

## **AFO CONFERENCE 2011**

**Sat 19 November**

**Session G in 'Lawrence' room**

**Time: 14.30 - 15.25**

**Topic: Getting your festival noticed - PR and advertising**

"Nurturing the press to work with and for you. Do you need it? How do you decide on procuring the best advertising to build brand awareness?"

### **Speakers:**

**Andy Farquarson** (Iconic; Cropredy PR Manager)

**Ian Anderson** (Editor of fRoots)

**Lucy Clark** (Larmer Tree Festival)

**Chair: Joe Heap** (AFO, Towersey, Big Session)

### **Preface**

By way of a preface to this session, 2012 will present festival organisers with a major opportunity and a major challenge.

The opportunity is that Glastonbury is reportedly taking a sabbatical which would mean potentially 130,000 or so festival-goers looking for alternative mud to wallow in. But competition will be stiff - all the major festivals will be chasing that displaced audience and organisers have to offer something distinctive to get their event noticed in the media scrum.

The major challenge is the Olympics. It will be a huge news story, it will dominate events coverage, and – in short – it will be a major distraction. For festivals (and, of course, other outdoor events) there will be knock-on effects – just as it will be much more difficult (and, probably, more expensive) to hire outdoor event infrastructure next year so it will probably be more difficult (and costly) to book advertising space in non-music mainstream media.

So bear those two factors in mind when considering your advertising and PR for 2012.

### **Know your potential audience**

To make your PR and your advertising cost-effective you first need to know your audience. If you haven't already done so, you should conduct some market research.

That research should not only provide you with demographic information about your audience (how old they are, what socio-economic group they belong to and so on) it should also reveal what they read – which magazines, which newspapers, which websites – and which social media they use.

Once you know that, you can concentrate on a targeted market and address it through the most appropriate medium or media. For example, if you are staging a heavy metal festival there's not much point in advertising it in fRoots magazine; equally, if you run a folk festival it will be a waste of money to advertise it in Kerang.

Once you know who you are talking to and which medium will reach them, make sure your PR and your advertising tells them what they *need* to know – who's on, when and where, how much. And, of course, as well as giving them information you also need to entice them into buying tickets.

Only when you know your audience and know how to reach them can you make your PR cost-effective.

### **Make it easy for the media**

You should always try to make things easy for the media. For example, a clearly-written press release which contains useful, newsworthy information in an accessible and concise form and which is sent to the right person in good time will stand a good chance of getting used. Conversely, a badly-written rambling messy press release that has no discernible news value and is sent at the last minute to the wrong recipients will end up in the wastepaper basket.

### **Listings**

The same advice applies to the information you send to listings outlets such as PA Listings.

Whereas a press release is basically narrative - it tells a story - listings are non-narrative information usually published in lists (hence the name). Most listings are free (though there are a few listings agencies that charge to distribute your information) so it makes sense to submit details of your event. In particular, be sure to send info to festival issues of magazines and festival supplements of newspapers.

As with your press releases, be sure to submit listings in good time. You should also study the usual format of each listings outlet – for example, some print the date first, others the location first; some always include full ticket prices, others only publish season ticket prices. You should tailor your info closely to each outlet's format – again, it's about making life easy for busy media professionals.

It may also be useful to provide listings info in both short and expanded form. In the sort version, include essential info such as: festival name, date(s), location, headliners for each day, ticket prices, box office details, phone number (if applicable) and website address. In the expanded version, you could include supplementary info such as: more details of tickets (concessions, day tickets, seasons etc), the complete line-up, the running order and individual performance times, festival capacity, a very brief description of the event, travel info (including public transport), camping charges, and any special features of the event such as pre-erected 'VIP' camping, disabled access and so on.

## **Press releases**

It goes without saying that press releases should be well-presented, well-written, spell-checked and dated. Another, less obvious, essential is that the release should be *newsworthy* – it must have a newsworthy point.

A press release should follow the form of a news story – the classic formula of "who what why where when". That is what editors expect and as a bonus it helps you remember to get all the important information into the story. You should also try to get the basic information into the first paragraph or the first and second paragraphs because news stories are invariably edited from the bottom up – in other words, an editor or sub-editor who is pressed for space will assume that the stuff near the bottom of the press release is less important than the stuff at the beginning so she or he may just cut out the last paragraphs to fit the available space.

Most press releases are in two parts. The release itself will tell the story and contain all the most essential information – the "who what why where when" – with supplementary information (such as contact details, further info sources, background material and so on) appearing on a separate page headed "Notes for editors."

## **Think local**

When sending press releases to your local newspapers or your local radio station it is vital that the story has a local angle. Even if there doesn't appear to be a specifically local interest angle, you can often slip in a phrase or two along the lines of "The line-up has been announced for Cropredy, north Oxfordshire's annual festival, etc etc..." Or "Cropredy, Banbury's major music festival, today announced its line-up..."

Even festivals that market themselves as national (or even international) events rely to a greater or lesser extent on a local audience. So don't neglect your local papers and radio stations. Cultivate them: establish contact with the editors and arts correspondents, get to know local radio presenters and producers. Try to build a rapport and a personal relationship with your local media. For example, invite them along and be generous with handing out press tickets.

Many local papers and broadcasters like to run reader and listener competitions or promotions – these add value for the paper or radio station and they get your event noticed. So they work for both you and the media.

## **Advertising**

Some festivals advertise, some don't. If you're absolutely certain you will sell all your tickets before the gates open, there may not seem much point in advertising. But even then, you might still want to buy adverts to keep the brand in front of the public, to maintain your presence in the market. As an example, if a newspaper publishes a festival supplement and all your rivals take full-page adverts in it, you may send out the wrong message if you are not up there with them.

There are so many choices of media that it's a major headache deciding where to advertise. For example, should you spend your limited budget in local or national publications? Should you concentrate on magazines or newspapers? What about online advertising? It's hard to offer any hard and fast advice – every festival is different – but again effective market research is a powerful tool in helping you decide where your target audience will be found.

Advertising is not free: you have to buy it. That means every advert has to earn its cost. It is hard to determine whether any given advert (or, indeed, advertising in general) is cost-effective but a starting point is to ask yourself this question: "Will I sell enough tickets that I *wouldn't have sold otherwise* to recoup the cost of this advert?"

You should also make sure you get the best deal possible. As an example, a series of adverts usually attracts a discount. In fact, you should *always* expect a discount from the 'top line' ratecard prices. Be prepared to negotiate. As with all your dealings with the media, try to establish a personal relationship with advertising sales people. For example, it's worth offering them free tickets – even if they don't want to come to the festival they will appreciate the gesture.

Another way of keeping costs down is to look for 'late space' deals. The name says it all – if a publication has space left as press day approaches it will usually be offered at a discounted price. But if you intend to bid for late space you *must* have your advertising copy (your artwork) ready to be sent at a moment's notice.

At the end of the day, only *you* can decide whether or not it's worth advertising your festival and – if it is – where you should advertise and how much you should spend.

## **Conclusion**

The most vital step in getting your festival noticed is to do your research. Learn who your audience are. Find out what they read. Gather as much information as you can about potential media – for example, who is the editor of your local paper or who produces arts news on local radio. Google for the names of journalists who have written festival-related articles. Look up advertising rates online. Make a list of relevant businesses – for example, listings agencies. The scope for research is endless and it can be a really time-consuming task. But it's the essential starting point towards your goal of a capacity crowd.