



Q Theatre, Architecture Now, New Zealand

Business case and critical review for Q Theatre, Auckland

> THE CONTEXT

Auckland's small-scale theatre sector is widely recognised as the source of much innovation. However, from the mid-1990s Auckland lacked a venue to present the work of small-scale theatre companies, with the exception of a university theatre which also served as a lecture hall. Q Theatre was an industry-led response to this gap in provision by a group of experienced theatre practitioners who advocated for the building of a new theatre in the CBD.

During its extended development period, Q Theatre had consulted widely with Government and other public agencies on the need to develop suitable venue provision, and on the specific solution being proposed. Auckland City Council had provided strong support from the early days of the Q Theatre concept.

> THE BRIEF

Auckland City Council required an independent view of the business case for Q Theatre, and a critical review of planning material and financial forecasts for the project. Many local and New Zealand companies were keen supporters – but a sound evidence base was needed before the City could justify investing further in the project. Specific questions included:

- What is the problem or issue which Q Theatre is addressing?
- How clear is the evidence of demand or need?
- What options have been considered, and what is the preferred option?
- How viable and sustainable is the preferred option (i.e. is it 'feasible')?

> OUR APPROACH

Positive Solutions surveyed a representative sample of arts and cultural organisations to update earlier consultation and to ascertain the level of interest in the venue. All of the production companies and festival respondents expressed interest in hiring the venue. Options for the configuration and location of the proposed venue were tested. In the light of evidence of demand, Positive Solutions took the view that the projections prepared by Q Theatre, were reasonable.

> THE RESULTS

City Council, and private funders, committed their continuing support for the project. A new board was established and the design development process was progressed. Funding of \$1,725,000 was secured, and a location immediately adjacent to Auckland Town Hall, in the heart of the CBD, was confirmed. In 2008, Q Theatre opened to the public, quickly becoming a valued addition to the Auckland cultural scene. At the end of 2015 Q Theatre reported that 93,000 people had attended during the year across 436 productions. The year included 1,100 events (averaging three per day), and the venue seating was reconfigured 68 times. By any measure, an extraordinarily busy theatre.

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