

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Branding, sponsorship and the music festival

Chris Anderton

This chapter examines the relationship between music festivals and sponsorship/branding in Britain. This is an important area to examine because the remarkable growth of the music festival sector over the past 20 years has been paralleled, and partially driven, by an expansion in commercial sponsorship initiatives. This includes enhanced media coverage on radio, television and the internet, and the emergence of specially created on-site brand activities and brand-centric events. This chapter defines festival-related sponsorships, examines how sponsors and brands (Figure 54) work with festivals and concludes by questioning how broad changes in society may have supported a shift in perceptions and attitudes towards commercial sponsorship.

A report prepared by the copyright collection agency PRSforMusic in conjunction with the brand agency Frukt found that music-related sponsorship activities were worth a total of £104.8 million in the United Kingdom in 2012. Of this, live music sponsorship was worth just over £33 million, which was split between festivals, tours and venue naming (PRSforMusic/Frukt 2013). The importance of such festival support was underlined in 2013 by James Drury (general manager of UK Festival Awards Ltd) who stated that 'For many festivals, sponsorship of some shape or form is a vital income stream' (Drury 2013, 25). Among other things (discussed further below), sponsorship can provide financial security in a risky and volatile market and enable promoters to secure the headline acts needed to help sell tickets to their events. Indeed, the loss of sponsorship support is one of several reasons why festivals may fail to succeed (Getz 2002).



FIGURE 54 *The pop festival's branding opportunity: Strongbow cider tent, Isle of Wight, 2007.*

The expansion of commercial companies into the promotion, branding and sponsorship of music festivals has not been welcomed by all festival-goers and commentators. For instance, when the commercial music promotion company Mean Fiddler (later renamed Festival Republic) took a stake in the Glastonbury Festival in 2002, the relationship was criticized by, among others, the anti-corporate activist organization Corporate Watch, which claimed that Mean Fiddler was taking a share of the net profits, and that radical groups previously welcomed at the festival had seen their ticket allocations cut or withdrawn (Michaels 2002; see also Osler 2005). More recently, Lena Corner's article for the *Independent* (UK) newspaper provided a useful summary of the position held by those who fear the influence of commercial sponsorships and branding upon music festivals:

For a while, there has been an increasing feeling that festivals have shifted too far from their original hippie-spirited ethos. The point was to offer an alternative reality. Now, it's a slick industry. The television rights have been sold, and with that have come price rises, mass audiences and corporate domination – the antithesis of everything they stood for. (Corner 2012)

This quotation (and Corner's article as a whole) is suffused with what has been referred to as an ideology of the 'countercultural carnivalesque' (Anderton 2009, 2011, forthcoming) through which outdoor music festivals have come to represent much more than cyclically held events with (or without) camping. Instead, in this ideology they have become central to an alternative or imaginative history of Britain that traces countercultural and youth culture ideals from the 1950s jazz fans of Beaulieu Jazz Festival through to the peace and love politics of the hippies and the 'Woodstock Nation' (see Bennett 2004 for a number of chapters on this topic) and onwards to the post-hippie neo-tribes of the New Age Travellers and the

later 'Free Party' ravers (see Sandford and Reid 1974; Clarke 1982; Collin and Godfrey 1997; McKay 2000, 2004; Worthington 2004; St John 2009). In the process, outdoor rock and pop music festivals in particular have been theorized as contemporary flowerings of what Mikhail Bakhtin termed the 'carnavalesque': a temporary period of 'letting loose' in which societal norms are inverted, removed or mocked, authority critiqued and consumptive or transgressive behaviours taken to extremes (Bakhtin 1984; Stallybrass and White 1986). A range of countercultural interests has been added to this, such as pro-environmentalism, anti-materialism, anti-corporatism, social justice, New Age beliefs and a nostalgic desire for a pre-capitalist, mythological or enchanted society (Hetherington 2001; Worthington 2004; Partridge 2006). Above all, perhaps, is the belief that outdoor music festivals offer utopian possibilities, that they are (or should be) times and places that provide 'freedom from' social norms and expectations and 'freedom to' play with, transform, or create new norms (Turner 1982, 36). Hence, contemporary trends in festivals towards commercialization and sponsorship are negatively linked to other trends such as the increasing regulation, standardization and domestication that these bring (St John 2009, 9–13).

Outdoor music festivals have, as shown later, adopted a variety of strategies for dealing with sponsorships, and while there are some promoters and festival-goers who regard sponsorships with suspicion, the majority of festivals make use of sponsorship opportunities in order to provide financial support, additional attractions and assistance in marketing, promotion and media coverage. Several studies (such as Havas 2012; Drury 2013) have also shown that there is increasing acceptance or support for live music sponsorship and branding activities at festivals, though such studies tend to rely on audience surveys at large-scale music festivals where sponsorship is prevalent, rather than a broader sample of all event types.

Definitions and forms of sponsorship

Two regularly quoted definitions of sponsorship in broad terms are those produced by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and by the International Events Group (IEG):

any commercial agreement by which a sponsor, for the mutual benefit of the sponsor and sponsored party, contractually provides financing or other support in order to establish an association between the sponsor's image, brands or products and a sponsorship property [such as a festival] in return for rights to promote this association and/or for the granting of certain agreed direct or indirect benefits (ICC 2003, 2); a cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property [such as a festival] in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property. (IEG 2000, 1)

In each case the sponsor enters into a commercial transaction whereby it provides money or services in return for the direct or indirect benefits of exploiting (also known as 'leveraging' or 'activating') the association between the festival and the sponsor (discussed further below). This separates sponsorship from philanthropy, which may be defined as the donation of funds or services without the expectation of receiving a commercial return. However, there is a grey area between these two positions, as many festivals operate with non-commercial sponsors, while smaller events in particular often benefit from various kinds of informal arrangement. Furthermore, the ICC definition suggests that sponsors are seeking to benefit from the semiotic associations of their involvement with music festivals (whether festivals in general or the image of specific events). In effect they are aiming for alignment between their own brands and the brand of the sponsored event. This is as true of non-commercial sponsors and corporate philanthropy as it is of the kinds of commercial sponsorship agreements that are focused on in this chapter. For instance, non-commercial sponsors have imperatives to satisfy regarding the continuance of their own income streams; hence their festival sponsorship decisions may have important implications for their own future funding. As the above definitions refer to events in general, the following typology is suggested with regard to music festivals.

First, there are 'non-commercial' sponsorships in the form of grants or donations provided by regional and local governments, private organizations or individuals and, in the United Kingdom, the Arts Councils and the National Lottery. For instance, the Green Man Festival in Wales receives support from the Welsh Assembly, the National Lottery and the Bevan Foundation, in addition to both the Arts Council of Wales and the Arts Council of England. Here the 'return on investment' for the sponsor may relate to a set of cultural, social, economic or touristic goals that the festival organizer must duly address. There is a politics of such sponsorships which is beyond the terms of this present chapter, yet in need of further research. For instance, how and why are decisions made regarding which music festivals to support, and by implication which organizations, locations, social groups and genres of music will or will not benefit from that support?

Secondly, there are informal arrangements of reciprocity which have similar effects to formal sponsorships in terms of in-kind benefits received by festival organizers, but which are not fully philanthropic in nature. For instance, many small festivals rely on favours from companies and individuals who provide services or equipment for free or at a discount. This support helps to build goodwill within the local music community, and this in turn may translate into future business opportunities, or the return of in-kind favours to the sponsor by those involved in the festival organization. Unlike formal commercial sponsorships, these arrangements are typically organized without a written contract and while such supporters are sometimes acknowledged on event posters or literature, there may be

no clear indication of the existence of the relationship to festival-goers. The benefits to the sponsor instead lie in forging or bolstering business-to-business relationships.

Finally, there are formally contracted commercial sponsorships with local, national and international businesses where the aim is to achieve a commercial return of some form on the investment made. Various motivations can be proposed: to build brand awareness and visibility, to increase sales and/or market share, to introduce new products or services and to either differentiate the brand from its competitors or reposition it within the marketplace. Central to all of these aims is the assumption that by aligning a brand with a festival, the sponsor will gain access to a specific target market (or aspirational market) that is receptive to sponsor messages because they are experiencing the 'good times' that festivals offer, and so will come to associate those good times with the sponsor. This is, effectively, a form of corporate image management aimed at forging a credible link between a specific brand and a particular event, audience, lifestyle, genre and/or activity. Additional motivations include internal communications and business-to-business relationships, especially through the use of VIP ticket allocations for selected suppliers, clients and staff.

Typical business sectors at the national and international level include telecommunications, financial services, alcoholic beverages and soft drinks, clothing and footwear and various forms of media. Since the turn of the millennium, the range of sponsorship deals has increased, particularly towards lifestyle-related products and services such as car manufacturers, restaurants, supermarkets, confectionery, fragrances, hair and make-up products and so on. However, two particularly important sub-categories deserve further discussion: 'pouring rights' and 'media rights'.

Pouring rights give a specific company control of a festival's bars and the choice of drinks on offer (though this may be split between alcoholic and soft drinks). A major example is Carlsberg UK, which signed a deal with Live Nation in 2008 (renewed for a further 5 years in 2013) that gives the company pouring rights at all the main festivals related to Live Nation. This includes Download, Wireless and Creamfields, as well as the Reading and Leeds Festivals (since Live Nation is the majority shareholder of the holding company which owns Festival Republic). As a result, all of these festivals offer Tuborg lager and Somersby cider (both brands of Carlsberg) for sale in the arena bars, to the exclusion of other brands: an effective on-site monopoly that is supported by the interdiction against festival-goers bringing their own alcohol into the performance arena (though they can take their own alcohol into the campsites). One effect of such deals and arrangements is that it reinforces the perception that major festivals are becoming too 'alike', too 'corporate' or only interested in making profits from the captive festival audience within the arena.

Media rights are agreements made with radio stations, television channels, magazines (both online and print) and various providers of online

media services. The companies involved may provide cash sums to the festival, but are more likely to provide benefits in kind in the form of free advertising in return for access to exclusive content from the festival, such as previews, photography, exclusive artist interviews, film clips, VIP access and permission to produce on-site news sheets or festival-specific Apps for smartphones. Mainstream media coverage of outdoor music festivals has grown considerably since the early 1990s, with the now-defunct *Melody Maker* producing its first pull-out festival guide in 1993, and Glastonbury Festival gaining televised coverage for the first time in 1994. The increased visibility and championing of festivals in the traditional media, together with a broadening of interest online and in fashion, lifestyle and celebrity gossip titles, has helped to drive changes in public perceptions of the sector, making festivals more accessible and desirable for a wider part of the population and contributing both to the sector's growth and to the broadening of corporate sponsorship interest (see also Anderton forthcoming).

Leveraging and activation

Leveraging (or badging) is a relatively passive form of sponsorship in which the sponsor's logo is placed on festival posters, tickets and wristbands, and on the official website and souvenir programme. The most visible examples are 'title' or 'presenting' sponsorships, where the brand name is incorporated into the name of the festival and naming rights for individual stages, tents or areas within the festival arena. The festival's logo is often used on the sponsor's products or promotions (such as in-store displays and on-product competitions), while online leveraging is conducted through the brand's own website and social media channels. The aim of the latter is to forge ongoing relationships with festival-goers by encouraging Facebook 'likes', Twitter 'followers' and the collection of personal data useful for marketing initiatives. Leveraging also refers to on-site advertising and free product sampling, as well as backstage hospitality and product-gifting provided to journalists and selected suppliers and staff of the sponsor. Press and social media are particularly important to both sponsors and festival organizers as they provide promotion/awareness for the event and sponsors, and because the impact of sponsorship is often measured as column inches in magazines (traditional) or social media hits (known as 'impressions' – including website visits, Twitter 'followers' and Facebook 'likes'). If these figures are good, sponsors will believe that they have achieved a return on their investment and so be attracted to renew their support. Moreover, positive social media impressions can potentially attract both new sponsors and new attendees.

Leveraging has been seen in music festivals for many years, with alcohol sponsorships particularly prevalent. For instance, in 1986, the Guinness

Brewery launched the Harp Beat campaign to promote its Harp Lager brand. It sponsored over a hundred live concerts in that year, including an event at the Milton Keynes Bowl. In 1987, the annual Monsters of Rock festival at Donington Park added 'Harp Beat 87 presents' to its posters and advertisements. However, there was no on-stage branding at the festival, and sponsorship of rock music in the United Kingdom was still in its infancy during the 1980s. This began to change when the Mean Fiddler organization became involved with the long-running Reading Festival. The 1989 event was 'supported by Melody Maker' (which became a stage sponsor in 1991), and during the 1990s the event gained additional sponsorships from the likes of Doc Martens, Carlsberg, Virgin Megastores, MTV, Red Bull, Converse and Loaded. A title sponsorship was then negotiated with Carling lager, which saw the festival renamed The Carling Weekend from 1998 to 2007, and the introduction of a sister event of the same name in Leeds from 1999 (see Figure 55).

The term 'sponsor activation' appears from the early to mid-2000s (Wakefield 2012, 146) and marks a shift towards experiential marketing. The leveraging or 'badging' of events with a logo was seen as an ineffective way to engage consumers; instead, sponsors focus on delivering 'added value' activities, services and settings relevant to a festival context in order to foster active and interactive engagements with their brands. The aim is to create playful, imaginative and memorable multi-sensory experiences that not only become associated with the sponsor but are also regarded as enhancing the festival experience as a whole (Pine and Gilmore 1998; Carù and Cova 2007a). Drengner et al. (2008, 138–9) refer to such activations as 'event marketing': the creation of an event/activity which propagates marketing messages. At larger events, there may be many such activities



FIGURE 55 Carling Leeds Festival stage 2006.

within the boundaries of the festival arena, situated within both the public and the backstage VIP areas depending on the particular aims of the sponsor involved.

Backstage activations target key opinion formers and media who will hopefully disseminate stories about those activations, and so publicize the sponsor relationship. In contrast, arena activations are aimed at festival-goers in general and are intended not only to 'add value' to their experience, but also to stimulate positive word-of-mouth coverage across social media platforms. Carù and Cova (2007a, 41) note that sponsor activations are experiential spaces which need to be 'enclavized' (separated off), 'secured' (under the control of the brand) and 'thematized' (through the use of relevant designs and narratives). The first two elements are important because the festival setting as a whole is one in which there is a high degree of distraction from other people, brands and entertainments, while the final element is crucial for the brand to construct a compelling, distinctive and memorable setting and experience (Pine and Gilmore 1998).

A good example of sponsor activation is the Southern Comfort Juke Joint (Figures 56 and 57), which won the 2012 Best Brand Activation Award at the UK Festival Awards. It was a specially created venue (enclavized and secured), designed (thematized) to look like an authentic run-down New Orleans 'juke joint' (a semi-legal drinking den of the past), with neon signs and a rough-looking corrugated iron and wood façade. Inside and around this hyperreal space there was a house party atmosphere generated by DJs, a New Orleans-style jazz band and a number of people employed to create characters such as 'Reggie Two-Step', who would engage directly with the public. The bar served a variety of cocktails based on Southern Comfort, and the overall aim was to help position the alcohol brand as a fun, creative and youthful drink that could be enjoyed in clubs throughout the year, while generating positive press and social media awareness. In a short video about the Southern Comfort Juke Joint festivals campaign, branding



FIGURE 56 *The Southern Comfort Juke Joint at UK festivals, 2012.*



FIGURE 57 *New Orleans-style parade band and second liners in Southern Comfort promotion.*

company Frukt stated that its main aims were to change the perception of Southern Comfort by fusing the brand's Louisiana heritage with a modern house party vibe and to tour the activation around the United Kingdom's top festivals. It reported that in 2012 the Juke Joint received 100,000 attendees across four festivals, with audience surveys finding a 92 per cent positive response to the brand experience and over 45 per cent of respondents stating that they were now more likely to drink Southern Comfort (Frukt 2012).

Strategies for engaging (or not) with sponsors

I want now to introduce and discuss three key sponsorship engagement strategies for festival organizers: affirmation, acceptance and avoidance. Affirmation refers to festival promoters who actively embrace sponsorship propositions or work with brands to create 'sponsor-owned' events: ones which are created specifically for a brand. The larger commercial events managed by national and international concert promoters are perhaps the most obvious examples of the affirmation strategy, as they accept numerous sponsorships and can negotiate with those sponsors across more than one event. It is interesting to note that Live Nation now refers to its festival sponsors as 'partners' (as does Glastonbury Festival), thus attempting to lessen the negative connotations that some festival attendees see in the term 'sponsorship'.

Acceptance refers to festival promoters who want or need the benefits of sponsor support but who make ideological or ethical decisions about which sponsors to work with. For instance, the Sunrise Celebration website states the following:

Our partners are carefully selected based on their values and suitability to our core aims as a festival and nation. We believe that innovative partnerships add value to Sunrise and help us in our quest for sustainability on all levels. (Sunrise Celebration 2014)

Festivals which adopt the acceptance strategy typically seek local business sponsors, those with similar ethical or environmental ideals, or those who promise to donate some of their income to charitable causes. A variant of this strategy is that adopted by the Glastonbury Festival, which accepts corporate sponsors but does not promote them on its website and marketing materials. This 'covert' form of sponsorship includes long-term relationships with mobile network operator EE (formerly Orange), which provides on-site recharging facilities and free wi-fi, and the BBC, *Guardian* newspaper and *Q* music magazine, which provide key media services. Glastonbury Festival has received criticism about its sponsorships, with some arguing that the media side of the event now dominates or overshadows its countercultural heritage (Street 2005).

A common element to the strategies of affirmation and acceptance is the need for 'congruence' or 'fit' between the values and attributes of the sponsor and those of the festival and its audience (Drengner et al. 2011). A poor 'fit', or a poorly imagined and delivered activation, can lead to criticisms of both the brand and the festival. One such example is the 'Show Me Your Sloggis' stage at V Festival in 2007 and 2008, which aimed to promote a unisex range of underwear (Sloggis). In addition to a stage with DJs, dancers, skateboarders and a fashion show, free samples were thrown to the crowd and a special photo booth was set up for festival-goers to enter the brand's search for 'the world's most beautiful bottom' (with a modelling contract and other prizes for the eventual winner). Several hundred festival-goers reportedly entered the competition in 2007, yet a reviewer at Virtualfestivals.com described the stage as 'leery, cringey and unnecessary', while the general opinion of the activation was that it was inappropriate for a festival context (Roberts 2009).

The final strategy is avoidance, where festival promoters consciously choose to manage their event *without* sponsorship support. A high-profile example was Vince Power's Hop Farm Festival (2008–12) which proclaimed a back to basics ideology and sought to survive by booking high-profile artists to drive sell-out attendances. After initial success, the difficulty of this position was finally demonstrated in 2013 when the event was cancelled because of poor pre-event sales and Power's company went into administration. An alternative justification for sponsor avoidance lies

in the continued influence of the countercultural carnivalesque (Anderton 2009). Shambala Festival, for example, lists a number of 'guiding principles' on its website that illustrate this:

Festivals should be an alternative vision of society. They should be utopias, places where interacting with fellow humans isn't a hassle but a pleasure. [The festival is] 100 per cent independent and will always be so. This means being free of any external agendas or demands, excessive advertising and branding and mindless consumerism. (Shambala Festival 2014)

Nevertheless, large corporately run events with a heavy brand presence in the form of sponsor activations have grown in number and popularity over the past 20 years while, as noted earlier, surveys of festival-goers suggest that sponsorship is either accepted as a necessary part of controlling costs and securing headliners, or indeed viewed as an attractive part of a festival's entertainment offering.

Audience acceptance of sponsorship and branding

Rojek (2013, 14–6) argues that events such as music festivals respond to 'the urge to go beyond narrow, private concerns and the rigmarole of habitual, regimented existence' and that they are capable of establishing or reinforcing both individual and group identities, especially since the media typically portrays them as 'catalysts of life-affirming exhibitionism, festivity and transcendence' (103). He places events firmly within the 'hospitality, leisure and tourism industries' (1); in his view, rather than being heirs to a countercultural heritage, contemporary music festivals may be examined as consumer commodities and spectacles much like the shopping malls, casinos and theme parks discussed by Bryman (2004) and Ritzer (1999). These use simulated settings to create hyperreal experiential products, where hyperreality is defined as an 'inclination or willingness among members of the culture to realize, construct, and live the simulation' (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). From this perspective, contemporary music festivals are simulations or pastiches, which merely play with the imagery and ideas associated with the countercultural carnivalesque. They may not be 'real' but are treated as if they are, hence their experience is legitimized. For instance, the Southern Comfort Juke Joint created an imaginary version of a New Orleans bar that never existed, complete with New Orleans-style parade band and second liners (Figure 4), while many festivals trade upon a loose 'Woodstock Nation' or Glastonbury Fayre-style narrative of peace, love and freedom, or the perceived image of the late 1980s/early 1990s rave culture (Anderton 2009, 2011, forthcoming).

The growth of music festival sponsorship is indicative of changes in the development of the wider consumer society. The 1990s saw the introduction of commercial satellite and cable television, the sponsorship of individual television programmes (for instance, the popular soap opera *Coronation Street* gained its first sponsor in 1996), and the growth of the internet with its now-almost-ubiquitous advertising banners and links. Popular internet sites, music streaming services, email providers, computer games and social media channels all make considerable use of sponsorship and advertising, and contemporary festival-goers in the 16–24 age range in particular have grown up with this world. Furthermore, Miles argues that consumerism has ‘become part and parcel of the very fabric of everyday life’ (1998, 1), such that people work with commodities to help frame their sense of self, and to communicate to others through the consumption choices they make: that music festivals should be used to further this work, or that contemporary consumers should be willing to accept sponsorship and branding at outdoor events, should come as no surprise.

Nevertheless, Carù and Cova (2007b) warn that festival-based sponsor activations offer shallow and manipulative forms of experience that leave little room for truly participatory activity. Instead, festival-goers are urged to take part in activities and settings that are staged for the benefit of sponsors and are closely controlled by them. In this sense, festival-goers may actually be more passive than active in such situations, while truly creative, self-directed and participatory experience may be restricted to the campsites where the control of sponsors and organizers is generally weaker.

To conclude, I have suggested in this chapter that the countercultural carnivalesque underpins objections to the rise of sponsorship and branding at festivals, while changes in consumer society and the commercialization and growth of the music festival sector as a whole mean that these objections are not shared by all. There are significant financial pressures involved in promoting festivals, hence sponsorship of one form or another has become a useful and sometimes necessary way for festival organizers to mitigate the risks involved. Nevertheless, the growth and diversification of the festival sector over the past 20 years means that space exists for events to follow each of the strategies of brand affirmation, acceptance and avoidance identified above. In the contemporary festival market there may well be something for everyone, though whether these events offer truly participatory experience or hyperreal simulations remains a matter for continued debate.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Everybody talk about pop music: Un-Convention as alternative to festival, from DIY music to social change

Andrew Dubber

... it's not like a traditional type of festival, but yeah – let's say a musical celebration and bringing people together.

UN-CONVENTION CO-FOUNDER RUTH DANIELS, 2014

Un-Convention began in 2008 as a small gathering of grassroots and independent music industry professionals over two days in a church hall in Salford, UK. The event featured music performances and seminars about the ways in which artists and small, entrepreneurial music businesses could be sustainable in the digital age. Importantly, the gathering acted as a networking opportunity for a sector of the industry that had previously not had access to professional networks. The event took place against a backdrop of In The City, a major music industry event in Manchester. Delegates from Belfast proposed a follow-up event in their own city, and Un-Convention became a recurring and repeatable platform for the independent sector. The Belfast conference changed the parameters of Un-Convention in line with the needs and suggestions of participants within the local independent music ecology, while keeping with the broad theme of sustainability, innovation and mutual support.