2011 Stage Management Survey – United States

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http://smsurvey.info

In November 2011, the Stage Management Special Topics class at the University of Iowa conducted a national survey of stage managers to track demographics and technology use for the field. This survey is part of an ongoing study of stage management that began five years ago. David McGraw, PSM and now the Head of Stage Management at the University of Iowa, conducted a survey of 283 stage managers in November 2006. He followed this with a graduate class-developed survey of 525 stage managers in November 2009. We decided in 2009 to conduct the survey every two years but to alternate questions to address more topics while keeping the overall length the same. In 2011, we received 734 responses with 614 stage managers completing the primary survey.

This incredible response would not have been possible without the support of Actors' Equity Association. Actors' Equity Association estimates that over 2,100 of its active members are stage managers (http://www.actorsequity.org/Members/stagemanager.asp); 332 AEA stage managers, or approximately 15% of all union stage managers, participated in the 2011 survey. We are especially grateful to David Lotz, National Communications Director, for promoting the survey through social media and Helaine Feldman at the *Equity News* for publishing a survey notice in its November 2011 edition.

We would also like to acknowledge the Stage Managers' Association (http://www.stagemanagers.org), which has supported this project since the first survey in 2006. In 2011, 158 members of the SMA participated in the survey. The SM Network (http://smnetwork.org), an online forum of both union and non-union stage managers also promoted the survey on its message boards, producing 414 views of the invitation. Finally, none of these surveys would have been successful without the support of the hundreds of stage managers who have volunteered their time to share their thoughts and to forward the surveys to their colleagues and peers.

We fully acknowledge that even 614 responses does not represent the full view of all American stage managers. But we do believe that this survey yields very important and interesting data about our most unusual field.

Section I: Stage Manager Demographics

In order to elicit candid responses, complete anonymity was guaranteed for all participants. Survey participants were also not required to answer every question, so percentages are based on the number of responses for that question. For instance, 734 stage managers shared their thoughts on separate blocking/calling scripts, but only 617 responded whether they are currently on tour (only 34 were on tour during the survey). The 2011 survey is
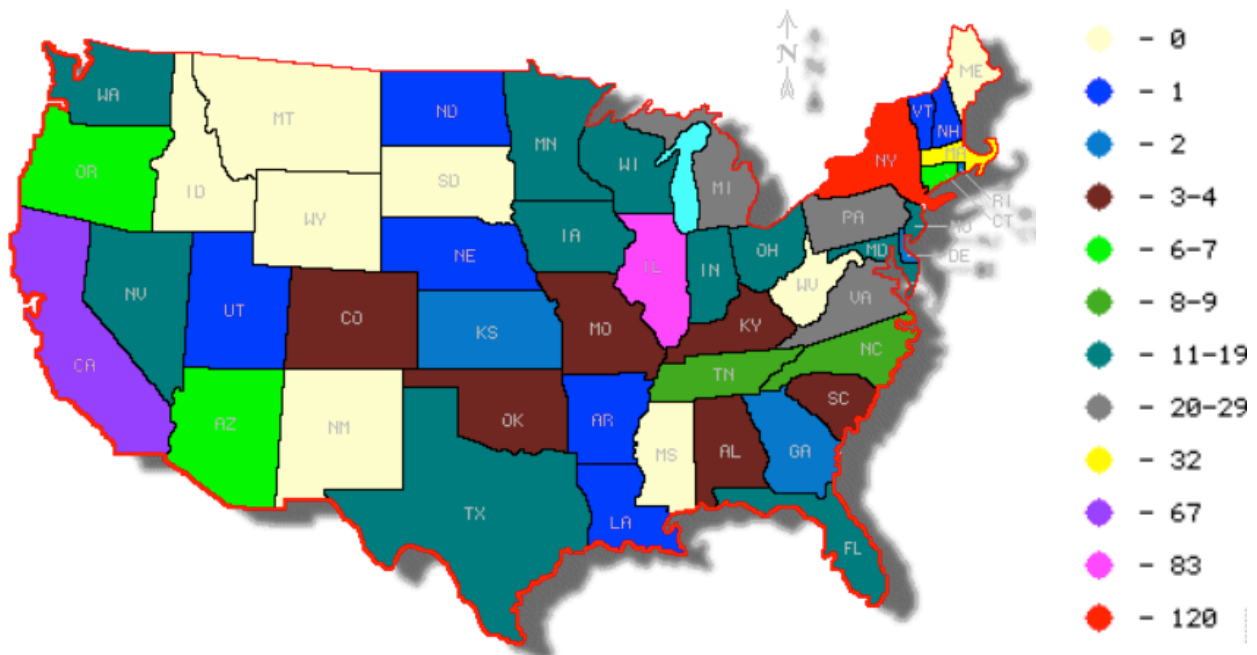
part of a longitudinal study to identify trends over a number of years, so we asked several demographic questions of the participants.

The survey was open to anyone who has stage managed an American theatrical production. When asked to identify their current occupation, 378 (60%) indicated stage manager, 133 (21%) were ASMs, 94 (15%) were students, 38 (6%) were teachers, 21 (3.0%) were apprentices or interns, 129 (21%) held other positions in the arts, and 69 listed "Other." The major entry for the "Other" category were 37 participants who identified themselves Production Managers. We will include this listing in future surveys.

When asked about their recent activity as stage managers, 66.8% of all participants had served as a stage manager (averaging 3.16 shows/year), 36.5% had been an assistant stage manager (averaging 2.28 shows/year), and 30.8% had worked as a production stage manager (averaging 4.91 shows/year) in the past year. Please note that participants could include themselves in all three categories.

Participants identified their state of residence [Figure 1], indicating participation from 42 states. As in the past two surveys, the state of New York had the strongest representation with 120 responses, followed by Illinois (83), California (67), Massachusetts (32), and Virginia (25). And stage managers remain on the move (or at least the commute): 23% of participants worked outside their state of residence. The majority of those who cross state lines do so to work in New York (49 stage managers), the District of Columbia (25), Massachusetts (21), and Florida (20). And to address the claim that New York City is the center of American theatre, 252 responses, or 41% of all participants who answered the question, have stage managed in New York City at some point in their careers.

Figure 1: State of Residence for Survey Participants

Survey participants also shared information about the number of years they have worked in stage management [Figure 2], the number and kind of shows they had stage managed [Figure 3], and their ages [Figure 4]. In 2009, the largest group of participants had been stage managing for 6-10 years, but this year the largest group (37%) have stage managed 1-5 years. We attribute this shift in experience levels to the increased use of social media to share the survey among peers. It should be noted, however, that 192 participants reported working at least 11 years as a stage manager. Moreover, Figure 5 demonstrates that years of experience and age are not necessarily linked. We are also able to isolate responses based upon years of experience to determine the practices of veteran stage managers.
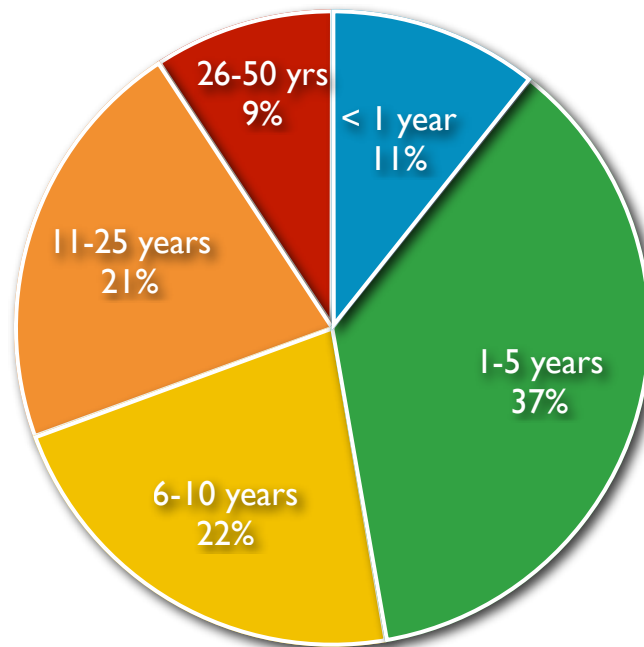
Figure 2: Years of Experience

Figure 3: Number and Type of Productions in Career as Stage Manager (Total Responses)

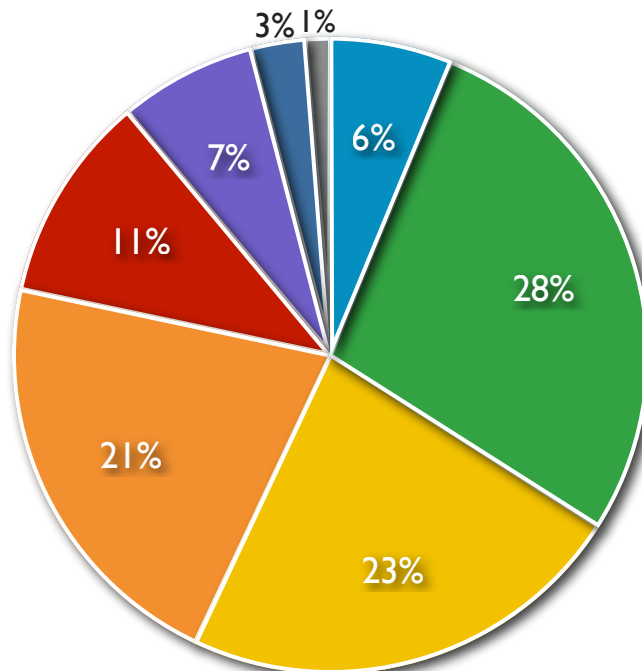| # of Projects	None	1-5	6-10	11-25	26-50	51-75	76-100	101+
Musical Theatre	23	242	137	105	46	17	5	6
Non-Musical Theatre	8	140	137	146	97	37	23	18
Classical Dance	225	135	18	5	3	1	2	0
Modern Dance	165	184	30	14	5	2	1	2
Classical Music	256	83	16	11	2	3	0	1
Modern Music/ Concert	195	139	27	12	7	4	1	2
Opera	180	180	33	19	8	5	2	2
Special Events	52	235	117	56	23	10	5	6
Television/Radio/ Films	253	96	14	6	7	0	1	2

Figure 4: Age

Figure 5: Experience Levels Divided by Age Brackets

Age	<1 Year Experience	1-5 Years Experience	6-10 Years Experience	11-25 Years Experience	26-50 Years Experience
Under 21	15	16	1	0	1*
21-25	47	115	9	0	0
26-30	1	71	64	5	0
31-40	1	11	54	65	0
41-50	0	4	3	50	7
51-60	0	1	1	8	33
61-70	0	0	2	5	9
71+	0	1	0	0	7

* as reported

We also asked a series of questions about training and education. Figure 6 shows the type of training that stage managers have received. The "Other" training experiences included formal education, work with AGMA companies and non-theatre stage management training, and conversations with stage managers. Figure 7 lists the levels of formal education in stage management. Eight of the "Other" responses in education were the BS degree in Theatre, often with a stage management focus.

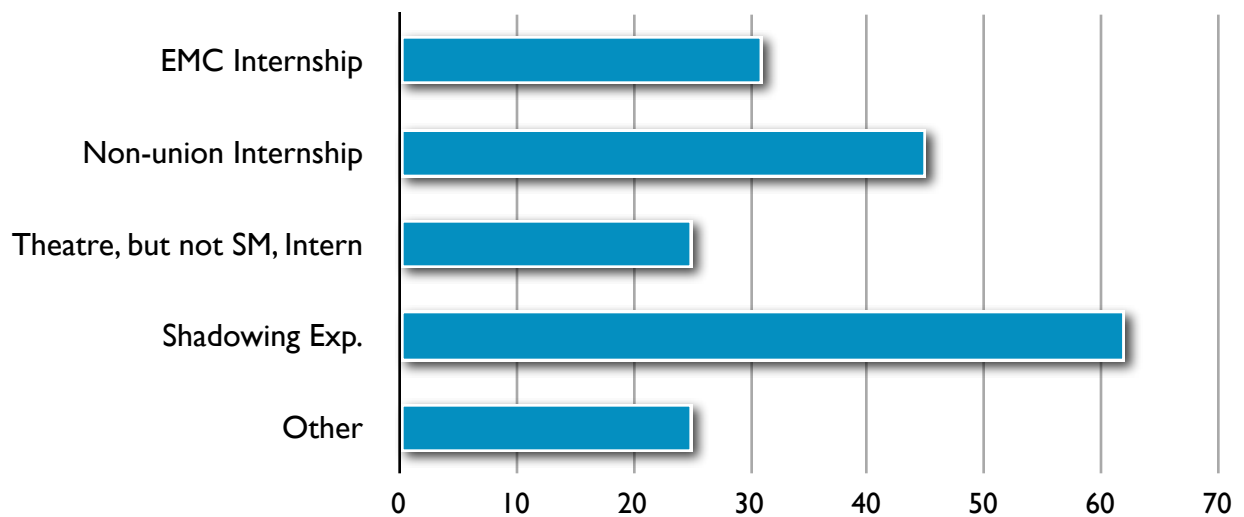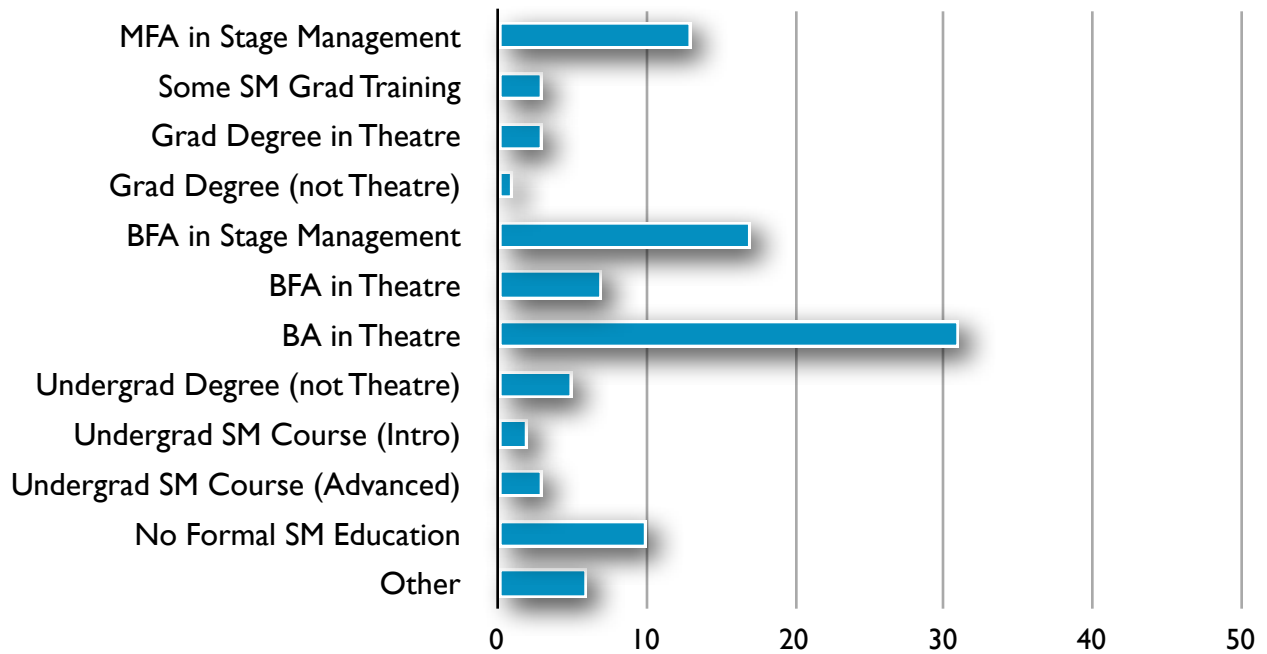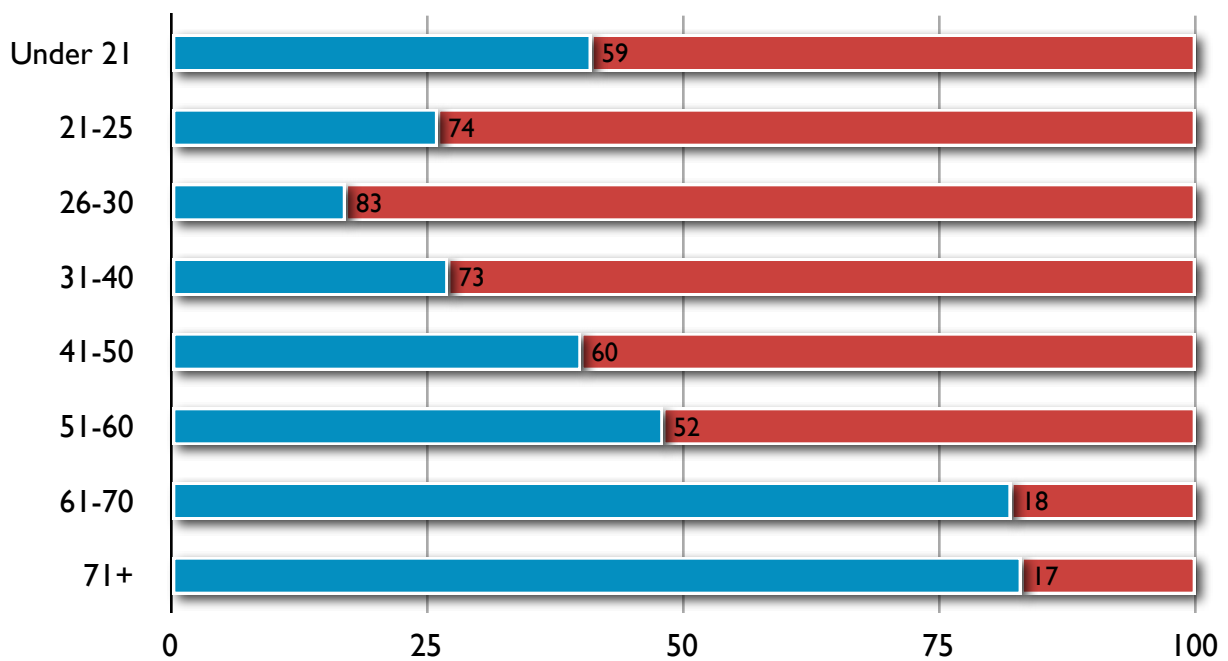Figure 6: Stage Management Training (Percentage, Can Indicate More than One Category)

Figure 7: Highest Level of Stage Management Education (Percentage)

It has long been noted anecdotally that stage management is shifting from a male-dominated to a female dominated profession. In the 2006 survey, 66% of participants were female. In the 2009 survey, 68.4% of responses were from women. In the 2011 survey, 609 participants listed their gender and 70% indicated female. This division is even more pronounced when examined by age brackets [Figure 8].

Figure 8: Gender Ratios by Age Brackets (Blue = Male   Red = Female)

One participant noted that many people do not identify themselves strictly by the male/female divide. In creating this survey, we had wrestled with how to present this question and ultimately decided to follow the classifications used by the U.S. Census Bureau, but we do respect stage managers who see gender not as a "binary" question.

We also would like to acknowledge a grave omission on this survey. It had been our intent to include a question about race/ethnicity among the demographic questions. There have been a number of discussions about racial diversity in stage management, including the recent article by Tayneshia Jefferson and David S. Stewart ("Diversity in the Booth," January 2012 edition of *Stage Directions*) . A stage manager brought the omission of this very important question to our attention after the 2009 survey, but a technical error deleted the question from our draft survey. We deeply regret this omission and will include a question about race and ethnicity starting with the 2013 survey.
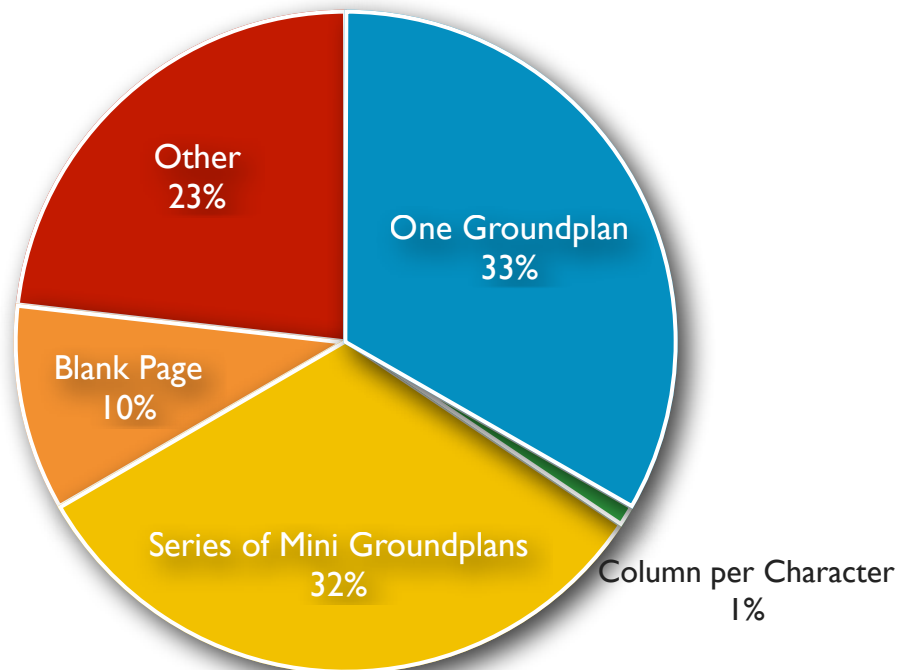
We did include a new question about whether participants identify themselves within the LGBTQ community and, if so, whether they have faced any discrimination based on their sexual orientation. We included these questions based on research in the United Kingdom on discrimination or obstacles that leaders faced in the theatre industry due to sexual orientation. In our survey, 24% of participants identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer. This is significantly higher than recent surveys that identified a LGBTQ population of 3-5% of the American population or even the early Kinsey approximation of 10% of the overall population. Of 143 responses, a total of 6 participants had "felt unsafe in a theatrical community" and 19 reported career discrimination due to their sexual identity. This survey did not provide a definition of the LGBTQ community nor did it investigate any claims of harassment. But while many people believe that theatre is one of the most open industries in terms of sexual identity, like the British study, there are reports of harassment and unfair employment actions. We did not ask about discrimination due to other demographic identifiers such as gender, race, age, and religion, nor do we feel equipped to analyze the results more than to report the number of responses.

The final set of demographic questions were about relationships and family status. In 2009, 37.2% of participants listed that they were married or had a long-term partner. In 2011, 35% listed this status. But if the responses of participants under age 21 are removed from the calculations then the response climbs back to 36.9% for married, domestic partner, or civil union. Although the number of married couples has been in decline in recent years, the Census Bureau found in 2010 that 48% of Americans were married. In our survey, 64 stage managers, or 10.4% of participants, had dependents in their household, which could include caring for children or for one's own parents (10.8% for stage managers age 21 or older). Of these 64 stage managers with dependents, 58 of them indicated that they were married or had a domestic partner or civil union. If the full survey group is divided by gender, 35.1% of male stage managers had a spouse/domestic partner and 12.6% had dependents, compared to 34.3% for married female stage managers and 9.6% for female stage managers with dependents.

SECTION II: TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGY

The field is still divided on whether to use separate calling and blocking scripts (58% chose two scripts in 2011 compared to 53% in 2009 and 55% in 2006). For blocking scripts, stage managers are evenly split on whether to hole punch the left side (50.8%) or right side of the script to best facilitate note-taking. For calling scripts, the majority of stage managers punch on the left side of the script (78.4%) like a standard binder document. Stage managers use a variety of formats for recording blocking [Figure 9]. The majority of "Other" formats involved two groundplans or a single groundplan with a table for note-taking.

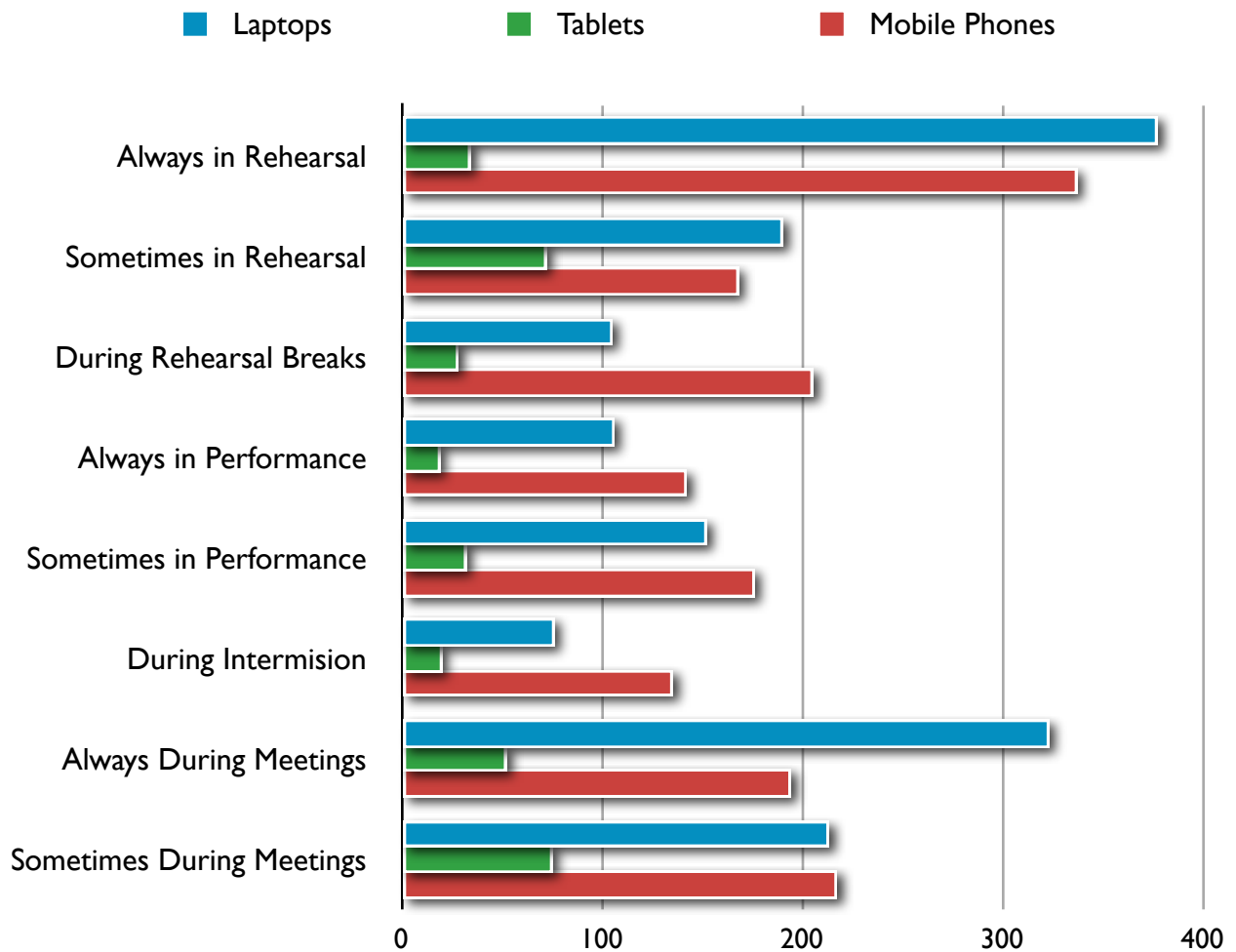Figure 9: Format of Blocking Pages

The majority of questions in this year's survey focused on using technology, particularly for performances. Since the PC vs. Mac debate has entered many fields, we asked about operating system preferences. A majority of stage managers had Macs for personal use (56.2%) and 61.3% preferred Mac overall, but a slight majority of participants (50.3%) used PCs for work. Perhaps the more interesting statistic is that 96 stage managers (13%) have called a show from a laptop or a tablet computer (such as an iPad). Most reported successes in calling off of a computer, and liked the ease and speed of making adjustments. But several reported anxiety over a computer crash or freeze and others found themselves too distracted by having other applications available on the same screen. One user took the computer display one step further:

> We fed my computer screen to a backstage monitor so the deck manager could follow along. He was prepared for all standbys, and the crew didn't have to carry deck sheets backstage.

The most common software used to prepare a computer calling script were .pdf makers (e.g. Adobe Acrobat Professional), or the iWork programs Pages or Numbers for use with an iPad.

The survey also asked about the kinds of technology that stage managers use outside of their offices [Figure 10].

Figure 10: Technology Use in Rehearsals, Performances, and Meetings (Total Responses)

One stage manager noted the need for balance: "being able to respond and disseminate information to those not in the room, but without compromising the focus of the room." Another stage manager remarked:

I don't believe in laptops in the rehearsal space. I feel that they create a barrier between stage management and the actors and it doesn't really create a safe space. On an upcoming production my ASM and I will be experimenting with the use of a tablet since it sits on the table like a book. I only use a cell phone in order to contact members of the company that are tardy or to look up something the director has asked me to research.

Unlike other theatrical professions, there does not yet appear to be commonly-adopted software among stage managers [Figure 11]. The most popular app, MegaWatch, has been used by less than 15% of survey participants.
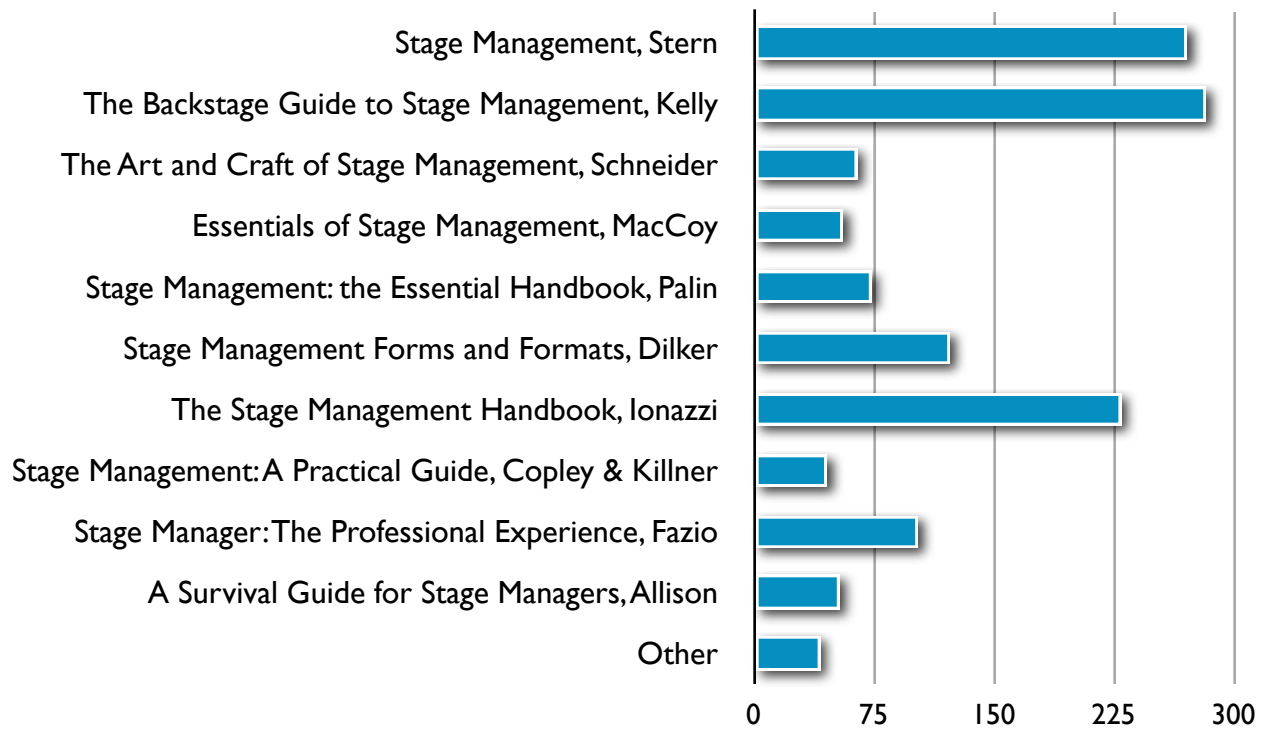
Figure 11: Stage Management Software/Applications (Total Responses)

"Other software" that received votes included Basecamp, Filemaker, QLab, smtoolkit, Dropbox, Google tools such as calendars and group websites, Microsoft Office Suite, ShowTool SM, iAnnotate, iScantoPDF, Doodle.com, and ShowTimer. MegaWatch was the most popular tool reported by users. We especially liked the candid response, "Are you kidding me? I use my own templates. I've been stage managing 31 years. You should use MY templates! LOL." The majority of stage managers reported not using any specialized software. According to one stage manager, "Every institution/show requires a different method of communication, and to get 'married' to one application would be folly."
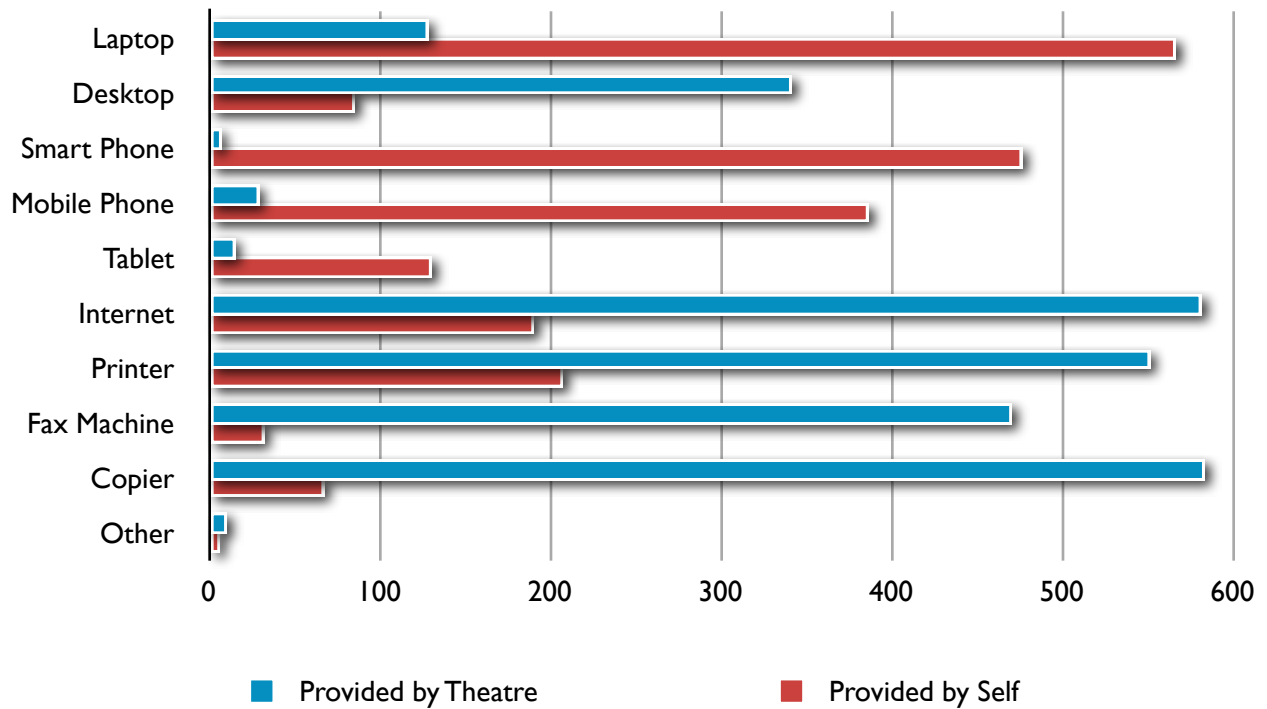
These responses mirror low responses overall for books on stage management. The survey question asked about most useful and favorite books, but the overall response was too low to generate extensive rankings. Figure 12 lists the number of stage managers who had read each of the ten most popular books listed from previous surveys. Of the three books that received at least 200 votes, Kelly's *The Backstage Guide to Stage Management* was voted most useful while Stern's *Stage Management*, in its multiple editions, was the personal favorite of the most voters.
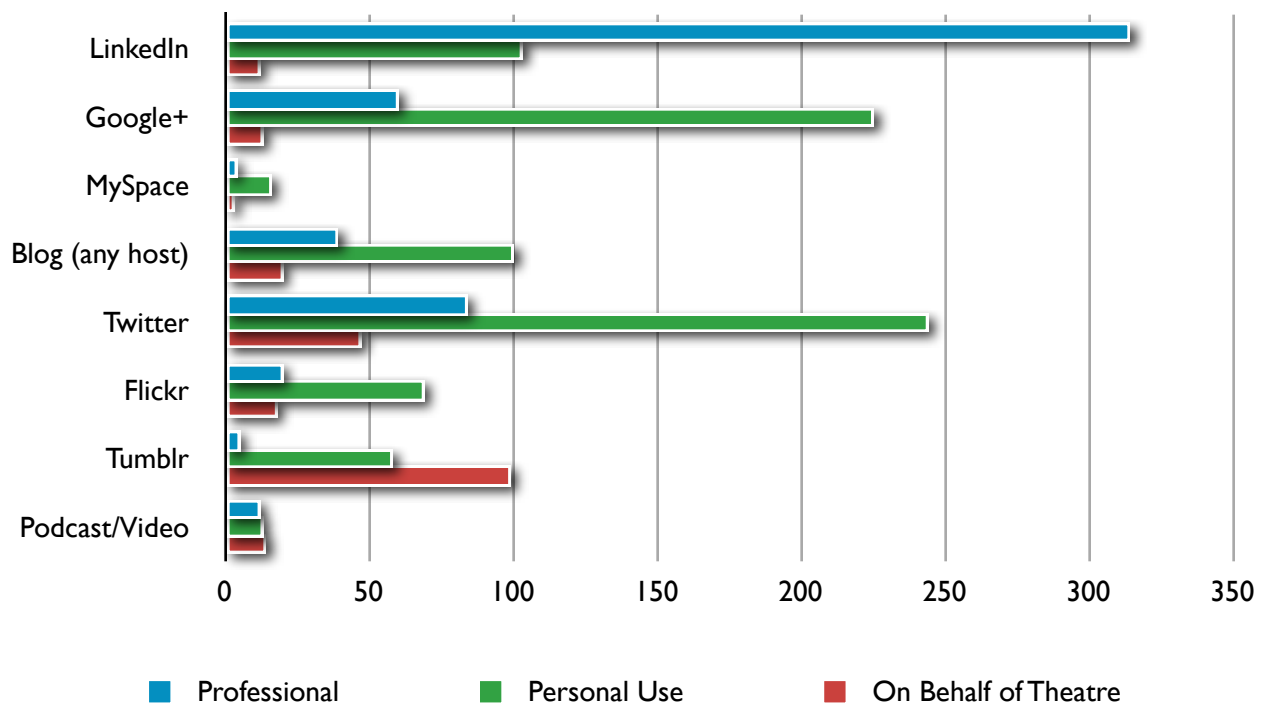
Figure 12: Stage Management Texts (Total Responses)

The survey also tracked which technologies are being provided by theatres and which ones the stage managers are expected to provide on their own [Figure 13]. The most common items listed under "Other Equipment" were scanners and laminators.

Figure 13: Technical Equipment Provided by Theatres

Provided by Theatre ■   Provided by Self ■

Finally, we asked about social networking sites. Facebook was the clear front-runner, with 676 participants logging in for personal use, 336 for professional use, and 161 stage managers using it on behalf of their theatre company. Among other social media outlets:

Figure 14: Social Media for Professional Use, Personal Use, and Representing Company

Professional ■   Personal Use ■   On Behalf of Theatre ■

SECTION III: EMPLOYMENT

A total of 234 participants reported that they hire their own stage management teams. Figure 15 indicates the average number of applications that these stage managers have received for advertised positions. Figure 16 returns to the full participant pool to ask which methods have been most useful recently in finding stage management jobs.

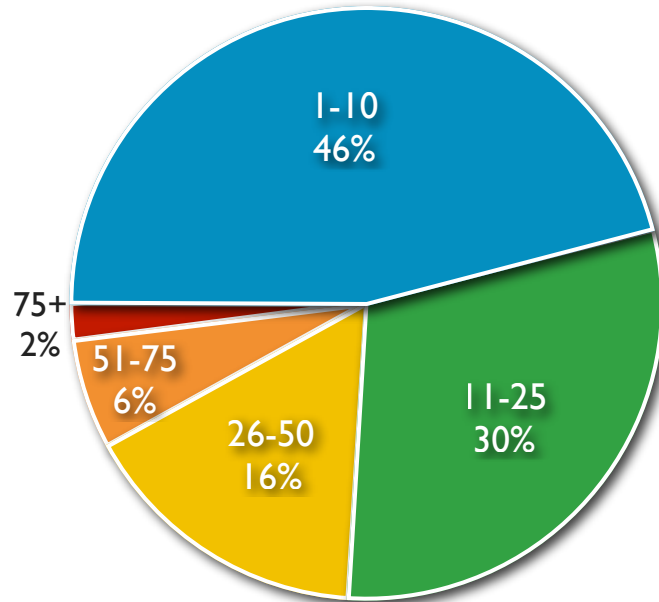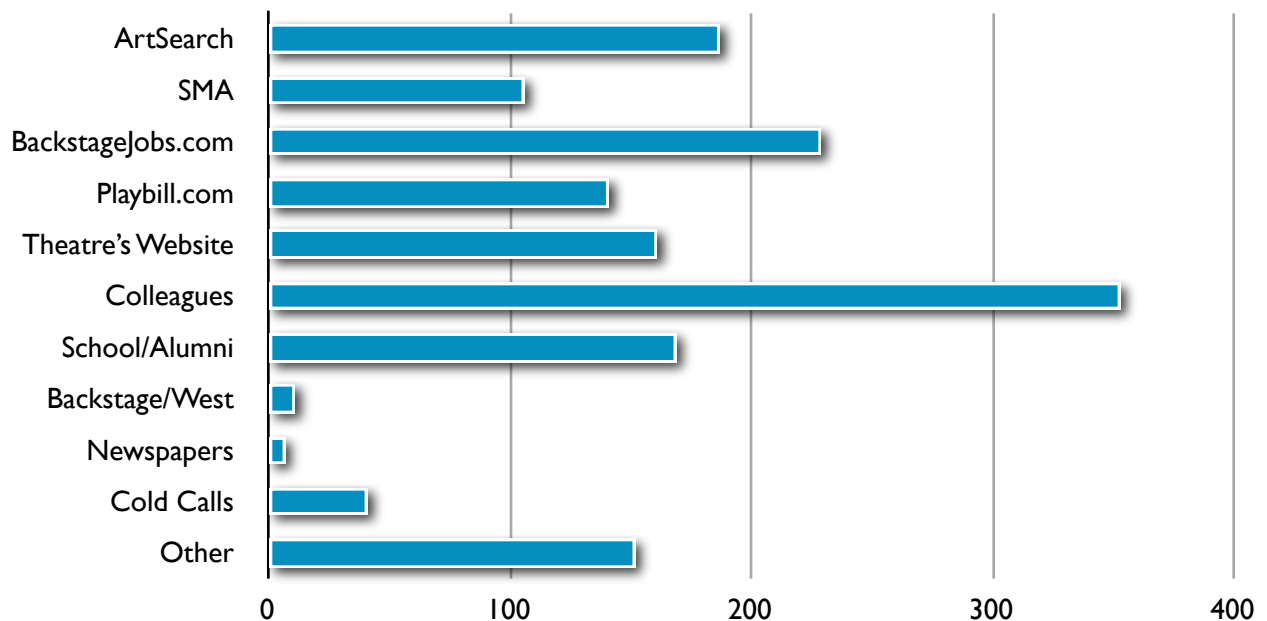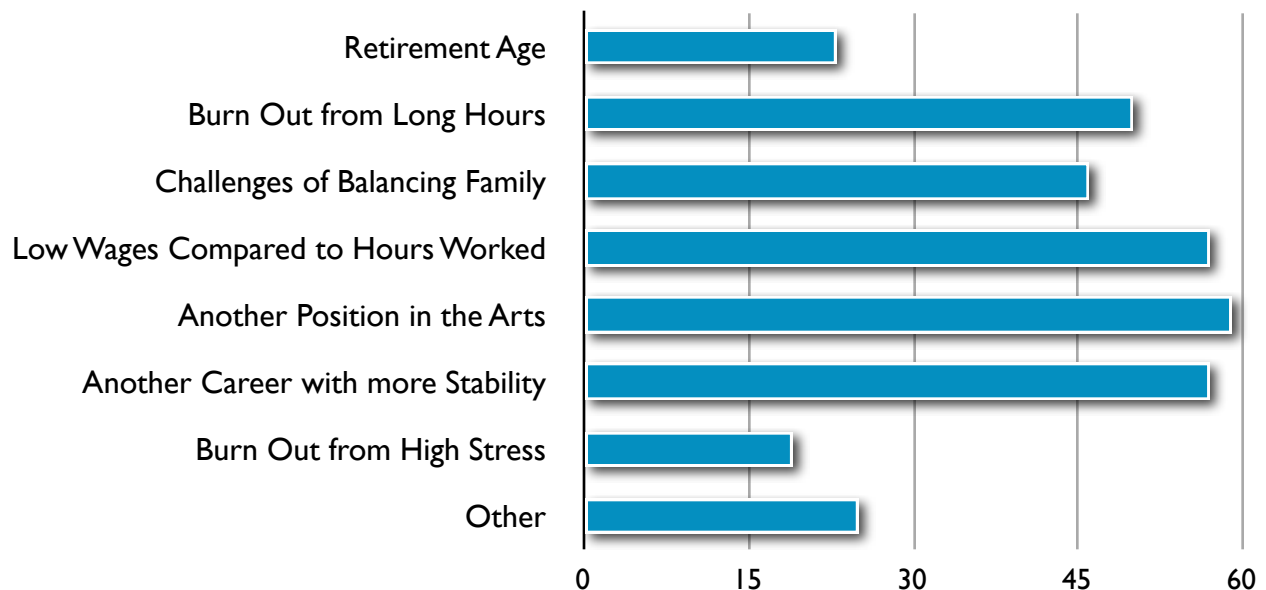Figure 15: Average Number of Applications for Job Listing (Percentage)

Figure 16: Sources Used to Find Stage Management Work (Total Responses)

The most common "Other" sources were the Casting Call on the AEA website, ChicagoPlays.com, SMNetwork.org, Atlantaperforms.biz, and the Chicago "speed-dating" interviews sponsored by Equity.

We also asked how likely a participant was to leave stage management in the next five years: 11% were very likely and another 5% thought it was likely that they would exit the field in this timetable. Our graduate students cross-tabulated this date with state of residence to see if there would be any regions with a plethora of openings. Eighteen New York stage managers are considering leaving the profession, but the other ninety-seven New York participants will likely prepare resumes for those jobs. Figure 17 shows the primary reasons for leaving stage management. The majority of "Other" reasons were based on the difficulties of finding stage management work or no longer feeling artistically fulfilled.

Figure 17: Contributing Factors in Decision to Leave Stage Management (Total Responses)

Those who choose to remain in stage management are generally very happy to do so. Over half the survey participants listed that they were very satisfied (21%) or satisfied (40%) with their careers. It should be noted, however, that a stage manager who was unhappy with the career choice was less likely to take a fifteen-minute survey about their field. We received over three hundred responses about factors contributing to job satisfaction, including:

> Continued relationships with loyal companies. A healthy balance of familiar and new directors.

Hard work, constant learning experience, working with my hands, not only doing management but getting the opportunity to do a variety of tech too.

I enjoy the excitement of live performance and the "instant families" that form with each new show.

I am doing work that pleases me on an intellectual, and artistic level. But of course the most important thing is money. I'm doing the work I love, and I'm being paid to do it.

I stage manage as a second job. My primary (full-time) job pays my bills, but I get a lot of personal satisfaction from being creative and pulling a show together. Because I don't rely on stage management for my income, I do not have to stress about finding work or constantly doing shows. I think if stage management was my career, I would be more likely to get burned out.

I'm living a life that I've always dreamed of: working in theatre in New York City and making enough money to provide me with an apartment, food, and beer. Living the dream!

I take pride in my work and respect the artists of all crafts I work alongside. I enjoy working hard for limited periods of time and having long break between contracts for travel and other activities. I enjoy being a freelancer and getting to work in a variety of houses.
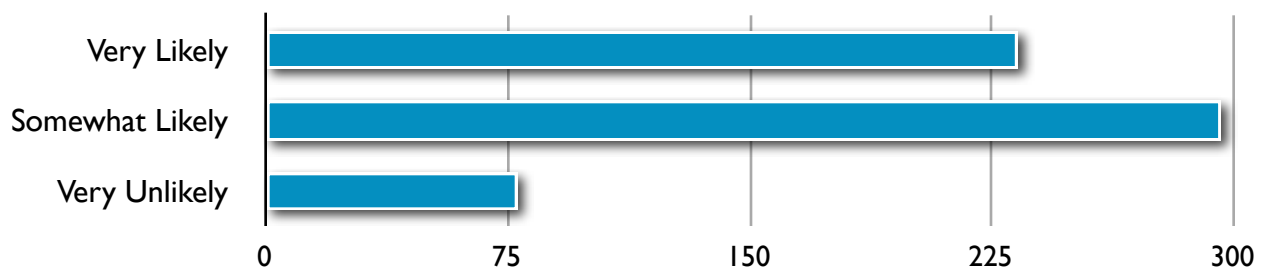
Continuing growth in my craft. I don't like to feel that I am stagnating, so I really enjoy challenges that make me rethink my style and approaches to various situations. I've also been fairly happy recently with my forward progress within my field.

Artistic satisfaction. Balance of PSMing world premieres, classics, musicals and operas. Working at one of the leading LORT theaters full time. The body of work I have done. Teaching my interns. The success of my staff. Good balance with family life. Supportive husband and understanding theater loving child.

Section IV: New Software Apps and Communication Tools

The 2011 survey included a supplemental section on the future of technology for stage managers. The Stage Management Program at the University of Iowa is dedicated to the advancement of stage management as a field. We are currently experimenting with several new technologies to serve stage managers and allow us to be better connected as a field. While participants have not identified a common computer program or smartphone application for stage managers, is there a desire for one? Figure 18 shows how likely a participant was to try new stage management software.

Figure 18: Likelihood of Trying New Stage Management Application for Laptop or Tablet

University of Iowa graduate students Amber Lewandowski and Leigh'Ann Andrews are currently researching and developing new applications. The survey included two questions that could be very helpful for anyone wanting to design new software for stage managers: what to include [Figure 19] and how much to charge [Figure 20].

Figure 19: Useful Components of Stage Management Software
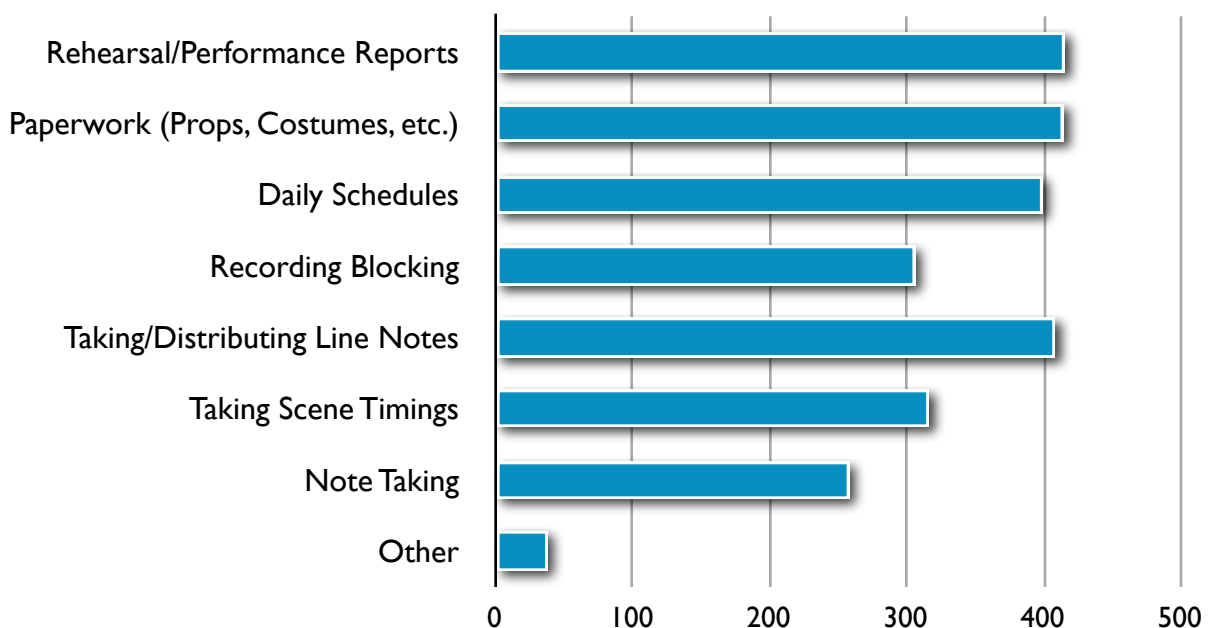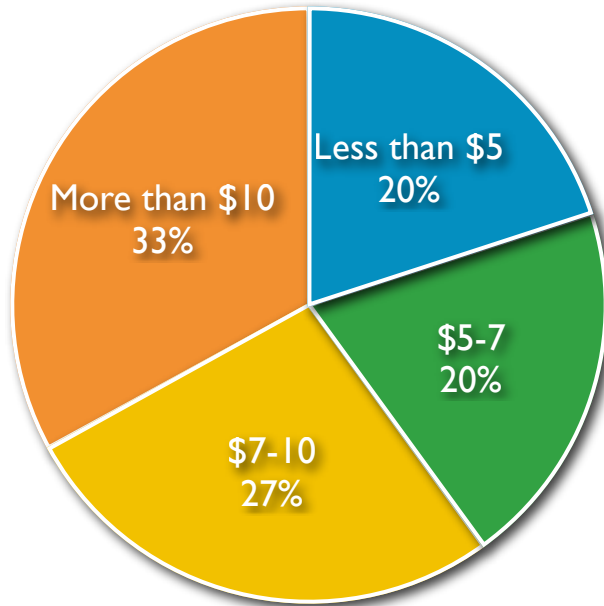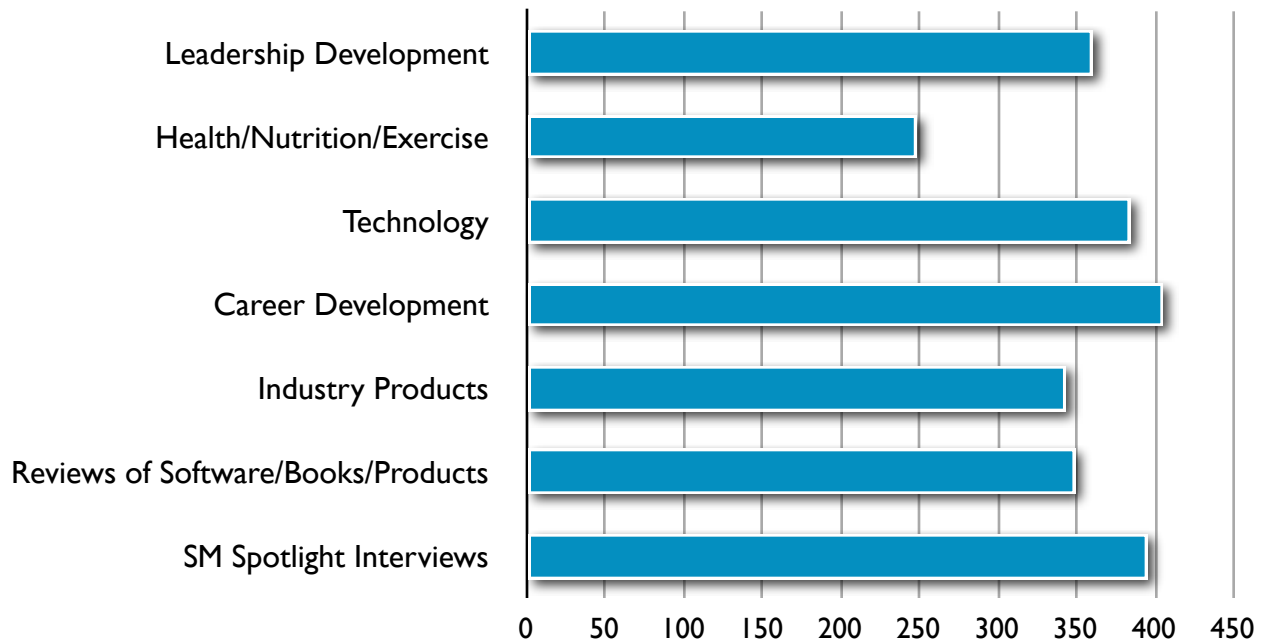
Figure 20: How Much Would You Pay for a Stage Management App?

The final survey questions were about the desire for a magazine geared towards stage management. Given how decentralized we are as an industry and how inexpensive the publication of niche industry journals have become, is it time that we have our own magazine? We received interest from 463 stage managers, who expressed interest in the following areas:

Figure 21: Recommended Topics for a Stage Management Magazine

Of the 463 stage managers who want a magazine, 320 expressed interest in contributing to such a publication. We also received dozens of recommendations for a magazine, which we will share with anyone wishing to take on this project. Kristin P. Kurz, a graduate student at the University of Iowa, is currently researching the costs and requirements of both print and online magazine structures.

Conclusion

Quite a few participants missed the option from earlier surveys to leave comments on each major question. While the original survey was designed for more open-ended feedback, it is impossible to share all of the comments from hundreds of stage managers. We also wanted to reduce survey fatigue and improve the completion rate. Even with the streamlining of the survey, the 2011 study resulted in a 912-page spreadsheet of raw data.

If you have any questions about the data or would like a cross-tabulation (e.g., the percentage of stage managers who have worked on at least 10 operas who use laptops in rehearsal), or would like to recommend a question for a future survey, please e-mail info@sm-sim.com with "Survey" in the subject line. We also appreciate constructive criticism and suggestions on how to improve the survey process. If you would like to be notified about future surveys, please sign up at http://smsurvey.info. The next survey, to be conducted in November 2013, will focus on rehearsal practices.

A number of stage managers, particularly on the SMNetwork, have wanted to expand the survey beyond the United States (11 participants in the 2011 survey worked on American shows but resided in other countries.). Due to some of the specific terminology (SM vs. Deputy SM, etc.) and union practices, we think it works best to limit the study to American theatrical stage management. The graduate stage management program at the University of Iowa would be very interested in partnering with other groups to conduct stage management surveys in other performing artforms or in other countries. We would be happy to provide guidance and we could potentially help develop and host the survey. In this decentralized field, there is much that we all can learn from each other.

Martin Kirchmeier
Kristin Kurz
Tresa Makosky
KatyBeth Schmid
LeeAnn Yeckley
David McGraw, Head of Stage Management
Stage Management Special Topics course, University of Iowa