. And then we've been really working hard to convert those people.

So I think this is a pretty neat little proof-is-in-the-pudding moment of when you focus on retention and upgrading people, you can move your pipeline forward. And we use our tech stack to accomplish all of that.

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