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Have You Heard of the Cirque "Passionates"?

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They don't work at Cirque's International Headquarters, out on tour, or for a resident show. They're not characters in one of our shows either. But they do exist! In May of this year, 31 of them met up in Vancouver to see *Quidam* together.

The Marketing Service's Internet team got wind of this peculiar gathering through regular communications with some of the Passionates. These diehard Cirque fans share their passion on the Web. In addition to congregating in a Yahoo chat group, they publish an online newsletter with close to 800 subscribers called *Fascination*, which provides in-depth, up-to-the-minute information on Cirque.

"We wondered who exactly these fans were," explains André Bélanger, Internet Marketing Manager. "It was the perfect opportunity to take stock of their contribution to our success." So who are they? Most of them are over 35 and American—though there are some Mexicans too. The Passionates earn slightly above-average income, and they all "have a life," says André. Forget your notions of rock-star groupies and Trekkies! These people are huge Cirque fans, and they've seen several of our shows and developed an excellent critical eye for them. They love our productions so much that they'll actually defend them and promote them to anyone who's willing to listen. Though they're a bit more intense, they strongly reflect our target market. In marketing speak they're called "e-fluencers," people with considered opinions who influence many others.

The Vancouver gathering was not planned by our Marketing people. It was three Passionates, including the editor of the *Fascination* newsletter, who coordinated the event by Internet. At the show, they were all invited backstage by the Cirque Marketing team to meet the artists for 30 minutes and ask them questions up close and personal. "The fans who attended never expected such a warm welcome by Cirque staff," adds André. "They were going to Vancouver anyway. They were pleased and surprised that we took such good care of them!"

Is there another such gathering in the works? André Bélanger would like that. "We hope that as many Passionates as possible meet in Montreal to see *Cirque 2005*. We could see up to 500 people willing to travel to take part in this type of event." Why not? They're some of our best ambassadors! *



Surprises abounded on both ends at the meeting between these Cirque megafans and the *Quidam* artists. The proof lies in a question for Mark Ward, who plays John: "For almost two months, you played the *Quidam* character rather than John. Why were you pushed to switch characters like that?"

"Well, no one pushed me to play the other character," Mark replied. "I requested it. But how the heck did you know that?"

Mark's surprise equalled the Cirque Passionates' knowledge: both were immense!

