

COVID-19 Sector Benchmark

Insight Report 9: March 2022

Real-time intelligence on the impact of COVID-19

Two years on

Reviewing the impact of COVID-19 on the ticket sales, revenue and audience demographics for the performing arts in North America, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in 2020 and 2021

Executive Summary – Key Findings

- Data from 385 CRMs of arts venues illustrate two years of extremely challenging trading in all territories.
- While reductions in sales and revenues in 2020 were universally catastrophic, the pace of recovery between and within nations in 2021 was very varied, both geographically and by venue type.
- The positive trends in all territories in November 2021 were not sustained into December 2021 as the Omicron variant spread around the world.
- In some nations there has been movement between 2019 and 2021 in the average age and wealth of bookers, but this has been minor, not fundamental.
- The majority of bookers in 2021 were first time bookers. This was also the case before the pandemic in 2019.
- Across all venues on average booking patterns were no later in 2021 than they were in 2019.

North America

- The ticket sales revival in 2021 was stronger in the U.S than Canada.
- There was significant variation in the pace of the revival in the U.S.
- Geographically, the Plains and Southeast performed substantially more strongly in 2021 than the East.
- Music venues in the sample performed substantially better than theatres in 2021.
- Advance booking patterns in 2021 were very similar in the U.S. compared to 2019, but booking was a lot slower in Canada.
- In the U.S. in 2021 there was a higher proportion of all ages of bookers under 50, but the average age of bookers was just 1.3 years lower in 2021 (55.2) compared to 2019 (56.5).
- In the U.S. Baby Boomers remain the largest generation, but the proportion of bookers has fallen by 3%. The greatest growth since 2019 has been in Generation Y.
- While there are small reductions in the proportion of all household income bands over \$75,000, the median income band remains \$75,000-\$99,999 in the U.S.

- Half of bookers in 2021 were making their first registered purchase at a venue. While this figure is high, it is no more than pre-pandemic levels.

United Kingdom and Ireland

- The ticket sales revival was stronger in the U.K. than the Republic of Ireland.
- There was significant variation in the pace of the revival in the U.K.
- Geographically, the South West of England and Northern Ireland performed substantially stronger in 2021 than Wales, Yorkshire and the North East of England.
- Large presenting theatres in the sample performed substantially better than large producing theatres in 2021.
- Advance booking patterns in 2021 were very similar in the U.K. compared to 2019, but booking was a lot slower in the Republic of Ireland.
- In the U.K. in 2021 there was a higher proportion of all ages of bookers under 60, but the average age of bookers was just 1.0 year lower in 2021 (56.4) compared to 2019 (57.4).
- In the U.K. Baby Boomers remain the largest generation, but the proportion of bookers has fallen by 3%. The greatest growth since 2019 has been in Generation X.
- More than half of bookers in 2021 were making their first registered purchase at a venue. While this figure is high, it is no more than pre-pandemic levels.

Introduction

TRG Arts and Purple Seven have partnered to provide real-time intelligence and advice to the arts and cultural sector on the economic impact of COVID-19 and how best to respond to it. This partnership brings together Purple Seven's experience integrating live sales feeds from hundreds of arts venues and TRG Arts' consulting and data analysis expertise in achieving unsurpassed results for the arts and cultural sector.

In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, cultural organizations are invited to [sign up to a free and easy-to-use international COVID-19 Sector Benchmark Dashboard](#). An automated data feed between the organization's box office and Purple Seven's secure servers provides a daily update on ticket sales and donations which is anonymized and aggregated for the national benchmark.

TRG Arts and Purple Seven are sharing new findings from the national benchmarks on a frequent basis during the crisis.

An [initial study](#) published in June 2020 focused on the comparative impact of COVID-19 on ticket sales in North America and the U.K. from January to May 2020. A [second study](#) published in July examined trends in individual giving in the first half of 2020. In August a [third study](#) examined who is buying tickets to future performances when the future is so unknown. Our [report](#) in September 2020 examined the impact of COVID-19 on the box office and philanthropic revenues of participating venues in the six months from the closure in mid-March. Our [October 2020 report](#) provided analysis of the number of philanthropic gifts received by performing arts organizations and their average value through the first nine months of the year.

Our review of fundraising in 2020 found that the overall aggregate revenue generated in 2020 fell in both the U.K. and North America, but this headline figure obscured strong performances by many organizations and increases in overall giving for particular types of donors and in different sizes of gifts.

[Our interim study](#) published in May 2021 was prompted by encouraging signs of increased ticket sales in some territories in March and April 2021. It revealed strong signs of recovery in parts of the U.K. and U.S., but ticket sales in some other territories showed no sign of an upturn. The green shoots of recovery were not spread evenly, with great diversity in the performance in different regions and venue types.

[Our last study](#) focused on the crucial holiday season, taking a snapshot of how sales were progressing in the middle of July 2021 and comparing this to July 2019 in the context of the 2019/20 holiday season. Despite most holiday productions being postponed in 2020/21 and many bookings reallocated to the following year, the report found that ticket sales and revenue was pacing behind 2019 for most organizations.

This report describes the very different paces of recovery in the North America, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland up to the end December 2021. It also examines some subtle changes in the demographics of ticket purchasers in the United Kingdom and the United States when comparing 2019 to 2021.

The Cohort

For this study we have analyzed sales data from 385 organizations (128 in the U.S., 12 in Canada, 228 in the U.K. and 17 in the Republic of Ireland).

In 2019, these 128 organizations in the U.S. collectively sold 15.2 million tickets and generated over \$740 million in box office revenue. Geographically, participating organizations come from all over the U.S. The 12 organizations from Canada collectively sold 1.2 million tickets and generated over \$81 million in box office revenue in 2019.

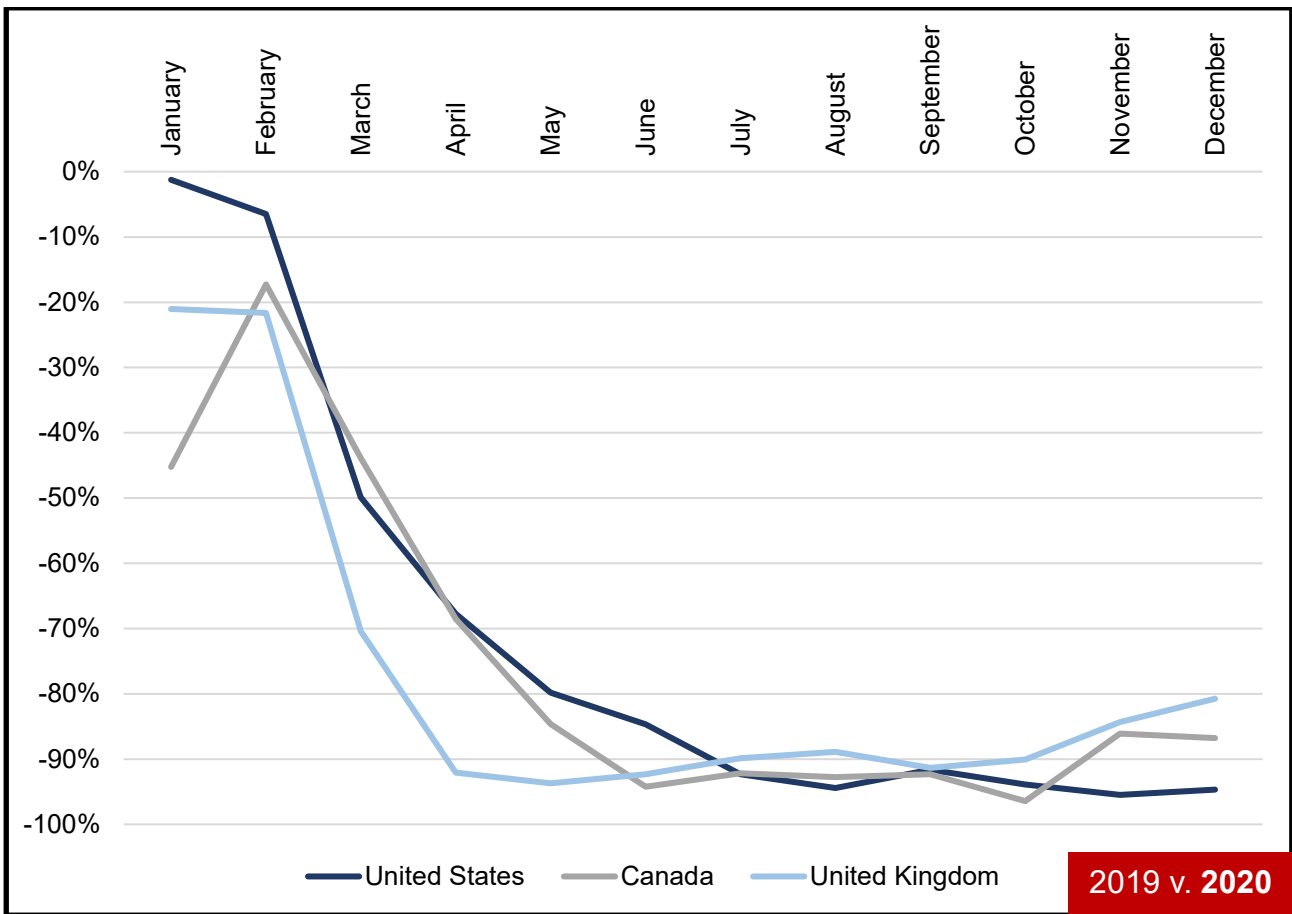
The majority of the North American sample are theatres, but there is also a representation of arts centers and orchestras. The size and scale of organizations is diverse with as many organizations with ticket sales in 2019 below \$1 million as those above \$10 million.

U.K.-based organizations in the sample collectively sold 35.5 million tickets and generated £965 million in box office revenue in 2019. The 17 organizations in the Republic of Ireland collectively sold 742 thousand tickets and generated over €12.7 million in box office revenue in 2019.

Geographically, participating organizations come from all over the U.K. and the Republic of Ireland. In the U.K. there are multiple organizations from every nation and region. The majority of the U.K. and Ireland sample are theatres, but there is also a good representation of concert halls and arts centers. The size and scale of organizations is diverse and includes both West End and regional commercial theatres.

Ticket Sales & Revenue

Chart 1 – Comparative Box Office Revenue (daily sales) by month, 2019 v 2020, United States, Canada and United Kingdom.



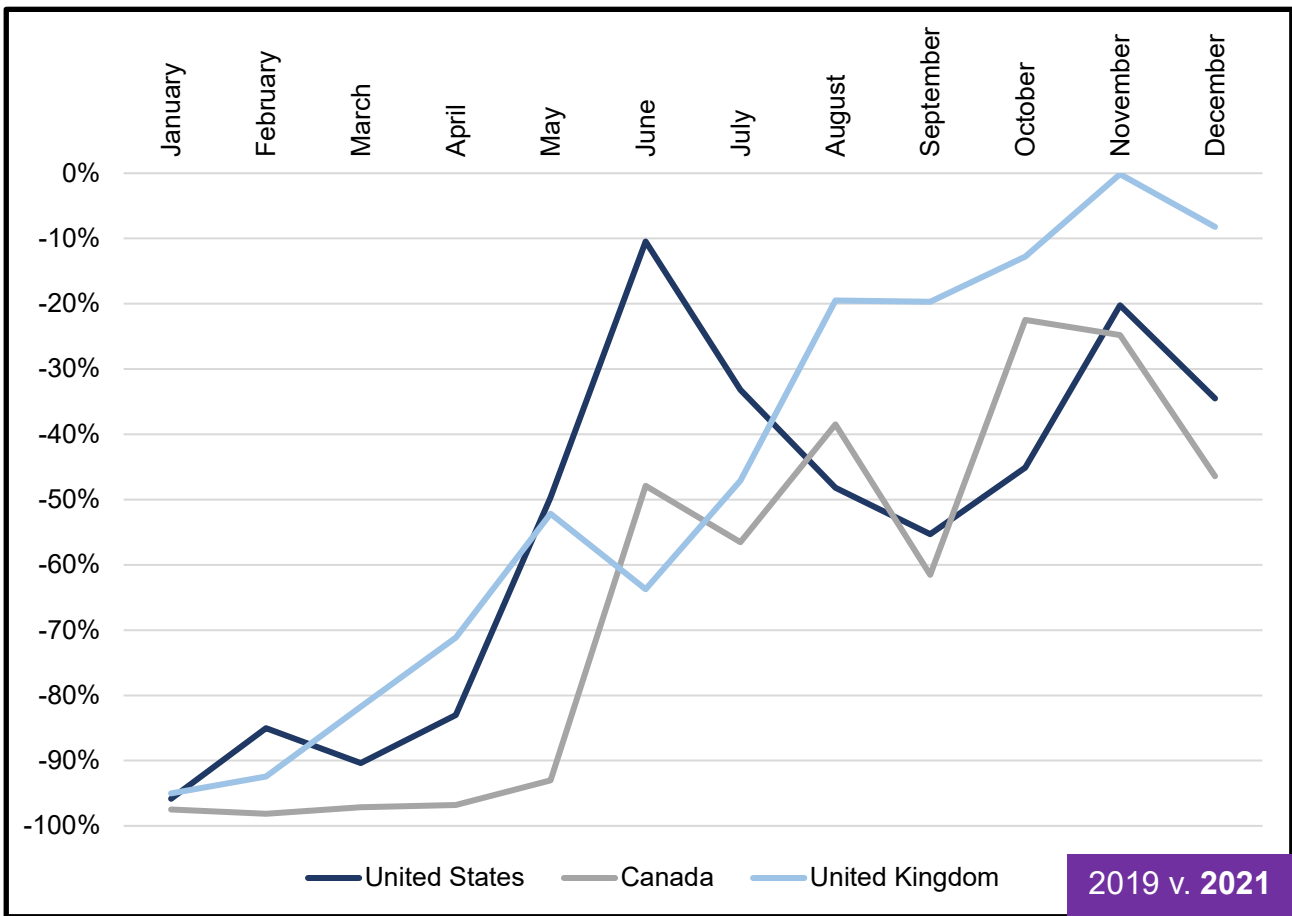
Ticket sales revenue in the United States was similar to 2019 in January and February 2020, but the U.K. and Canada had comparatively poorer starts to the year.

All three territories witnessed a collapse in revenue in March 2020, but the fall in the U.K. was fastest and deepest.

In November and December 2020 there was a partial revival in Canada and the U.K., but even at its best, revenue was still more than 80% down on the comparative month in 2019.

The U.S. witnessed no revival. November and December 2020 recorded the lowest revenue compared to 2019.

Chart 2 – Comparative Box Office Revenue (daily sales) by month, 2019 v 2021, United States, Canada and United Kingdom.



January 2021 was a very poor month for ticket revenue in all three territories. The U.K. and U.S. only sold 5% of what they achieved in January 2019 and Canada only 3%.

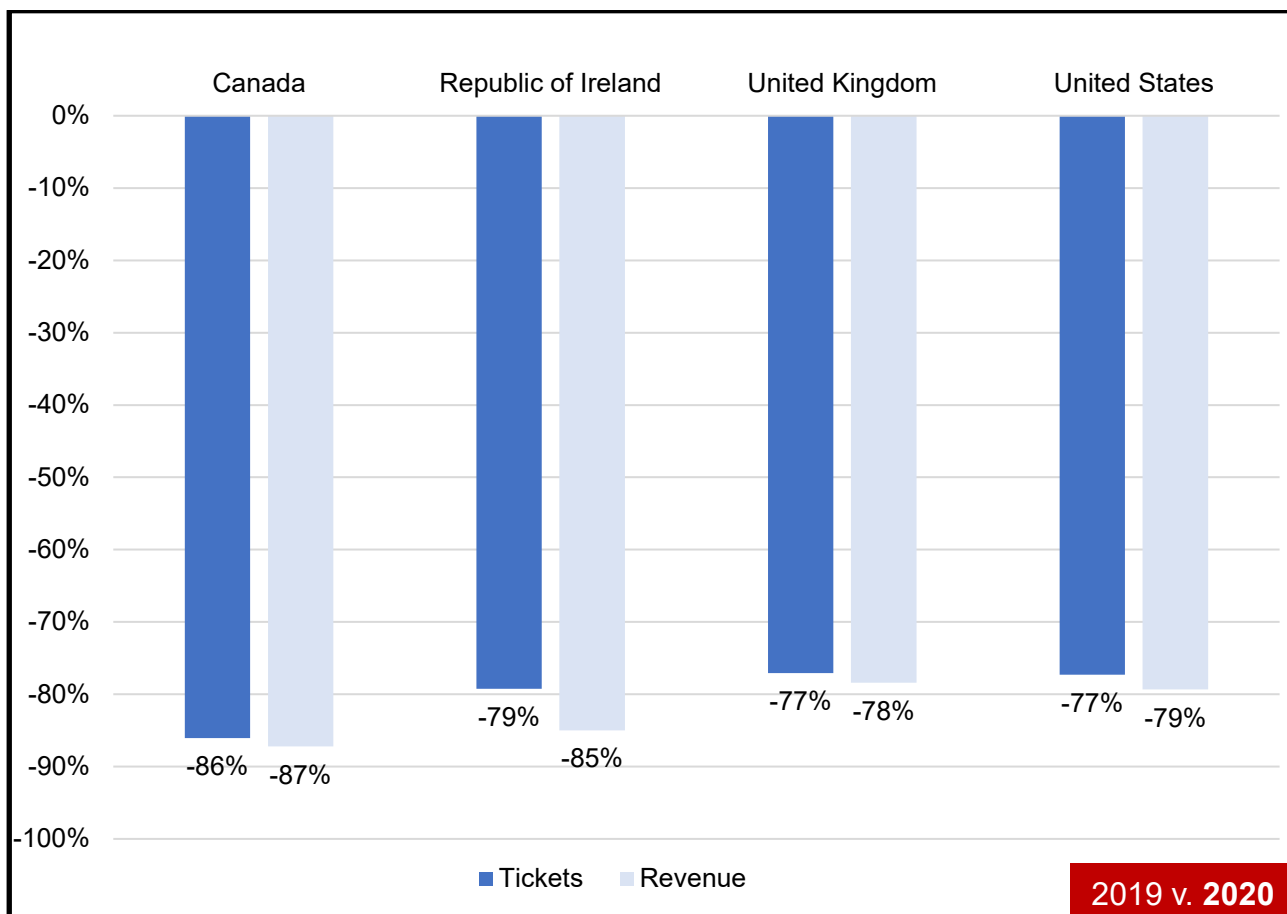
The U.S. witnessed a strong revival in May and June 2021, traditionally strong months for subscription sales. This revival was not sustained through the summer, but comparative sales did improve in October and November.

Canada saw a partial recovery in June 2021 and stronger revival in October and November at over 75% of the comparative months in 2019.

The U.K.'s revival was strong and sustained from August to November 2021. Aggregate sales revenue in November 2021 matched what was achieved in November 2019.

The positive picture in all territories in November 2021 was not sustained into December 2021 as the Omicron variant spread around the world. The U.K. dipped 8% compared to November, the U.S. 14% and Canada 21%.

Chart 3 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2020, Canada, Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom and United States.

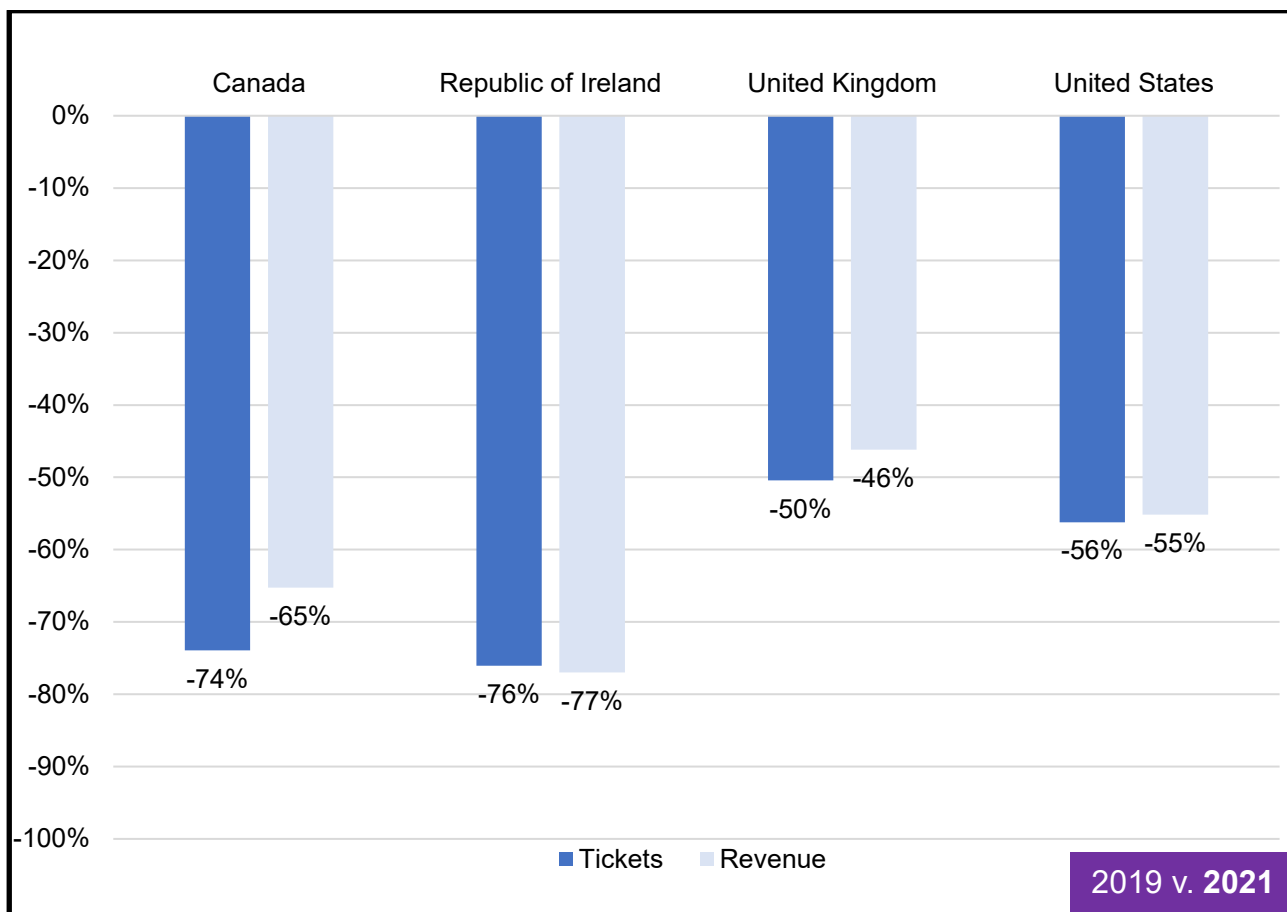


The chart above (Chart 3) summarizes both the comparative ticket revenue for the whole of 2019 and 2020 (explored by month in Chart 1) and also adds comparative annual aggregate ticket sales. As well as the three principal territories in this study, it also includes aggregate data for the Republic of Ireland.

Canada recorded the worst comparative performance for both ticket sales and revenue, but the U.K. and U.S. only performed marginally better with both recording a collapse in sales and revenue of over 75%.

All four territories recorded a greater fall in revenue than ticket sales meaning that the average ticket price paid was lower in all markets in 2020 than 2019.

Chart 4 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2021, Canada, Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom and United States.



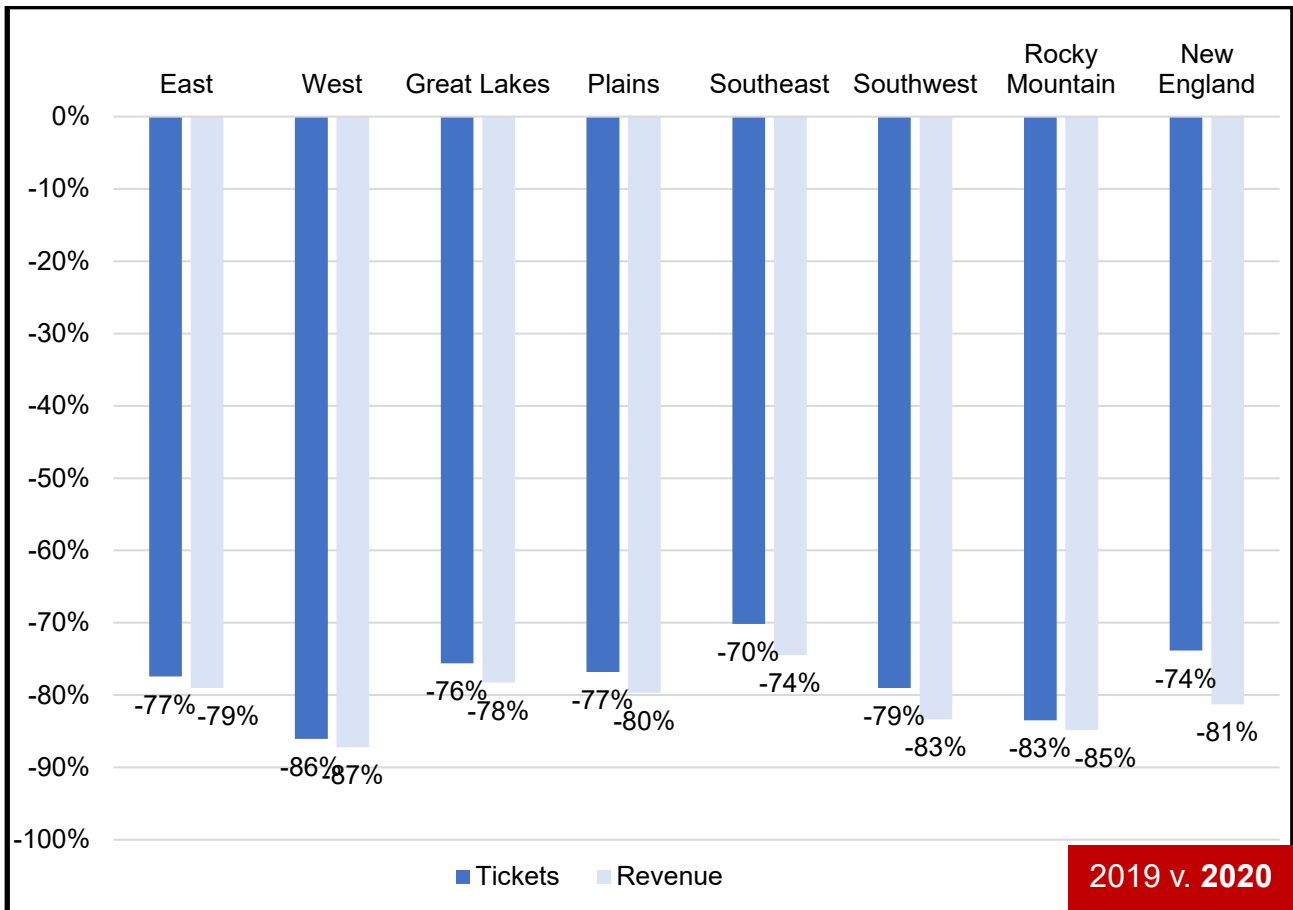
The chart above (Chart 4) summarizes both the comparative ticket revenue for the whole of 2019 and 2021 (explored by month in Chart 2) and also adds comparative annual aggregate ticket sales. As well as the three principal territories in this Study, it also includes aggregate data for the Republic of Ireland.

Unlike 2020, there were substantial variations across territories. The U.K.’s performance was the strongest, with venues on average selling half the tickets they did in 2019.

The annual performance for the U.S. was not far behind the U.K. (driven by strong sales in the subscription sales period), but both Canada and the Republic of Ireland only achieved around a quarter of the sales they recorded in 2019.

In all territories other than the Republic of Ireland, there was a greater fall recorded in ticket sales than revenue meaning that the average ticket price paid was higher in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. in 2021 than 2019.

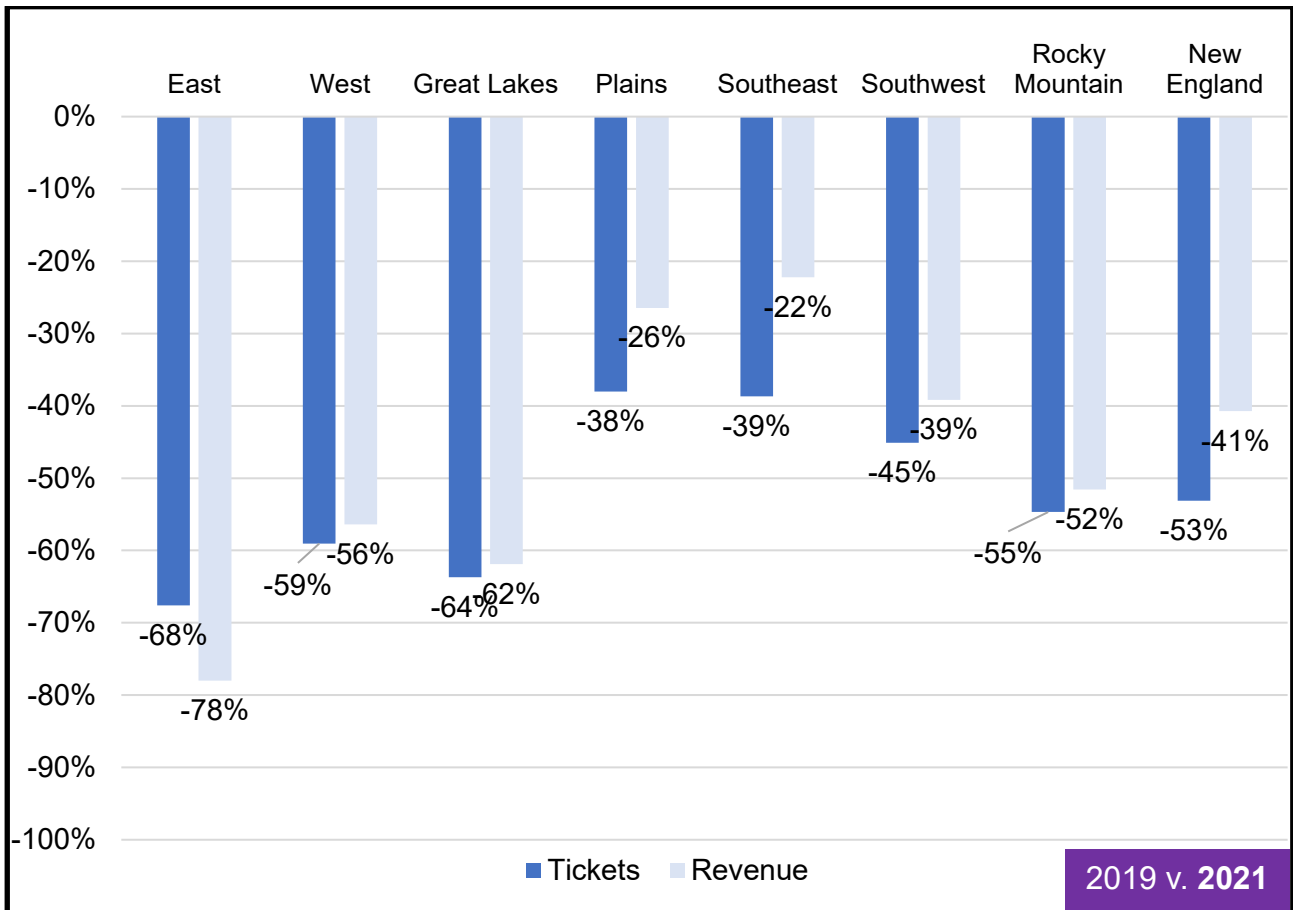
Chart 5 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2020, United States regions.



The chart above (Chart 5) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2020 for the U.S. (included in Chart 3) by region. In each case, there was a greater decline recorded in revenue than in ticket sales meaning that the average ticket price paid was lower in 2020 than in 2019.

The West performed worst for comparative revenue (down 87%) while the Southeast fared best (down 74%) in an unprecedented year for all regions.

Chart 6 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2021, United States regions.

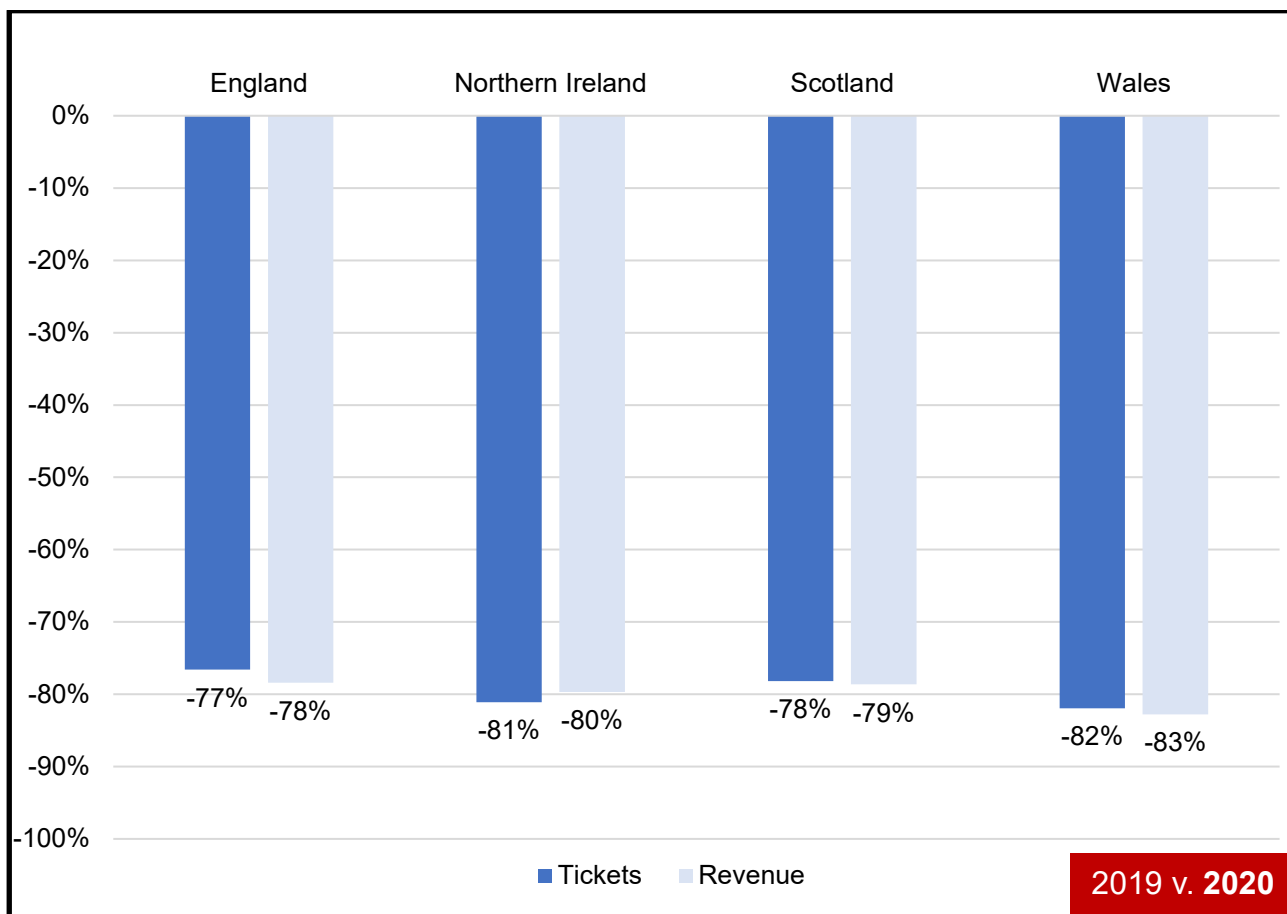


The chart above (Chart 6) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2021 for the U.S. (included in Chart 4) by region.

Compared to 2020, the regional performance in 2021 was far more varied.

There was almost no revival in revenue in the East in 2021, while the Plains and Southeast more than tripled the revenue they achieved in 2020. Relative to 2019, the 2021 average price paid was higher for all regions except the East, a reversal of the drop in average ticket price paid in 2020.

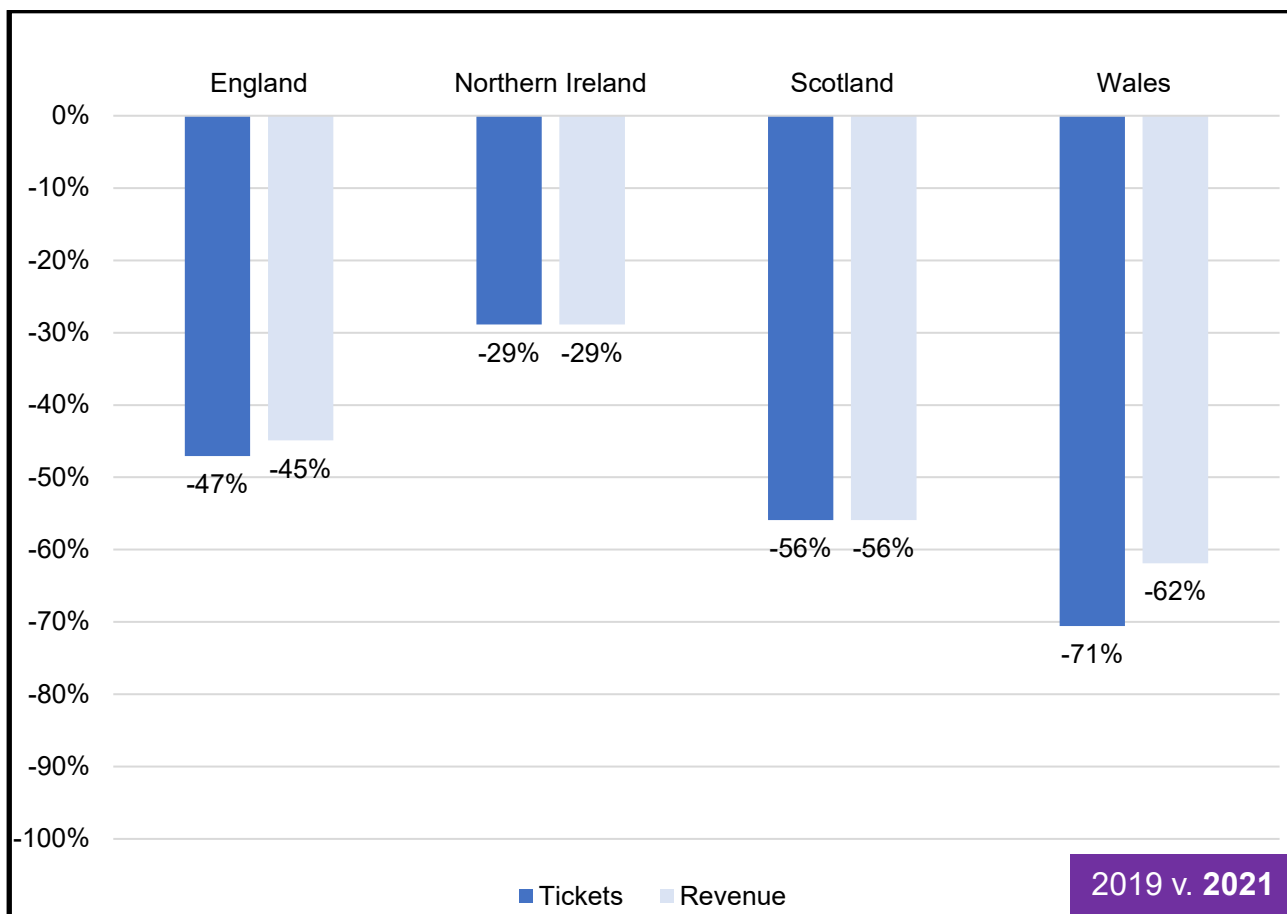
Chart 7 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2020, United Kingdom nations.



The chart above (Chart 7) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2020 for the U.K. (included in Chart 3) by nation.

Wales performed worst for comparative revenue (down 83%) while England fared best (down 78%) in an unprecedented year for all nations.

Chart 8 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2021, United Kingdom nations.



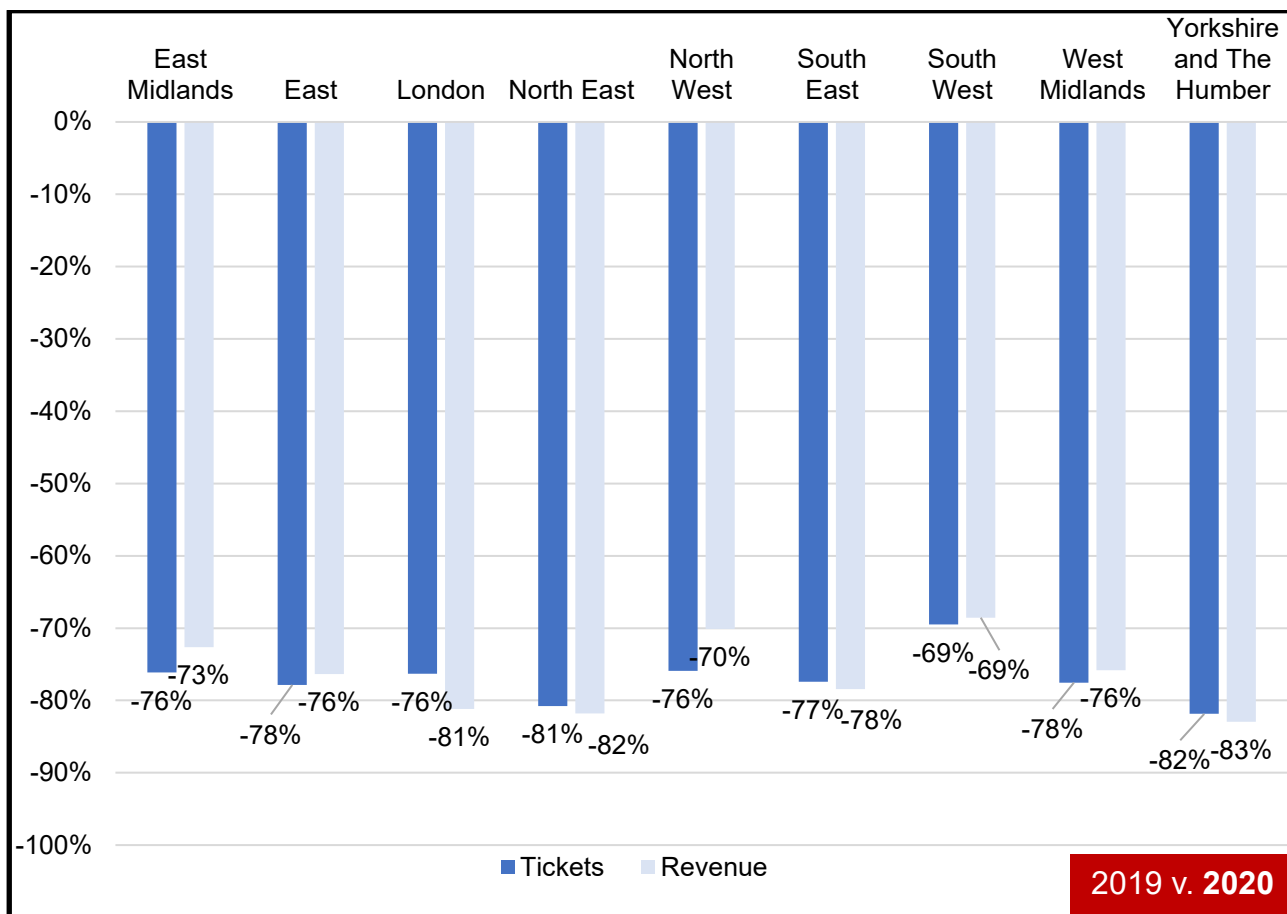
The chart above (Chart 8) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2021 for the U.K. (included in Chart 4) by nation.

Compared to 2020, the performance in 2021 was far more varied across the nations.

There was least revival in ticket sales and revenue in Wales in 2021. Scotland performed better (particularly for ticket sales) but was still around 10% behind England.

Northern Ireland performed best, thanks largely to strong performance in the last quarter of the year.

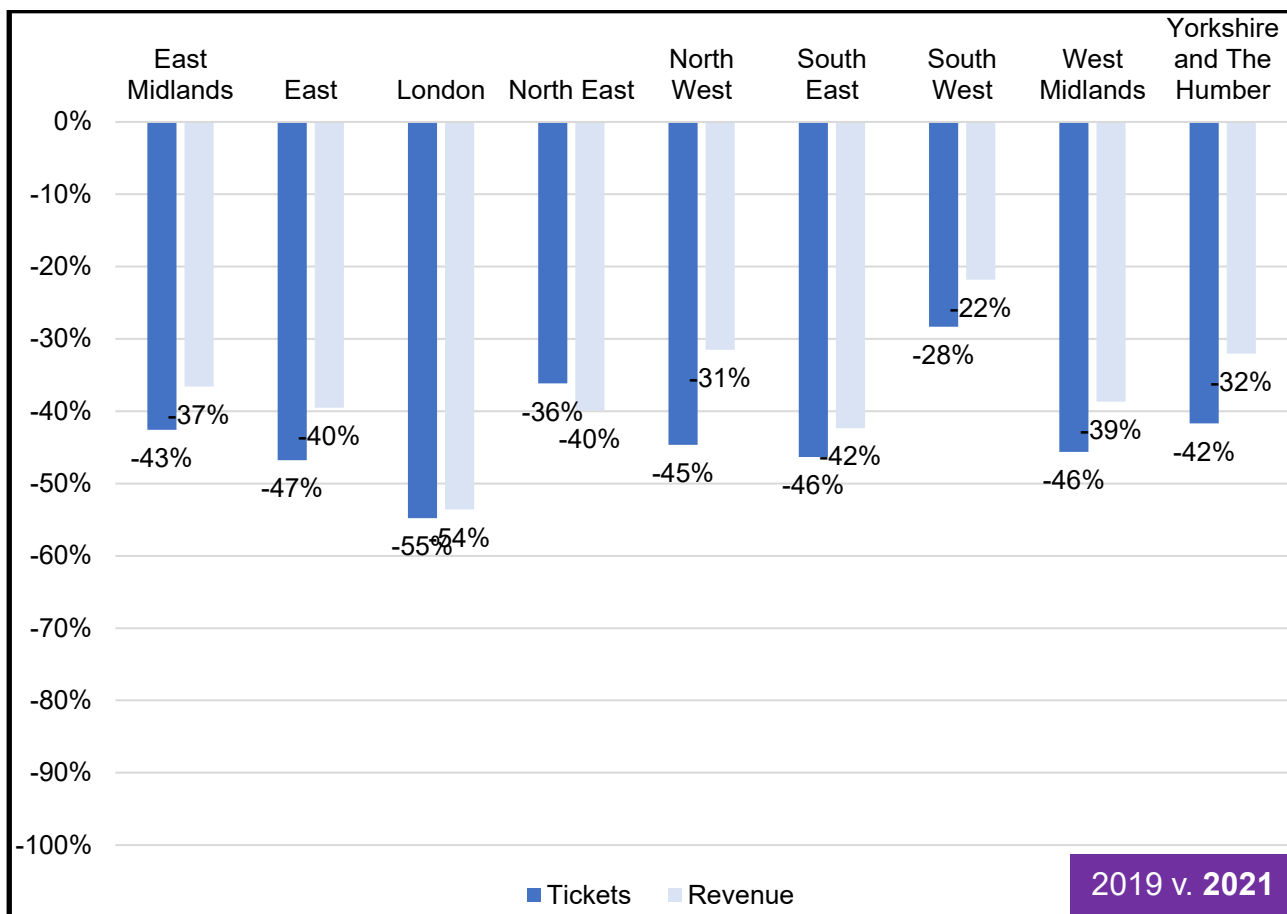
Chart 9 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2020, English regions.



The chart above (Chart 9) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2020 for England (included in Chart 7) by region.

Yorkshire performed worst for comparative revenue (down 83%) while the South West fared best (down 69%) in an unprecedented year for all regions.

Chart 10 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2021, English regions.



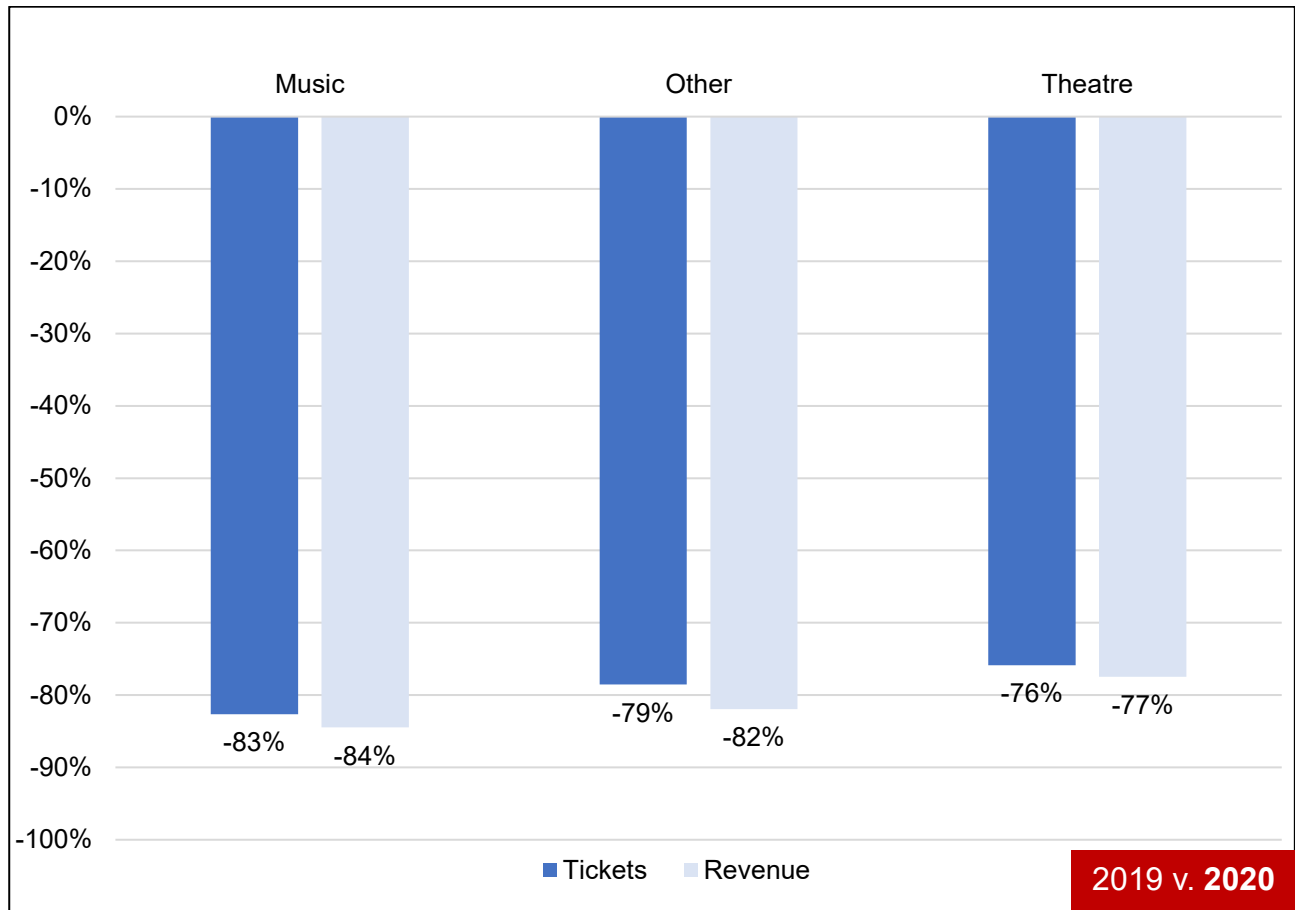
The chart above (Chart 10) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2021 for England (included in Chart 8) by region.

Compared to 2020, the performance in 2021 was far more varied across the regions.

There was the least revival in ticket sales and revenue in London in 2021.

As in 2020, the South West performed best, more than tripling the aggregate revenue recorded in 2020.

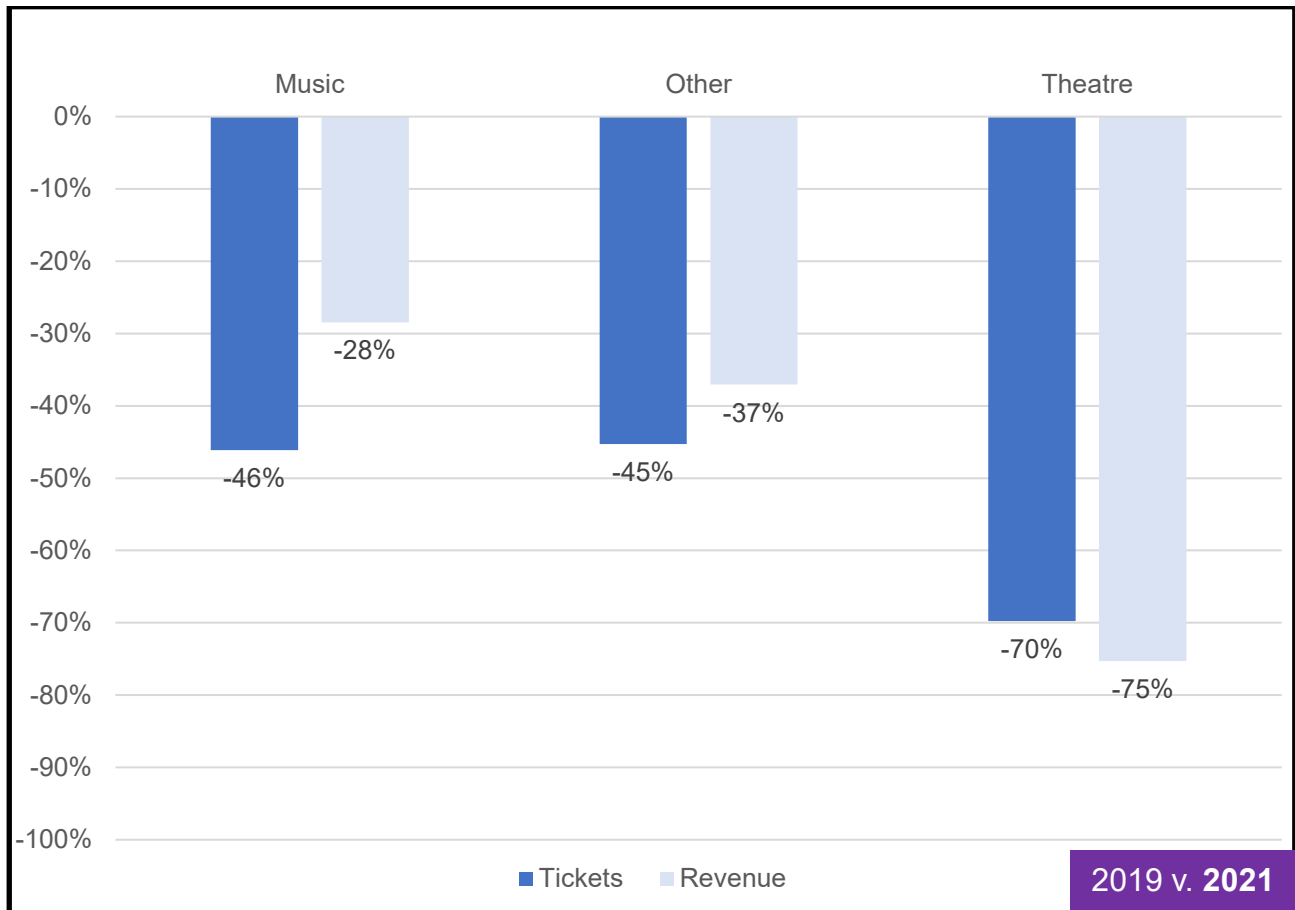
Chart 11 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2020, North American venue types.



The chart above (Chart 11) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2020 for the U.S. and Canada combined (included in Chart 3) by venue type.

We categorize venues in North America into three types. Music (including concert halls and symphonies) recorded the greatest comparative fall in ticket sales and revenue. Other venues (including arts centers, operas and ballets) witnessed a similar fall in revenue while theatres (both producing and presenting) fared marginally better in an unprecedented year for all types of venues.

Chart 12 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2021, North American venue types.

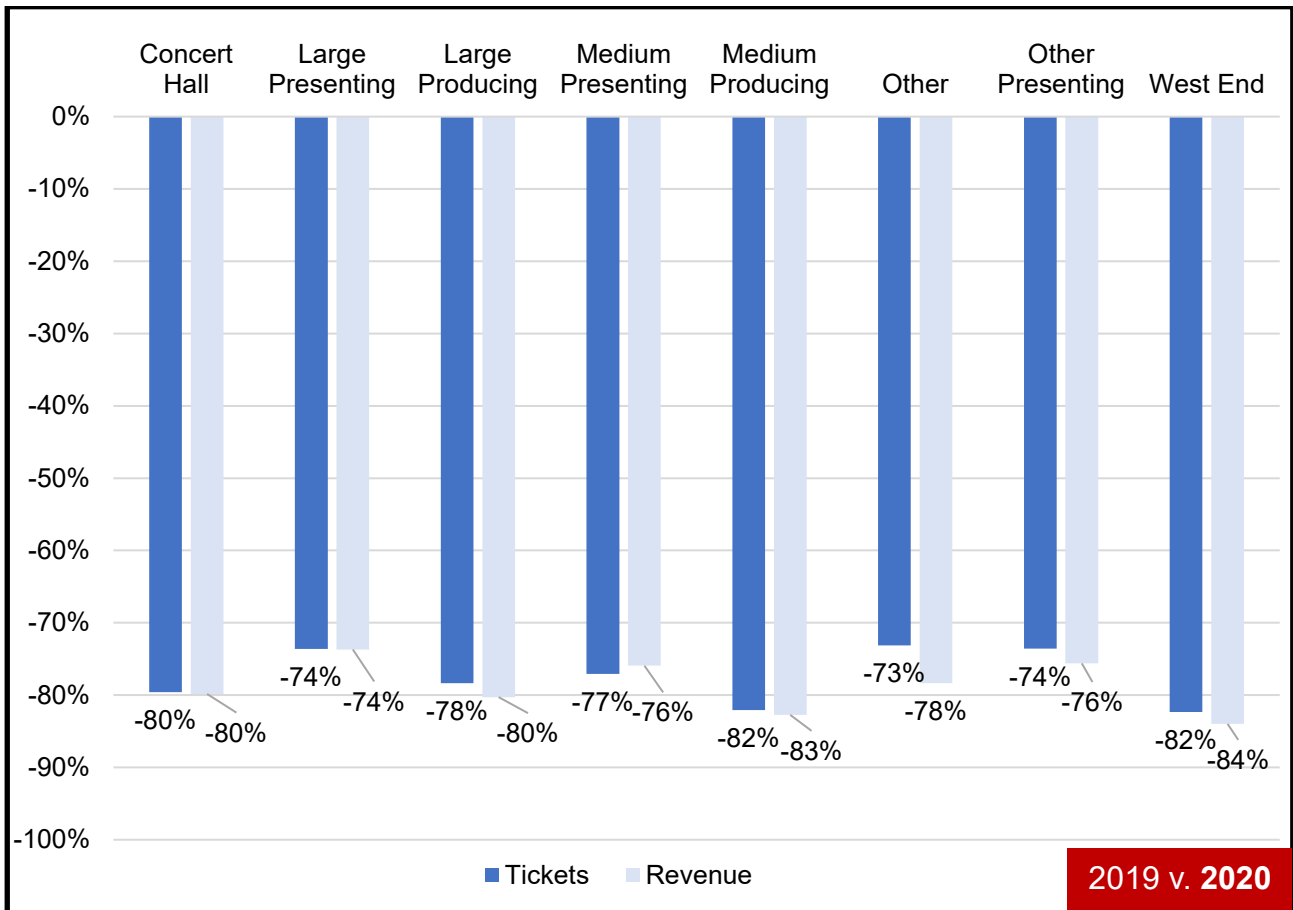


The chart above (Chart 12) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2021 for the U.S. and Canada combined (included in Chart 4) by venue type.

Compared to 2020, there was very little revival in ticket sales and revenue for theatres (both producing and presenting).

Other venues (including arts centers, operas and ballets) on average doubled their revenue compared to 2020 while the strongest revival was for music venues (including concert halls and symphonies) where three times the revenue recorded in 2020 was achieved.

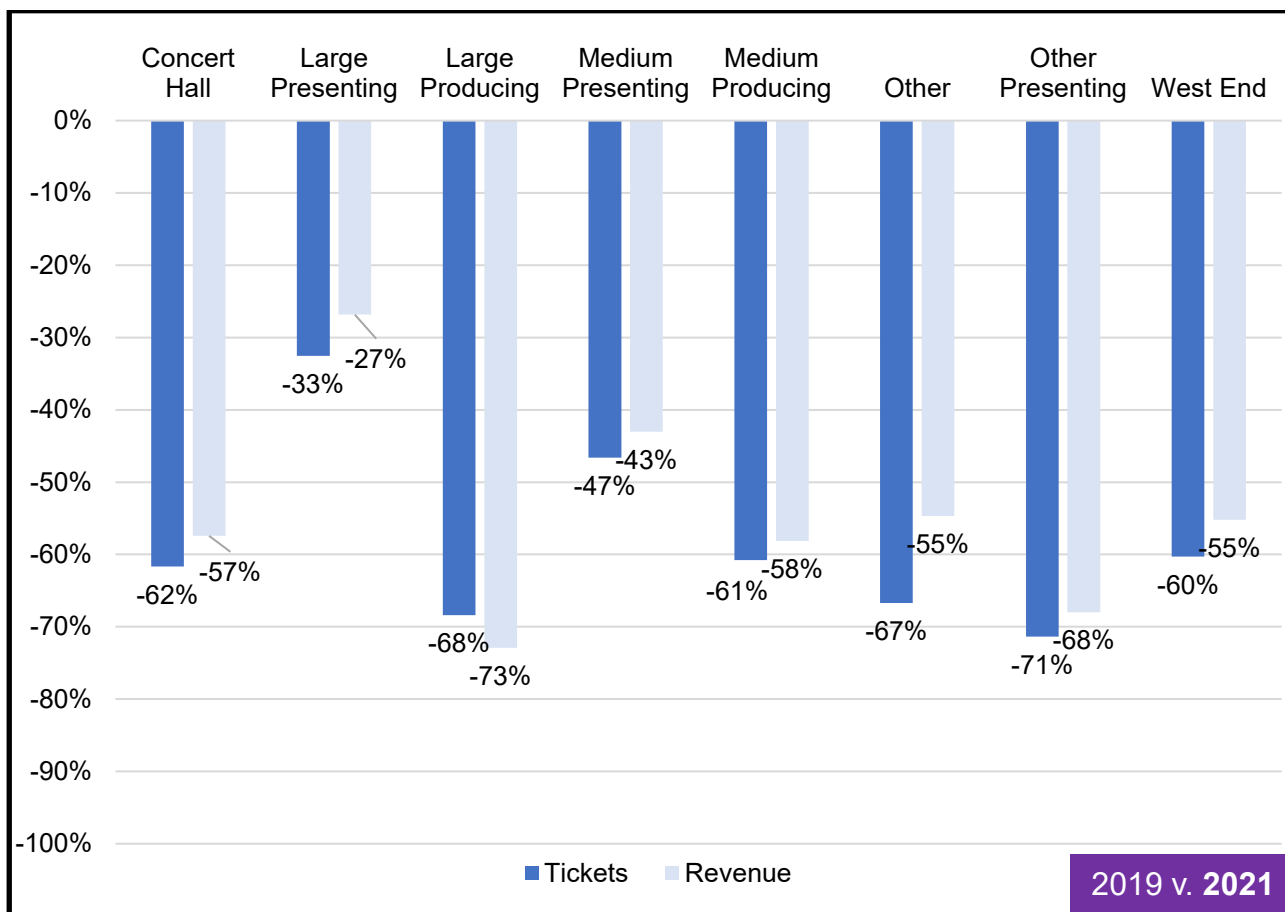
Chart 13 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2020, United Kingdom venue types.



The chart above (Chart 13) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2020 for the U.K. (included in Chart 3) by venue type.

We categorize venues in the U.K. into eight types. West End theatres recorded marginally the worst comparative revenue in 2020 while large presenting theatres (capacity 1,000+) recorded marginally the best in an unprecedented year for all types of venues.

Chart 14 – Comparative Annual Ticket Sales and Box Office Revenue, 2019 v 2021, United Kingdom venue types.



The chart above (Chart 14) breaks down the annual comparative summary of 2019 against 2021 for the U.K. (included in Chart 4) by venue type.

Unlike 2020, the eight different venue types witnessed varying levels of revival in ticket sales and revenue.

The two venue types that were closest to achieving a similar performance to 2019 were large presenting (1,000+ capacity) and medium presenting (600 – 1,000 capacity) theatres. The two venue types with most similar ticket sales and revenue to 2020 were large producing and other presenting (less than 600 capacity) theatres.

Booking Patterns

Chart 15 – Proportion of final revenue by weeks out from close, 2019 v. 2021, all territories

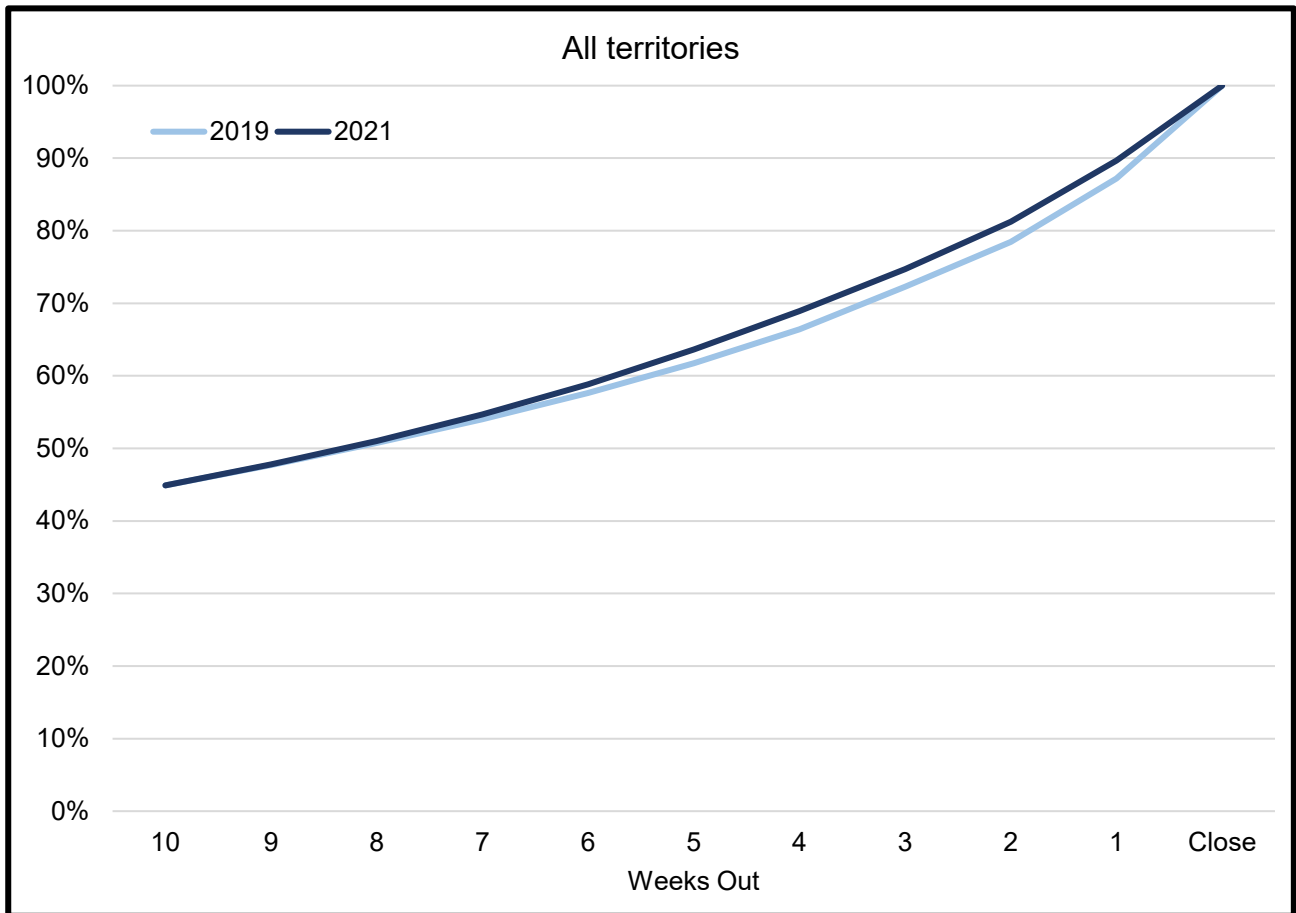


Chart 15 tracks average booking patterns for all territories from 10 weeks before the final performance of a run at a venue or the maturity of a single performance.

In both 2019 and 2021, 45% of the final revenue had been achieved by 10 weeks out. Patterns remain very similar throughout the following weeks. In 2019, 13% of revenue was achieved in the final week of sales. In 2021 this dropped to 10%.

Chart 16 – Proportion of final revenue by weeks out from close, 2019 v. 2021, United States

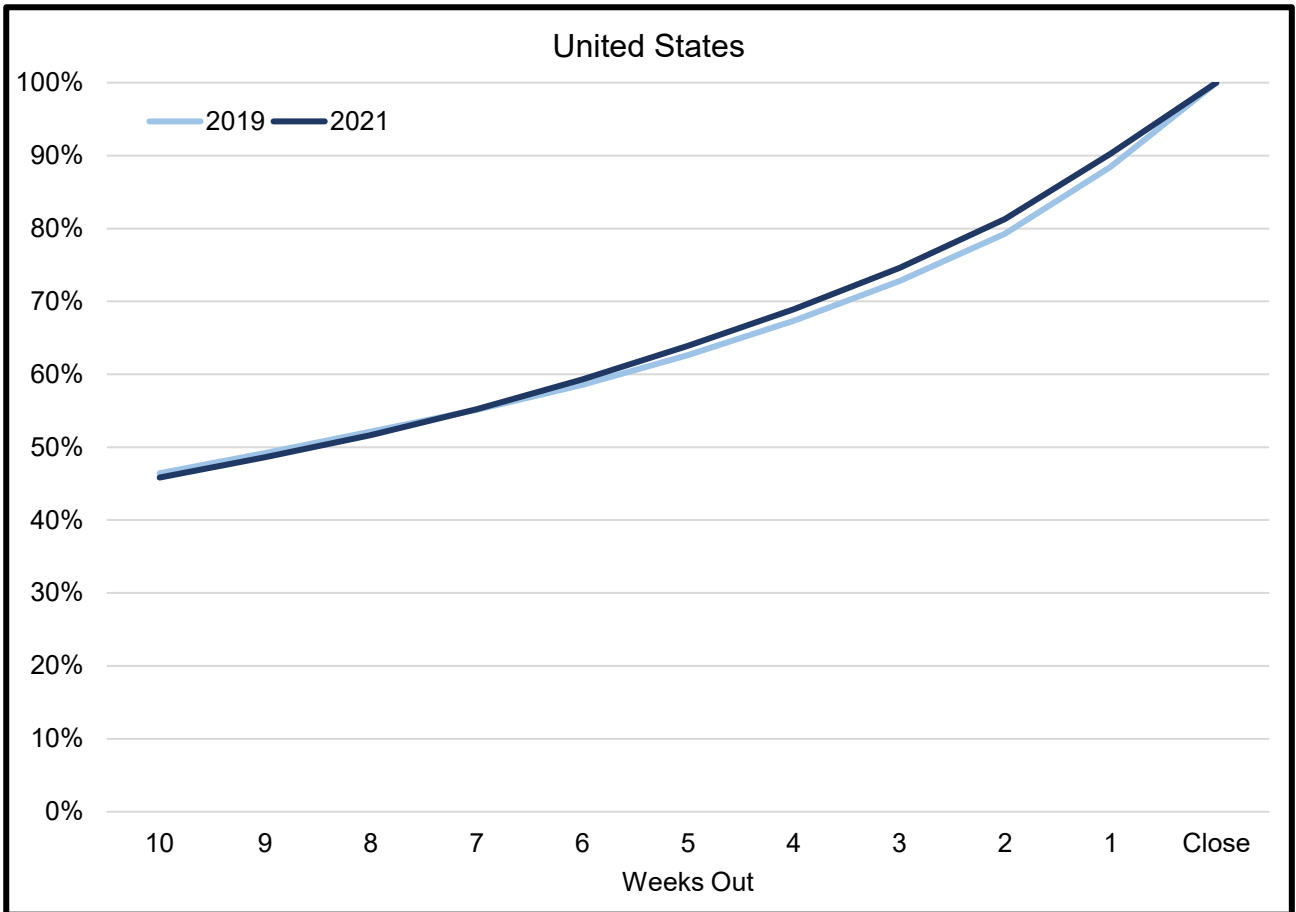


Chart 16 shows that the booking pattern in the United States was very similar to the average of all territories in the study.

In both 2019 and 2021, 46% of the final revenue had been achieved by 10 weeks out. Patterns remain very similar throughout the following weeks. In 2019, 12% of revenue was achieved in the final week of sales. In 2021 this dropped to 10%.

Chart 17 – Proportion of final revenue by weeks out from close, 2019 v. 2021, Canada

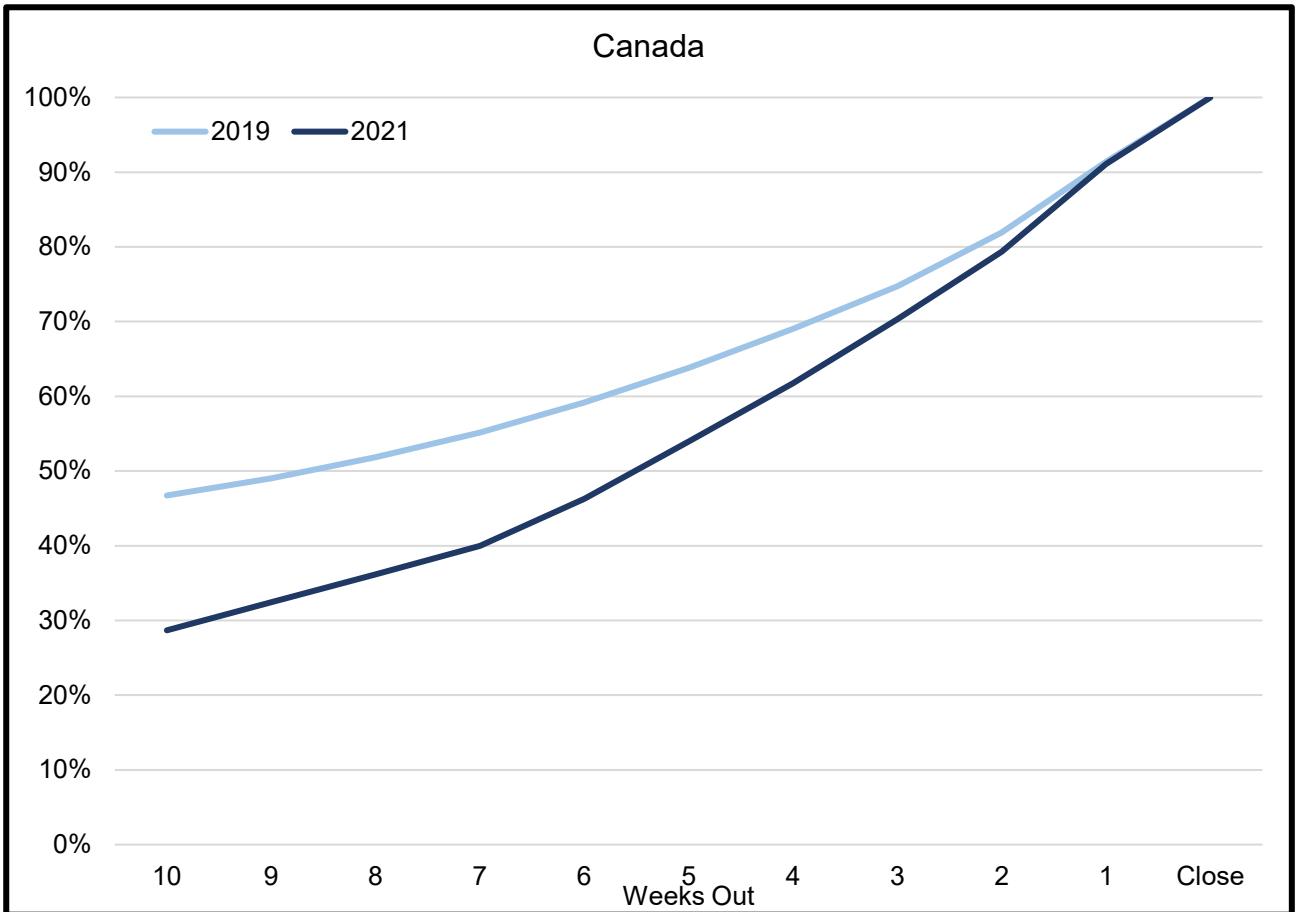


Chart 17 demonstrates that the booking pattern in Canada in 2021 was slower compared to 2019 and slower than the average of all territories in the study in 2021.

In 2019, 47% of the final revenue had been achieved by 10 weeks out. In 2021 this had dropped to 29%. It is only at six weeks out that the gap begins to narrow at more than 1% a week. In both 2019 and 2021, 9% of revenue was achieved in the final week of sales.

Chart 18 – Proportion of final revenue by weeks out from close, 2019 v. 2021, United Kingdom

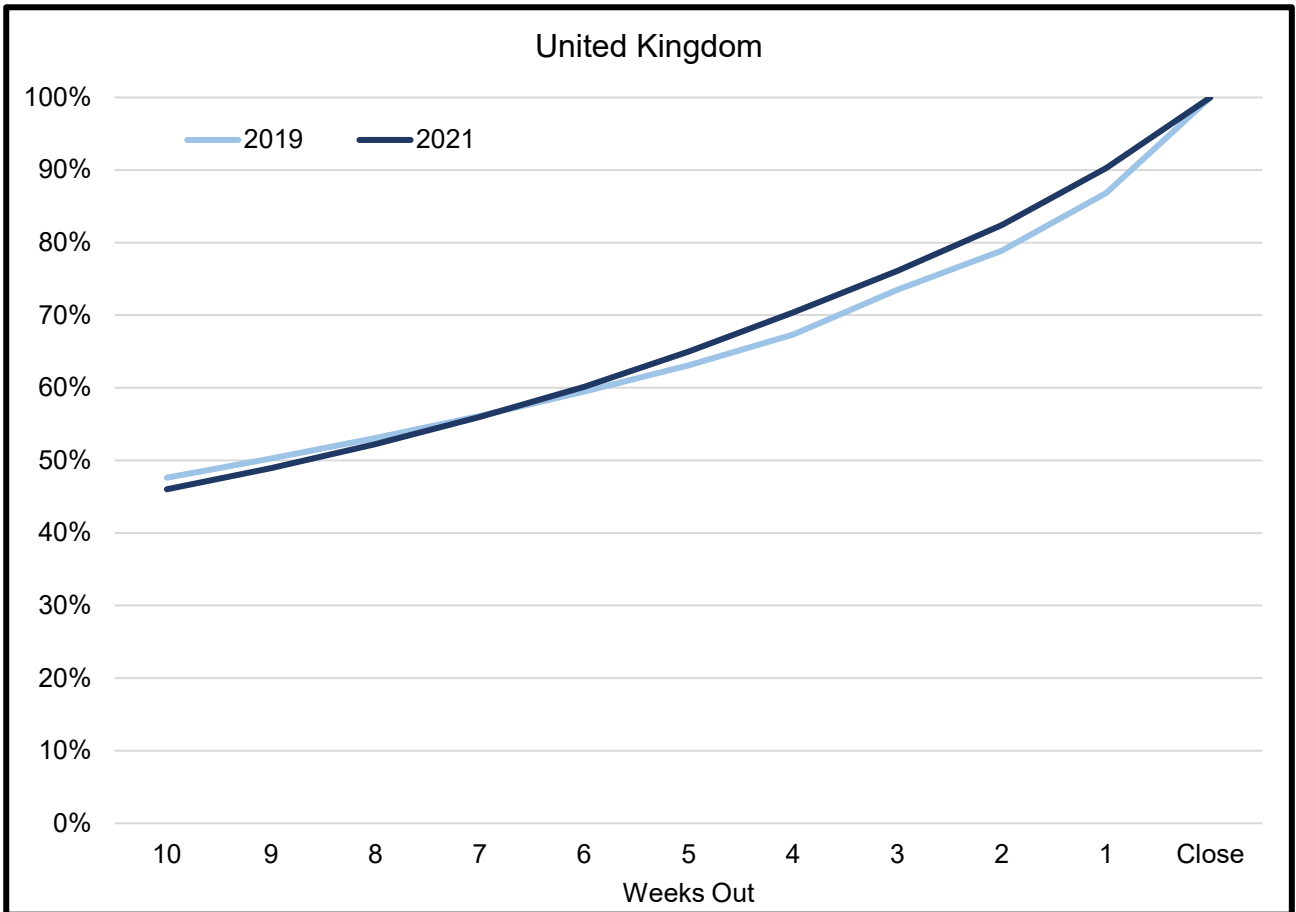


Chart 18 shows that the booking pattern in the United Kingdom was very similar to the average of all territories in the study.

In both 2019, 48% of the final revenue had been achieved by 10 weeks out. In 2021 this dropped slightly to 46%. By six weeks out 2021 'catches up' with 2019. In 2019, 13% of revenue was achieved in the final week of sales. In 2021 this dropped to 10%.

Chart 19 – Proportion of final revenue by weeks out from close, 2019 v. 2021, Republic of Ireland

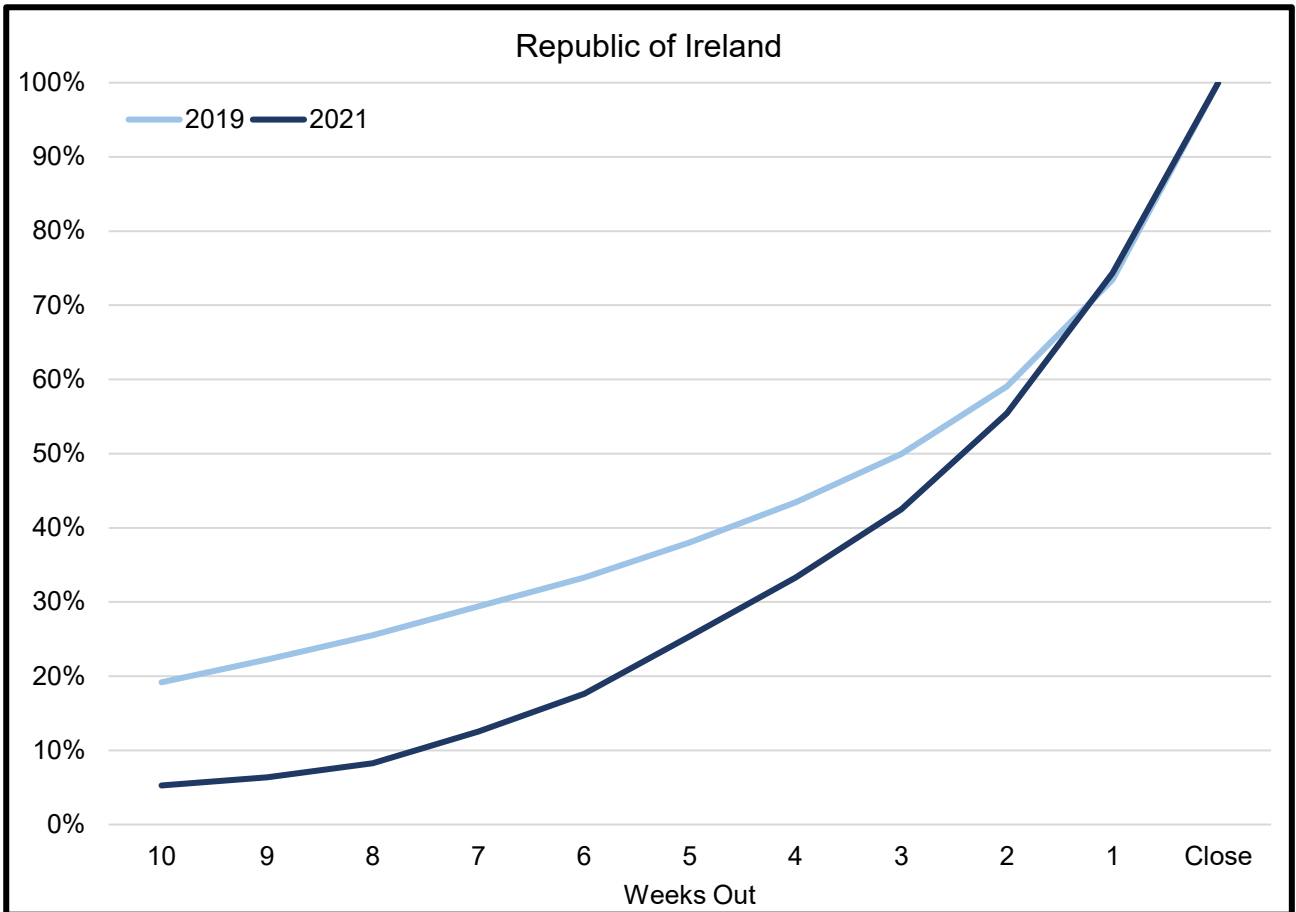


Chart 19 demonstrates that the booking pattern in the Republic of Ireland in 2021 was slower compared to 2019 and slower than the average of all territories in the study in 2021.

In 2019, 19% of the final revenue had been achieved by 10 weeks out. In 2021 this had dropped to 5%. It is only at five weeks out that the gap begins to narrow. In 2019, 27% of revenue was achieved in the final week of sales. In 2021, 26% of revenue was achieved in the final week of sales.

Demographics

Chart 20 – Age of Bookers, 2019 v. 2021, United States

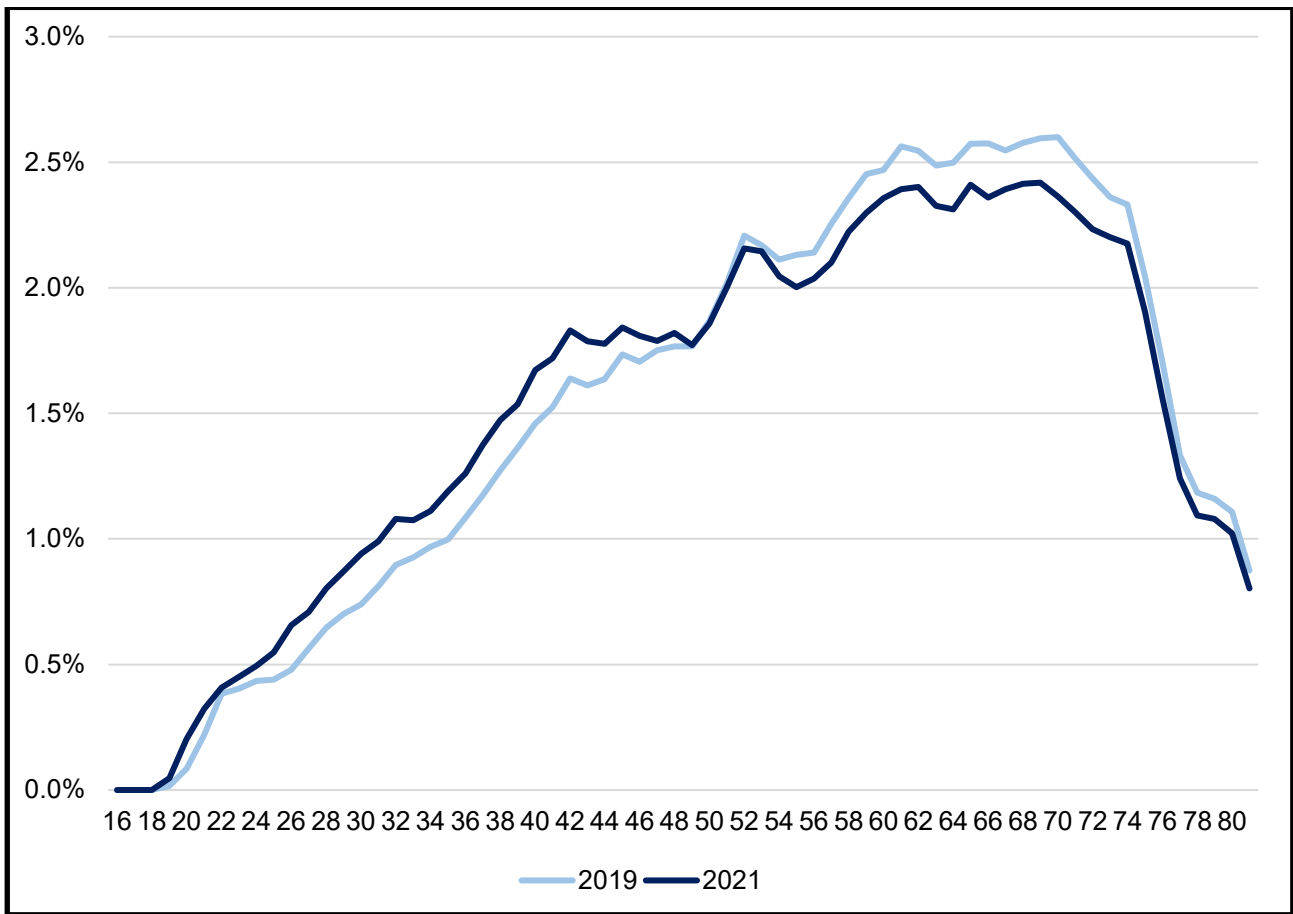


Chart 20 uses appended demographic data from a third-party supplier to chart the proportion of bookers in the U.S. by age in both 2019 and 2021.

There was a higher proportion of all ages under 50 in 2021 relative to 2019, and the opposite was true for ages over 50. Nevertheless, the average age of bookers was 1.3 years lower in 2021 (55.2) compared to 2019 (56.5) due to the high number of bookers in the 52-74 age range.

Chart 21 – Generation of Bookers, 2019 v. 2021, United States

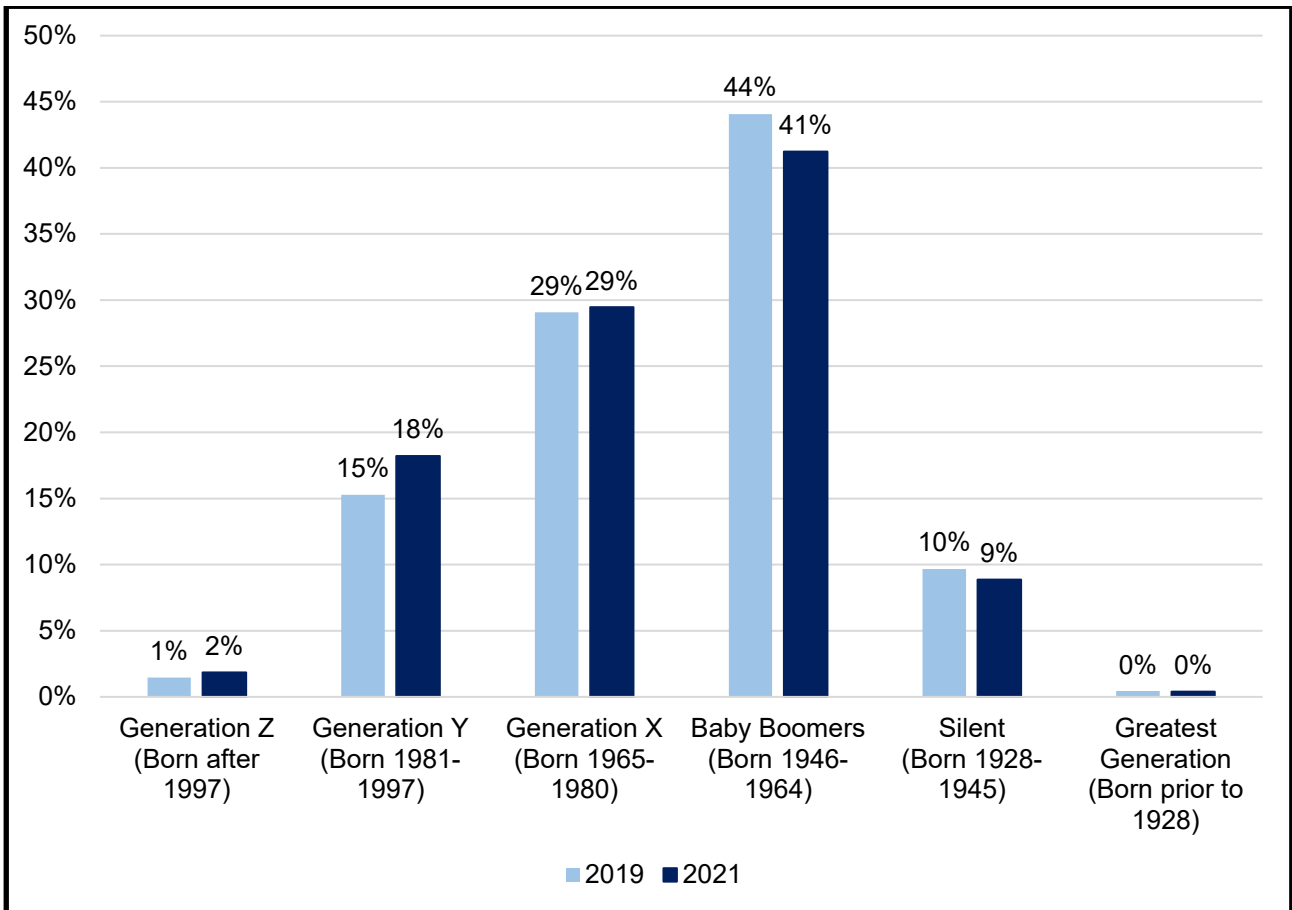


Chart 21 uses appended demographic data from a third-party supplier to chart the proportion of bookers in the U.S. by generation in both 2019 and 2021.

Baby Boomers remain the largest generation, but the proportion of bookers has fallen by 3%. The greatest growth has been in Generation Y.

Chart 22 – Age of Bookers, 2019 v. 2021, United Kingdom

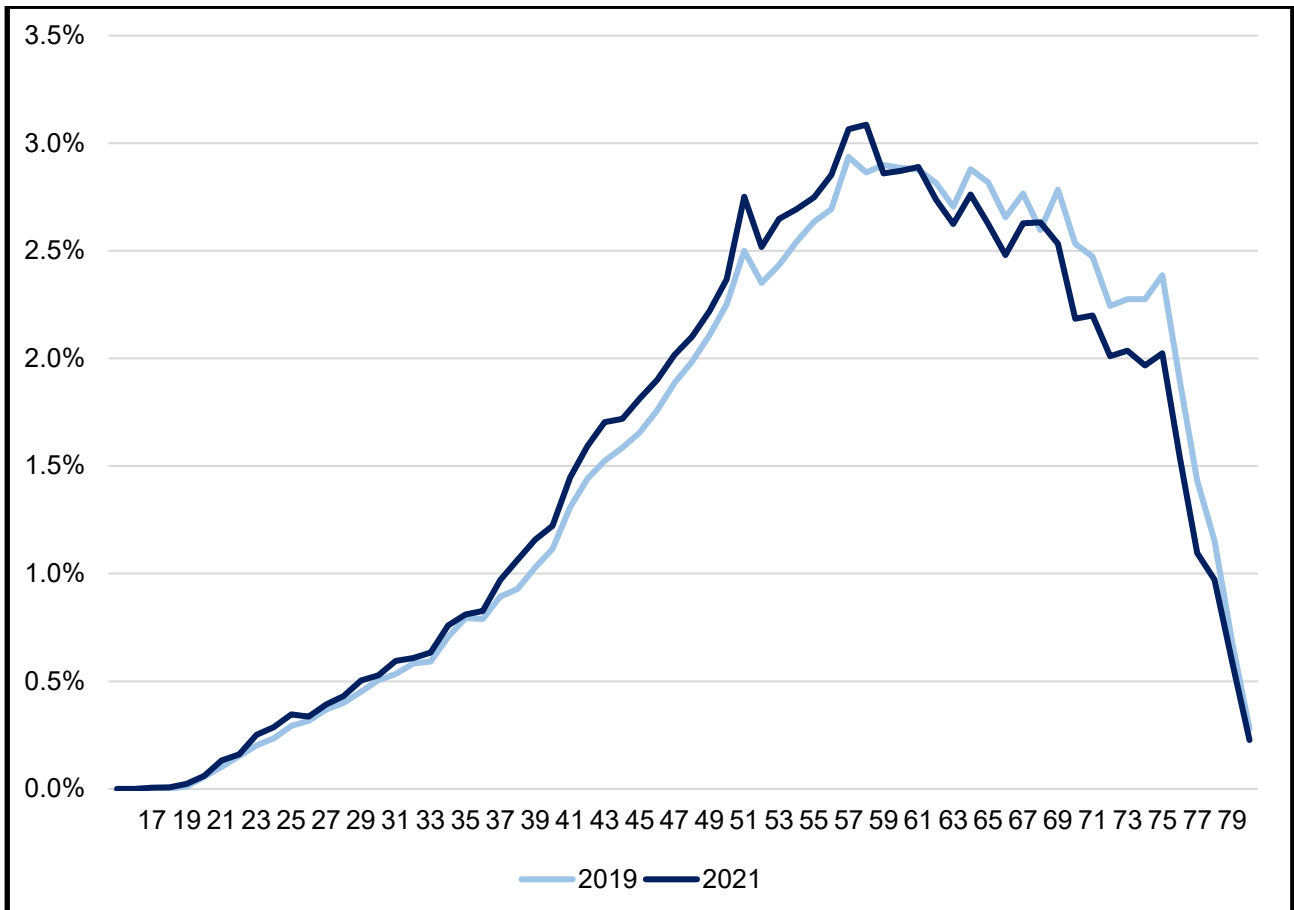


Chart 22 uses data from previous customer surveys to chart the proportion of bookers in the U.K. by age in both 2019 and 2021. While this is an effective and robust method of comparing across the two years, it should be noted that survey respondents are unlikely to be a representative sample of theatre goers and the ages reported, therefore, are representative of survey respondents rather than theatre bookers as a whole.

While there is a higher proportion of all ages under 60, the average age of bookers who have previously responded to a survey is 1.0 years lower in 2021 (56.4) compared to 2019 (57.4).

Chart 23 – Generation of Bookers, 2019 v. 2021, United Kingdom

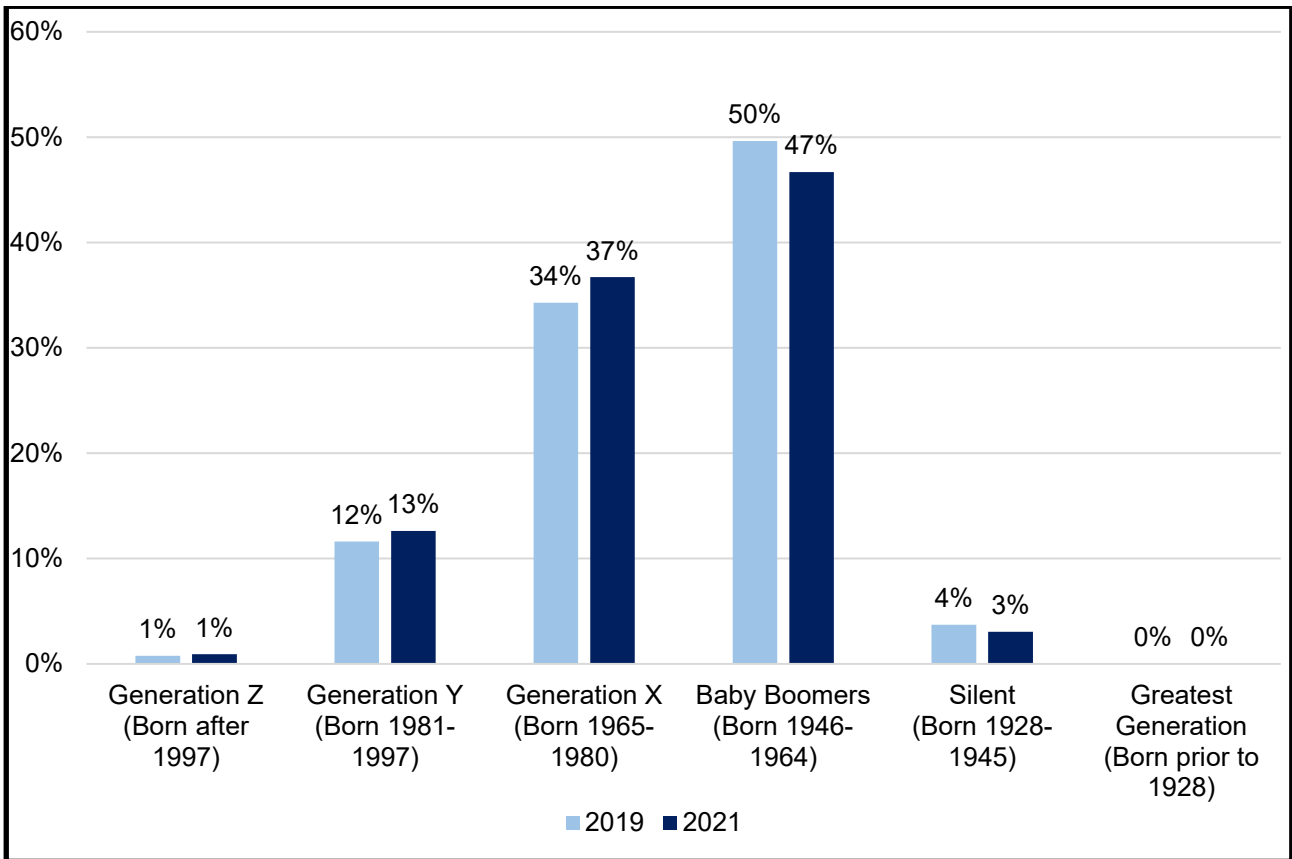


Chart 23 uses customer survey data to chart the proportion of bookers in the U.K. by generation in both 2019 and 2021.

Baby Boomers remain the largest generation, but the proportion of bookers has fallen by 3%. The greatest growth has been in Generation X.

Chart 24 – Household income of Bookers, 2019 v. 2021, United States

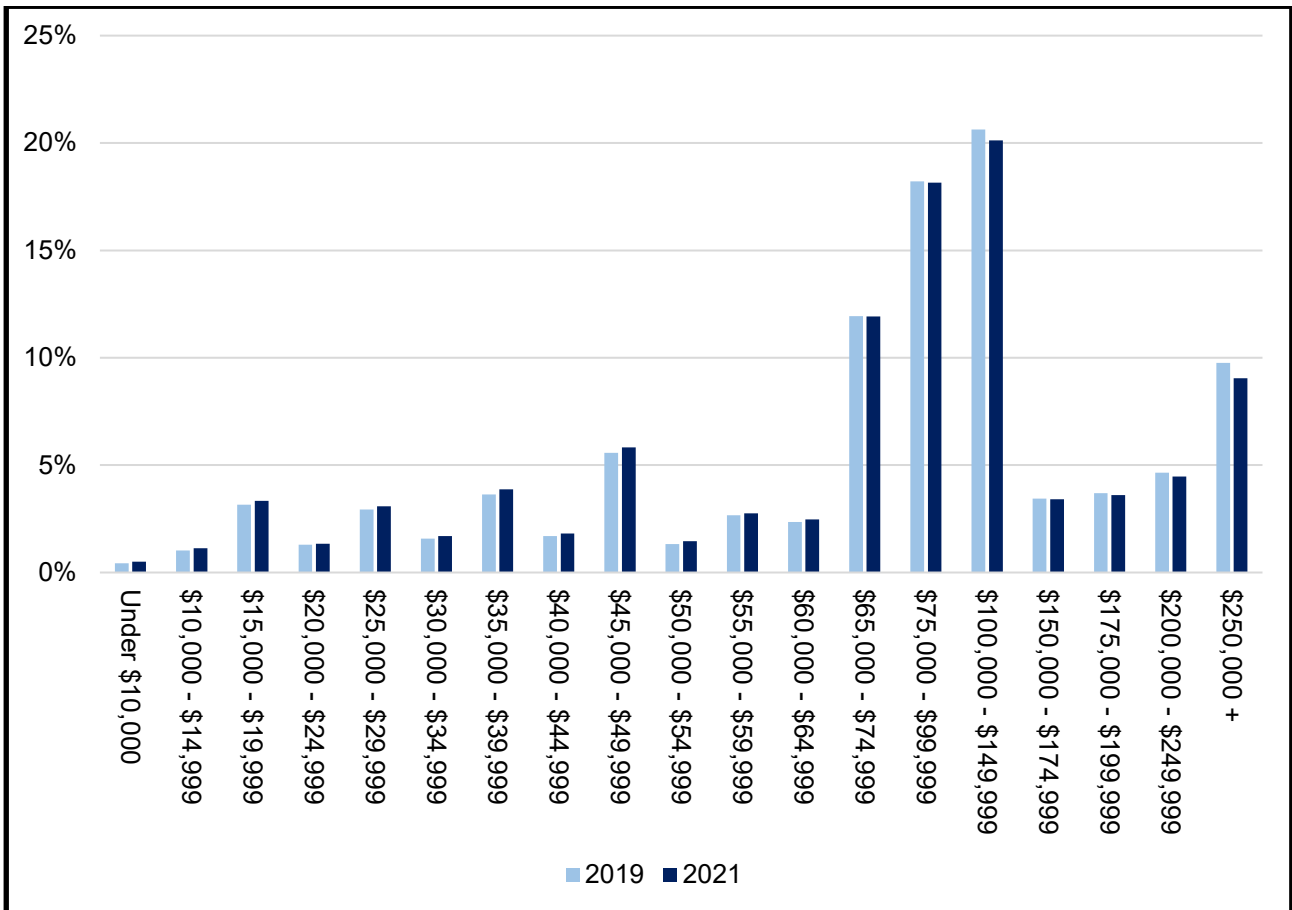


Chart 24 uses appended demographic data from a third-party supplier to chart the proportion of bookers in the U.S. by household income in both 2019 and 2021.

While there are small reductions in all bands over \$75,000, the median income band remains \$75,000-\$99,999.

Chart 25 – Proportion of bookers by behavioral segment, 2019 v. 2021, North America

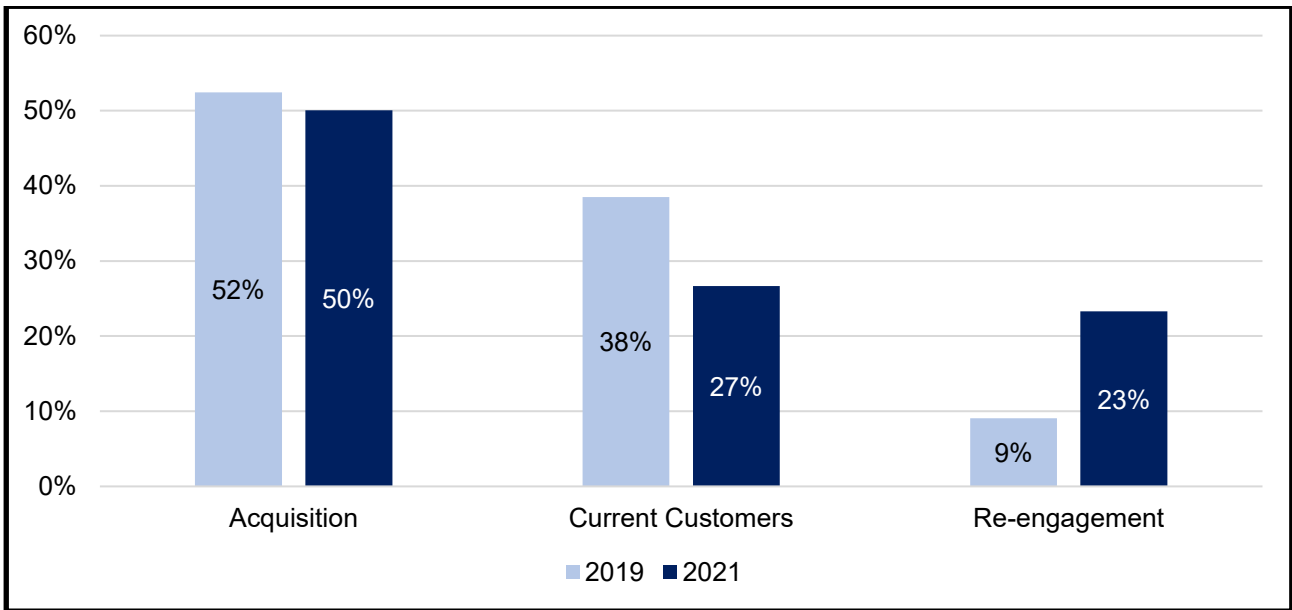
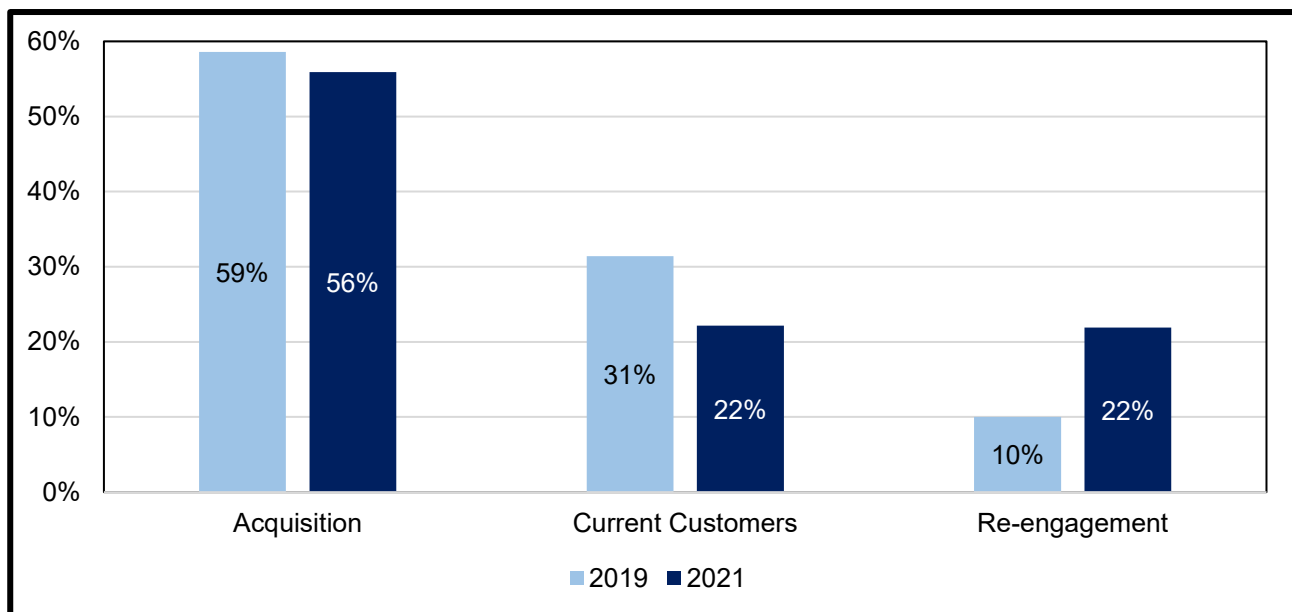


Chart 26 – Proportion of customers by behavioral segment, 2019 v. 2021, United Kingdom



Purple Seven and TRG Arts use a behavioral segmentation model based on loyalty. In its simplest form, it categorizes customers based on whether they appearing on the CRM as a customer for the first time (acquisition), whether they have transacted before in the last 18 months (current customers) or whether they have transacted before, but not in the last 18 months (re-engagement).

The charts above (Charts 25 and 26) show the proportion of bookers in each segment in 2019 and 2021 for North America and the U.K. respectively. Given the impact of COVID on venue closures, it is unsurprising that the proportion of current customers has dropped while the proportion of re-engaged has risen.

Acquisition was the largest segment in both markets in 2019. It continued to be in 2021.

Conclusions

While the collapse in ticket sales and revenue due to COVID-19 was universal in 2020, recovery in 2021 was uneven across territories and venue types.

While on a national level the U.K led the way into the final quarter of 2021, the trajectory of recovery was heavily impacted by the Omicron variant in all four territories we are tracking.

Before this latest twist in the story of the pandemic, it was clear that demand was very strong in the U.K. and some regions in the U.S. Was this demand coming from new audiences? Yes, in the sense that the majority of bookers were booking for the first time. This is not new behavior in the post-COVID world: in 2019 and before we would have expected new bookers to be the largest segment for most venues.

Our analysis shows that there has been some shift in the average demographics of bookers in 2021, but this has been minor. Most bookers on both sides of the Atlantic continue to be over 50 and comparatively wealthy.

As we see that consumer confidence appears to be returning in 2022, we can hope that we see the strong demand witnessed in the U.K. repeated in other territories. We will welcome a very high proportion of new bookers to venues, as we have always done. What we cannot expect is a major shift in demographic to younger and more diverse audiences.

Purple Seven and TRG Arts are still welcoming new organizations to join the free COVID-19 Sector Benchmark and would particularly like to welcome more organizations in Canada and the Republic of Ireland to grow the benchmarks in these nations. To sign up and receive a free dashboard to compare your organization's performance with your peers, visit <https://go.trgarts.com/benchmark>

David Brownlee & Eric Nelson for TRG Arts & Purple Seven

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