barriers are real, and people generally like to be with people who are like them. So most often they break off into groups. The Chinese will eat together and socialize together, and it's the same with other national acts. And you know what? We don't expect them to act like one big happy family all the time. In fact, the message is made clear very early on: "You don't have to love one another. You just have to work together." They come together in rehearsals, mainly, and in performances.

That's when they see how each one fits into the whole. That's when they are a team. As artistic director of Big Apple, you face another challenge that stymies many business executives—managing creative people. Any advice?

It all comes down to one thing: trust. You have to let creative people know that you care about them, that you respect them, and that you are there to create an environment that makes it easy for them to do their act well. I let our performers know that I am inside with them—I'm not the whip-cracking boss, I'm their partner. Now, we don't give away the store. There are times that creative people can't get everything they want—the music or the costumes or the lighting, even the money. But their creativity is a special gift, and you have to recognize that by being honest and taking care of their needs.

Doesn't that create prima donnas? The Big Apple Circus doesn't have any stars. The show is the star. That's what teamwork is all about.

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chart

Leaving the Gold in the Data Mine

Is your customer database going to waste?

How do you use your customer database?

Professional service firms, like most other companies, have rushed to adopt new technologies for collecting information on customers. Few, though, appear to be getting the full benefit of their investments. In a survey of 322 executives, Expertise Marketing, of Concord, Massachusetts, found that most were using their marketing databases to automate old processes such as mail-list management and contact tracking. Fewer than one-third were mining the data to gain strategic insights: Which clients should we target? Which service lines generate the highest returns? Where are we stealing clients from competitors? Where are we losing to the competition? Using marketing databases strategically may not be easy, but that's where their real power lies.

Andrea Ovans