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## Let Theatre Take You to a New World – Without Ringing, Glowing Phones

Heather Gibson  
*University of Central Florida*

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## Let Theatre Take You to a New World — Without Ringing, Glowing Phones

By Heather Gibson  
UCF Forum columnist  
Wednesday, August 12, 2015

There's been a lot of talk about patron use of technology in theaters, the most recent story of course being Patti LuPone's snatching a phone out of a texting audience member's hands in the middle of a scene during *Shows for Days* at the Lincoln Center Theater.

LuPone, a Tony and Grammy award-winning actress who has graced Broadway stages in *Evita*, *Gypsy*, *Les Miserables*, *Sweeney Todd*, and numerous other shows you've wanted to see, has long been vocal about her dislike of audience distractions, and for good reason. Imagine that you were doing your job and the person to whom you are speaking starts staring into a tiny screen, talking with someone else.

Oh, wait. We don't have to imagine this, we live it every day!

It's rude, it's distracting, and it's antisocial. At UCF, we devote entire paragraphs in syllabuses about not using cellphones during class time. At the theater, we post signs, put notices in playbills, and politely request that phones be turned off during the preshow announcements. Yet people persist.

As a marketing professional, I occasionally consider welcoming phones into the theater. "What if we create a Tweet Seat?" I think.

"Patrons could talk about us on Twitter, share a status on Facebook, grab a quick snapshot (also against the rules, but a story for another day) and share it on Instagram!

‘Theatre UCF has the best shows evaaaaarrrrr! Come see it! #ilovetheater #yougottaseethis #UCF #chargeon #hashtag.’”

But every time I consider it, I always come back to no. It’s not just for the performers that I say no. It is also because theater-goers, just like students in the classroom, will have a better experience if they put down their darn phones.

I no longer watch TV without my phone. “I wonder what else that actress was in?” and out comes IMDb. I no longer read without my phone. In fact, that’s pretty much the *only* thing I read anymore. I no longer ride in the car as a passenger without scanning my phone (though I do *drive* without it, because rules.) The only place I am without my phone is when I am forced to put it away — and man, I cherish that time. But screen addiction is a powerful thing. Even though I value my phone-less time, I don’t do it unless forced to.

We need a break from the beeping, the dinging, the ringing, and the glowing screens. According to various opinions, smartphones are impacting our focus, our relationships with our children, and even our posture. We need time with no distractions. We need real experiences that we can share and discuss in real face-to-face conversation with our friends. We need to sit and look *up* at something, for a change! Theatre can do all of this.

Let your busy mind escape from your stresses and slip into a new world. Theatre provides a chance to dream, to visit faraway places, to travel to a different time. Partake in the Age of Aquarius, dance with a drag queen nun, ride on a flying turtle. Wear a 50s party dress, a pirate’s eye patch, or a slinky evening gown. Sing in a barbershop quartet, boogie on down, defeat the killer zombies. Theatre UCF patrons have been transported to some of those places in recent seasons and will visit the others this year.

Give the theater three hours of your time and it will give you a whole new life for the low, low price of one ticket — and no phones.

And then, once the play is over, and you have returned back to reality from your short trip to our fair Verona, you can turn the phone back on and tell everyone: “Just got back from Italy! BEST MINI VACATION EVER!!! #ilovetheater.”

*Heather Gibson is marketing director for the School of Performing Arts in the UCF College of Arts & Humanities. She can be reached at [heather.gibson@ucf.edu](mailto:heather.gibson@ucf.edu).*