

# iBROADWAY

MUSICAL THEATRE IN  
THE DIGITAL AGE

Edited by  
JESSICA HILLMAN-MCCORD



iBroadway

Jessica Hillman-McCord  
Editor

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Musical Theatre in the Digital Age

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*Editor*

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*For Doug, Ellie and Hannah*

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Jessica Hillman-McCord

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# Musical Theatre in the Digital Age

*Jessica Hillman-McCord*

The Internet and other digital technologies have fundamentally shifted our moment-to-moment existence, changing the way we examine the world and the ways we shape, remember, and share our experiences. Our phones or computers, and the worlds they link us to, are omnipresent at almost every waking moment. Within this author's lifetime, in the technologically developed world,<sup>1</sup> we have passed from one way of life into another, vastly different one. Previously, we used home phones, or that cultural dinosaur, payphones, to communicate. Now not only do we have a phone in our pocket at all times, phone calls often feel slow, we'd rather text. Twenty years ago, we sent each other physical letters; now we message or send videos through endless social media sites. We played records, then tapes, then CDs (and briefly laser discs) on physical equipment; now we stream music on multiple devices. We researched using books, encyclopedias, or newspapers; now we can satisfy the smallest query in a moment, on our phones. We contacted friends via phone calls and letters; now we have vast networks of hundreds or thousands of digital "friends" or "followers" who we can blast news to with a click of a button. We read about the lives of celebrities in fan magazines or

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newspaper stories; now we can “follow” as many celebrities as we would like and receive minute-to-minute updates about their personal lives. That’s only the beginning. It is, in a vast understatement, a new world. And the pace only quickens.

As a highly popular art form, musical theatre has always acted as a mirror to society. Unsurprisingly then, the form also reflects the ways we react to sweeping technological change. From its historical beginnings, overlapping with the adoption of electric lighting, all the way to today’s social media marketing, musical theatre has been impacted by innovation and technology. The digital revolution has fundamentally altered the way musicals are marketed, admired, reviewed, researched, taught, and even cast.

As Elizabeth Wollman explains in her afterword to this volume, musical theatre’s relationship to technological change has been fraught throughout its history, mirroring the discomfort and fear society as a whole has exhibited in response to the march of innovation. From the invention of photography, to radio, to film, to television, and all the way to the Internet, the public has reacted with combined terror and passionate fascination. Musical theatre’s overall response to the digital revolution can best be described as a cautious arm’s-length embrace.

In the first hundred years of its existence, commercial musical theatre functioned on one basic model. With the advent of digital technologies, every musical theatre artist and professional has had to adjust to swift and unanticipated change. Now producers and marketers manipulate the web and social media in order to reach and develop audiences in constantly shifting ways. Scholars make use of digital devices and archives in their research and pedagogy, altering the way they teach the form to a new generation of technologically driven students. Casting directors consider social media reach when choosing whom to cast, and therefore both Broadway celebrities and younger actors looking to build careers must develop and curate their own digital profiles. Designers make use of computer-aided design, or CAD, allowing more flexibility in their artistic process, and also frequently utilize digital scenery, causing audiences to perceive their work in new ways. Dramaturgs employ web technologies to grant context and educate audiences who have grown to expect digital integration. Traditional print media criticism has begun to disappear; in the digital age anyone can declare himself or herself a critic. Audiences and fans engage with musicals in fresh and innovative ways, for musicals now have “postmodern presence.” They reach audiences across the



globe through both sanctioned means (official websites and Internet marketing), and illegal trading of bootleg performance videos. Attending a live musical is now only a fraction of the experience a fan may have with a musical.

Due to the commercial nature of the musical theatre form, musicals offer a more potent test case to reveal the implications of the digital age than other theatrical art forms. For although the resultant financial pressures might encourage stasis, avoiding change will ultimately prove futile. Musical theatre must transform with the times and strive to meet the challenges of our modern world. Rather than merely reflecting technological change, musical theatre scholarship and practice can lead the conversation about art in the digital age.

### CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

There has been no full-length work exploring digital culture's fundamental and defining impact on musical theatre. Scholars are only beginning to discover the multifaceted effects of the digital world on musical theatre. Although pioneering works have examined the intersections of the digital world with straight theatre, none have focused on musical theatre, where the implications are particularly significant, both commercially and artistically.

Theatre scholars' response to the digital has continued to rapidly change along with societal attitudes towards technology. Matthew Causey's work, as one example, demonstrates that evolution. Causey has continued to engage with the digital, beginning in 2006, with *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, which asked how theatre can respond to science and technology's "colonization of the body," and how the individual can produce effective theatre in the face of this "regime of embeddedness."<sup>2</sup> Causey's concerns reflected a period where many scholars warned of the potential perils the digital posed to the live theatre. For example Michael Kustow, in *Theatre@Risk* (2000), cautioned of the extensive dangers theatre faces in the digital age, in a world "tidied by information technology."<sup>3</sup> By 2015, Causey demonstrates a shift away from earlier fears, returning to the now more normalized subject. He now argues, "Now that the shock of the virtual has subsided toward a 'new-normal' of computational interference in all areas of life, it is an advantageous moment to reflect on the passage through the virtual and back to the real."<sup>4</sup>

As Pamyła Stiehl puts it in Chap. 3 of this book, “[o]ther theatre theorists and scholars have further explored the phenomenon of mediatized theatre, often focusing on models of reception, production, contextualization, cultural hegemony, phenomenology, semantics and semiotics.”<sup>5</sup> Through the myriad lenses she mentions, the majority of theatre scholarship on the digital discusses the implications of incorporating multimedia into performance, in volumes such as *Multimedia Performance* (2011),<sup>6</sup> and *Virtual Theatre: An Introduction* (2004).<sup>7</sup> Amy Osatinski touches on similar questions in Chap. 4 of this book, when she examines digital “magic” in screen-to-stage musicals. Despite the extent of work on multimedia performance, fewer scholars have examined how the digital touches more practical elements of the form, from ticket sales, to audience behavior, to scenography, to fan engagement. This is one of the spaces this book aims to fill. While there are technical manuals that of course address changing technologies for the various areas of theatre, including scenography, lighting and sound, and even several works on the use of digital technologies to teach theatre students (such as *Theatre in Cyberspace: Issues of Teaching, Acting and Directing* (1999) by Stephen Alan Schrum), these books do not bring all areas together holistically. They discuss practical elements of media and online culture for theatre practitioners, but also include little to nothing specific to musical theatre.

In “Theater is Media: Some Principles for a Digital Historiography of Performance,” Sarah Bay-Cheng points out that “all history is media”<sup>8</sup> and that the way that we study theatrical history has been distinctly impacted by digital technology. Other scholars have also taken on this subject, such as Maggie B. Gale and Ann Featherstone in their “Researching Digital Performance: Virtual Practices.”<sup>9</sup> In this book, Sissi Liu and Doug Reside engage with the implications of digital research specifically concerning musical theatre, through both musicological and social history lenses.

Other scholars have taken up disparate perspectives in response to the digital. Bill Blake examined the lay of the land in *Theatre and the Digital* (2014). He offers a useful overview of current scholarship then examines specific performance art based case studies. Nicola Shaughnessy argues that digital natives’ brains may actually be different, and that the plasticity of the brain means that children who grow up in the digital world may actually perceive that world differently.<sup>10</sup> Very recently, in 2017,

Eirini Nedelkopoulou examines the implications of liveness in the age of the digital.<sup>11</sup> A crucial theoretical construct which has shifted dramatically in response to the digital, liveness is by necessity examined in several chapters in this book, including Chap. 3 by Pamyła Stiehl, Chap. 4 by Amy Osatinski, and Chap. 8 by Ryan Bunch.

Even with the multiplicity of approaches mentioned above, very few scholars writing about theatre and the digital mention musical theatre, despite that art form having statistically the largest popular audience and therefore arguably the greatest potential impact on culture at large. A few scholars do mention musicals, for instance John H. Muse discusses *Next to Normal's* (2009) use of a “Twitter play” during its Broadway run in his chapter “140 Characters in Search of a Theater: Twitter Plays.”<sup>12</sup> Laura MacDonald also examines these Twitter plays in the context of producers’ use of social media marketing in Chap. 2 of this book. Amy Petersen Jensen, in *Theatre in a Media Culture* (2007), incorporates several musicals into her larger discussion of how “theatre has reconfigured itself to access the economic and cultural power of the media, and the extent to which mediatization undermines theatrical creativity.”<sup>13</sup> Patrick Lonergan has a section on *Once: The Musical* in his book *Theatre and Social Media* (2016), a work where he discusses social media itself as a performance space.<sup>14</sup> Similar questions to those Lonergan raises, regarding fans’ performance of online identity and their subsequent marketing value to commercial musicals, are explored in Chaps. 6, 7, and 8 of this book. While the abovementioned works that include musical theatre scholarship offer useful beginnings, this book brings its full attention to the specificities and peculiarities of the musical theatre form, on its own, and as a whole. It is time to explore all of these issues in terms of technology’s specific impact on the musical theatre field, where the digital world currently interacts with commercial and artistic demands on a daily basis.

## ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

Chapters in this volume cover a vast array of topics. To showcase the breadth of areas where the digital revolution impacts musical theatre, the book is split into three sections covering thematic areas. Chapters in each section act as case studies demonstrating the current state of musical theatre’s intersections with digital technology.

## PART I: CREATING MUSICALS AND THE DIGITAL

Musical theatre authors, designers, and producers must all grapple with changing technologies on the way to creating and selling their product. Librettists, lyricists and composers must decide if modern digital era material resonates with them when choosing new topics to musicalize. Designers must employ a host of digital tools to facilitate their design process. Digital magic may also take center stage, visually through scenic and light design, and aurally through sound design. Producers must utilize digital tools to promote their shows and, once they have succeeded, to sell and distribute tickets.

In our first chapter of this section, Laura McDonald traces the history of Internet branding and audience development. She places digital technologies in the context of the early history of producorial innovation and adaption to technology, from the first discount ticket booth, through the early adoption of the web, to today. This historical grounding offers perspective on current innovative uses of social media and technological outreach, such as the 360° Facebook videos used by *Hamilton* and *The Lion King*. Given that the commercialism of the Broadway musical has been central to its understanding by both critics and scholars, the producer's perspective offers crucial context for the rest of these chapters.

In Chap. 3, Pamyra Stiehl concludes that, despite a few exceptions, most musical theatre to reach Broadway has not yet truly engaged with the digital world as central to its themes or topic. Instead, musical theatre largely looks to the past for material. (The current Broadway success *Dear Evan Hansen* (2016), discussed in the conclusion of this book, does engage extensively with millennial social media culture, but seems to be the exception that proves the rule.) In lieu of other commercial Broadway musicals that engage with the digital, Stiehl discusses the world of new-media musical theatre examples as a reflexive performance site. These short musicals, which take digital culture as their subject matter, are written largely for YouTube, such as AVByte's "Twitter—The Musical" and "Facebook—The Musical." These works not only have immense viewership, but further complicate the traditional definition of a "musical."

Lastly in this section, in Chap. 4, Amy Osatinski examines the design world, specifically the way that digital technology has enabled movie magic to be translated into stage magic in contemporary screen-to-stage musicals. One of the most obvious and lamented trends in recent

musical theatre has been the conversion of films into ready-made, ready to promote, musical theatre. These musicals can often be less artistically complex and more derivative, and Osatinski examines three of the most critically dismissed: *Ghost: The Musical* (2011), *Dirty Dancing: The Classic Story Onstage* (2006), and *Rocky: The Musical* (2014). In addition to critical disdain, these have in common their use of digital technology to bring moments from films to life on stage. Why might these musicals feel the need to translate pivotal moments from the films? And why might audiences crave such a direct nostalgic filmic reexperience? In order to answer these questions Osatinski engages with critical frames such as Marvin Carlson's theory of "ghosting," and multiple perspectives on the idea of liveness.

## PART II: AUDIENCES AND PERFORMERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The artists and business people discussed in the first section must make active choices in order to engage modern audiences. In our second section we take the perspective of the people who make up those audiences. Audience Studies and Fan Studies are lenses through which we can view the other side of the musical theatre experience. Part II examines the way audiences behave (or misbehave) inside the theatre due to the accessible technology of the cell phone, as well as the way they engage with musicals (both staged and televised) once they have left the theatre. The chapters in this section also engage with fan scholar Henry Jenkins' idea of "convergence culture," where fans seek out information about their fan object across multiple media platforms, from the Internet to the stage.

Several of the chapters in Part II grapple with a recent musical theatre trend: the conjunction of television and musical theatre. From the popularization of musicals via *High School Musical* (2006) and *Glee* (2009–2015), to the return to the televised live musical first popularized with *Peter Pan* (1955) and *Cinderella* (1957), television has been a crucial part of the expansion of the musical theatre fan base and a pivotal factor in making musical theatre "cool" again. While televised musical theatre offers enough rich topics for analysis to fill its own book, here we include chapters that examine the digital activities fans pursue in reaction to these televised musicals.

Several chapters in this section also examine musical theatre fans' active engagement online. Community formation offers one of the

central pleasures of fandom. Communal fan activities discussed in these chapters range from reassembling the central musical *Bombshell* from the backstage television show *Smash* (2015), to making *Hamilton* fan art, fan fiction, or fan videos, to hate-tweeting during televised live musical broadcasts. Online fan interaction offers one of the most crucial elements to building future audiences and hopefully bringing those audiences into the live theatre.

In Chap. 5, Kathryn Edney focuses on the cellular phone, perhaps the most central technology of the current day. She contends that audience behavior expectations have radically shifted in the smartphone-enabled world, as evidenced by numerous recent and highly publicized controversies, such as the much-shared video of Patti LuPone confiscating a spectator's cell phone mid-performance. This "summer of the cell-phone" in 2015 brought these questions to mainstream attention, and encouraged debate across media. In addition to the impact of cell phones on live audience behavior, which Edney places in the crucial historical context of the theatrical highbrow/lowbrow distinction, the cell phone offers a portal for much of the social media behavior addressed in other chapters.

In Chap. 6, I discuss *Hamilton* (2015) as an example of how the Internet affects the musical theatre fan dynamic. The Internet has not only further intensified fans' traditional personalization process with musicals, but also fundamentally altered that relationship. I trace the kinds of "fan culture" created and circulated via the Internet, and discuss features of the way fan communities function in the digital era. Fans value intensive knowledge about a musical, and share, compete, criticize, debate, and perform that knowledge. Digital media has radically intensified the reach of these fans. The ability of the Internet and social media to facilitate fan community formation has dramatically shifted what it means to be a musical theatre fan, as well as how fans relate to each other.

In Chap. 7 Kirsty Sedgman also takes a close look at how fan communities function. Using the example of *Bombshell*, a musical that does not (thus far) exist outside the fictional universe of the television show *Smash*, Sedgman describes how fans engage in practices that may bring non-existent meta-texts to life. *Smash* fans created a successful Kickstarter campaign in order to fund a concert performance of *Bombshell* and have hopes of subsequently bringing the show to Broadway. Their real-world results model the ways in which modern fans harness the power of the

digital world. The fans she discusses, like the *Hamilton* fans discussed in Chap. 6, create new texts in order to pay tribute to, or add to, the fan object's universe.

In Chap. 8, Ryan Bunch examines the phenomenon of the live televised musical "events" which resurfaced with NBC's production of *The Sound of Music Live!* in 2013. He discusses fan communities, shedding light on a darker side of fan culture, the phenomenon of "hate-tweeting," or "fan-tagonism." These fans are not necessarily devotees of the particular show being televised, but are nonetheless passionate in their response. Gleeful negativity has been a feature of much of the response to these events, but Bunch also examines the largely positive embrace of *The Wiz* (2016) in the context of the #blacklivesmatter movement. Such live events offer a perfect example of convergence culture, where live theatre, television, and the Internet coalesce, creating something larger and more complicated than any of these media alone.

The impact of the digital world on the day-to-day life of the actor has been quite dramatic. The final two chapters in this section examine a wide spectrum of professional actors, from those just beginning their careers to musical theatre stars. While the distance between these levels of success may seem extreme, both struggling actors and celebrity musical performers must meet similar digital challenges. All actors must market themselves online. Actors still on the audition circuit, which includes all but the most rarefied celebrities, must contend with digital means of getting a coveted audition slot. Whether or not an actor has the opportunity to be seen live partly depends on their digital impact. More strikingly, the digital world creates questions regarding the construction of online identities. How do actors' "real" selves differ from their constructed identities, and how can the digital version help sell their "product?" The line between one's personal life online and one's professionally constructed social media personality is now fascinatingly blurred.

In Chap. 9, Nathan Stith interviews casting directors and actors to learn how digital tools change their processes, and how performers' social media presence affects their marketability. Their answers are enlightening, if somewhat frightening to those who would like to believe that talent alone determines casting decisions. This chapter begins a fascinating exploration of identity formation online. Consciously constructed personas and careful choices as to where and how one uses social media have become an ever more crucial element of actors' career-building process. This new territory, in addition to affecting actors' and

casting directors' day-to-day experiences, raises questions that intersect with fan studies, media studies, and larger philosophical questions of identity formation.

In Chap. 10, Emily Clark continues to engage with these themes by exploring a very particular subset of celebrity Broadway musical theatre performers, namely those who emerged from reality television casting contests. Two very different winners of this new casting model, Laura Osnes, who won the role of Sandy in the 2007 production of *Grease*, and Bailey Hanks, who won an MTV contest to assume the role of Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, have had highly divergent careers since they first appeared on Broadway. Their varying levels of post-television success are at least partly due to Osnes' social media and digital savvy in creating her "girl-next-door turned Broadway Diva" persona. Online, popular musical theatre performers must tread a delicate line between connected and distant, between humble actor and "star," and between friend and diva. Perceived accessibility plays a pivotal part in celebrity success, or lack thereof.

### PART III: DIGITAL DRAMATURGY, SCHOLARSHIP, AND CRITICISM

The final section of this book examines questions of research, scholarship, and criticism germane to scholars in the musical theatre field and beyond. Readers of this book may be scholars or come from outside the academic world, but questions that musical theatre teachers and researchers face in the digital age are fascinating regardless of one's subject position.

In Chap. 11, Doug Reside explores how musical theatre scholars utilize the digital world and summarizes how musical theatre fits within the digital humanities. He offers an introduction to the kinds of digital tools scholars may now access. In the more traditional scholarly world, digital research methods are sometimes met with fear or caution, but Reside points out the myriad uses of such research instruments, and their impact, which adds greatly to the kinds of information scholars now have at their fingertips. More traditional research methods simply cannot offer this intensive level of data, and resultant methods to analyze it. Reside's own work examining Jonathan Larson's floppy disks and what they may tell us about his writing process on *Rent* (1996)<sup>15</sup> offers a striking example of the kinds of research open to us in the digital world.



In a companion chapter, Sissi Liu takes on questions of digital research specific to the musicological field in Chap. 12. Liu explains how new digital tools have changed the way we can study musicals' scores. Liu also questions whether a computer or "song machine" could create a musical theatre hit without human authorship, and Liu discusses *Beyond the Fence* (2016), the fascinating attempt already made. In order to create a digitally authored musical, one would need to utilize all levels of data from the most successful musicals, or the "canon." Liu therefore offers a method of explaining or defining the canon digitally. By doing so she outlines various new data driven ways to analyze musical theatre.

Bryan Vandevender examines similar questions in Chap. 13, through the lens of dramaturgy. Through interviews with major non-profit and commercial theatre dramaturgs, he describes new digital tools and methods utilized in their work. Dramaturgs may use similar digital methods as scholars or teachers, but to a different end. Their job is to reach out to popular audiences and to give them context for the productions they attend. How can major New York City theatres such as Roundabout Theatre Company and Lincoln Center Theater reach audiences digitally, and how does that ultimately change their bottom line? Vandevender examines how digital tools can expand the theatregoers experience with musical theatre, and thus encourage future theatre going.

In the book's final chapter, Bud Coleman discusses the shift away from the theatre critic as a professional journalist and towards Internet criticism. This chapter raises crucial questions of how "quality" can be ascertained in an increasingly democratic online world where paid experts are dwindling in numbers and self-professed "experts" are to be met with caution. The very existence of the traditional theatre critic is increasingly in danger of obsolescence. The new world of social media and blogging reviews demands attention in order to understand its potential impact.

## AFTERWORD

In the afterword, Elizabeth Wollman examines how societal distrust has always led the first wave of reaction towards any new technology, and places these individual musical theatre examinations in their overall context. She concludes that theatre scholars always return to the power of live theatre, even in the face of monumental technological change.

## LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Fourteen chapters admittedly cannot begin to encompass the full expanse of musical theatre's changing responses to the digital world. Examples of a few of the topics not considered in detail here include the impact of digital music sales on cast albums (the "iTunes effect"), the use of digital tracks to back up live performance, and the impact of the digital on other design and technical areas, including lighting and sound. Although the chapters included here are by no means comprehensive, they offer snapshots of the current state of various fields, and do the vital work of beginning a critical discussion.

Like any research on contemporary matters, it is hard to keep up with the dizzyingly fast technological changes that continue to occur even as I write these words. Because scholars often focus on the past, distrust of change can lead to a gap in analysis. We have many histories of musical theatre, but insufficient scholarship situating musicals in today's world. This is a disservice. We need to freeze-frame this moment in order to record for posterity how this art form has responded to technological change. Analysis of this very moment can help scholars and readers pause to process our current cultural and societal values, as well as offer a model on how we will continue to adapt. Digital technology will persist in influencing our world until the next, as yet unseen, breakthrough. We need to understand how the arts, and in particular the musical, this unique mix of artistic and commercial popular culture, adjust to a new world. Predictions about the future may prove right or wrong, but one thing is certain, musical theatre will continue to adapt, as the digital defines the ways we move into the future.

## NOTES

1. I refer to a specific population who encounter the digital on a daily basis. Figures show that, as of February 2016, economically developed countries such as South Korea, Australia, Canada, and the USA led the world in Internet users, at rates from 94% in South Korea to 89% in the USA. The least developed countries, such as Ethiopia, had rates as low as 8%. The global median was 67%. (<http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/02/22/internet-access-growing-worldwide-but-remains-higher-in-advanced-economies/>).
2. Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*.
3. Kustow, *Theatre@Risk*.

4. Causey, *The Performing Subject in the Space of Technology*.
5. Stiehl, Chap. 3.
6. Klich, Rosemary and Edward Scheer eds. *Multimedia Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2011.
7. Giannachi, Gabriella. *Virtual Theatre: An Introduction*. London: Routledge Press, 2004.
8. Bay-Cheng, "Theater is Media."
9. Kershaw, Baz and Helen Nicholson, eds. *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
10. Shaughnessy, Nicola. *Applying Performance: Live Art, Socially Engaged Theatre and Affective Practice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
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13. Jensen, *Theatre in a Media Culture*.
14. Lonergan, Patrick. *Theatre and Social Media*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2016.
15. Reside, Doug. "'Last Modified January 1996': The Digital History of Rent." *Theatre Survey*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2011, 335–340.

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PART I

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Creating Musicals and the Digital

# Connection in an Isolating Age: Looking Back on Twenty Years of Engaging Audiences and Marketing Musical Theatre Online

*Laura MacDonald*

Two decades after the first Broadway musical theatre tickets were sold online in 1996, the marketing of musicals has become even more sophisticated, with long-running, hit musicals from *Wicked* (2003) to *The Lion King* (1997) and *Hamilton* (2017) shifting or supplementing their in-person rush ticket lotteries with digital ticket lotteries, run through apps such as TodayTix. With a few swipes on a smartphone, theatregoers can toss their name into a digital hat and be notified whether or not they have secured discounted tickets to that evening's performance, and all without venturing to the Times Square or West End theatre districts. Broadway was not always an early or swift adopter of digital technology and online platforms (and London has typically lagged behind New York). But since musicals began launching their own websites, the Internet has fulfilled a range of functions for the musical theatre industry and its consumers.

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More than simply disseminating production information or digitizing a traditional print advertising campaign, musical theatre producers have found a wide and complicated range of uses for web platforms. From communicating ticket availability, offering tickets for sale, engaging with fans, and connecting musical theatre creators with their audience, these platforms have expanded the potential reach of musical theatre marketing. In this chapter I outline the growth of online marketing to demonstrate how far the musical theatre industry has come in harnessing demographic data and celebrating fans' commitment to particular musicals, to create and sustain global, online communities of musical theatre spectators. Theatre's "communities, by the active choice of assembling to attend plays, are more apparent as groups to themselves and to others than are the more abstract literary communities," Marvin Carlson points out, and this chapter investigates the engagement, capture, and visibility of such assemblies once they shifted to online platforms.<sup>1</sup>

Like any other consumer product, Broadway musicals have a brand experience to offer and online marketing is increasingly consumers' first point of engagement with a musical brand. The Internet is also the place where musical theatre consumers will continue to engage long after attending an ephemeral live performance, and their Instagram selfies at the theatre or fan performances on YouTube are far more valuable to a musical brand than a Playbill left on a coffee table at home. The group nature of theatre going Carlson privileges has thus intensified online. "The pressure of audience response can coerce individual members to structure and interpret their experience in a way which might well not have occurred to them as solitary readers," Carlson notes, and musical theatre fans have a myriad of opportunities to coerce fellow fans and spectators, whether through likes, retweets, YouTube comments, or blog posts, to commit to a particular, perhaps more emotional and public experience of musical theatre.<sup>2</sup> The byproduct of this publicized experience, I suggest, is the extension of a musical's brand.

The online brand experience begins the storytelling that ticket buyers will experience at the theatre, and social media platforms allow musical fans and spectators to participate in musical theatre marketing, promoting individual musicals through online activities and helping marketers to expand a community of ticket buyers. Carlson laments the limited scholarship investigating "what an audience brings to the theatre in the way of expectations, assumptions, and strategies which will creatively interact with the stimuli of the theatre event to produce whatever effect the