

IF YOU CAN'T JOIN THEM – BEAT THEM

**JUST DO IT
YOURSELF**

by LOTD

Have you always dreamed of working for a festival, but did all your application letters go unanswered? Or maybe you've emailed a thousand festivals, but your band never got booked? Just start your own festival! Easier said than done? Yes, that obviously applies to almost everything in life, but nothing is impossible. Glastonbury also had a very first edition, so just give it a go with this DIY guide in mind.

Not every festival has to last three days and attract tens of thousands of punters. Of course, intuitively you feel there's a definite distinction between an ordinary concert and an official festival, but as far as we're concerned, there's absolutely no harm done when you announce four bands in your local pub as a festival. You can always expand in the years following, and before you know it, you will be a household name in the festival landscape. But where to begin? To help you get started, we have divided the organisation of a festival into six categories and asked experts to elaborate on their responsibilities. →

STEP 1

THE CONCEPT

Coming up with a concept would be the logical first step. Sure, it's absolutely fine to organise a festival for the sole reason that you think it's a fun thing to do, but things will be simpler if you sit down and sketch the outlines of your event. The bottom line is that when you do this, it'll make every next step easier. Think about the genres of music that fit with your ideas of the perfect lineup, or what kind of audience your festival should appeal to. Decide if your festival should be indoors or outdoors. It doesn't matter if you keep it short and simple or write an extensive paper, as long as the concept is clear to everyone helping you organising the festival, you'll be fine.

Efterklang's Sommertræf (Loshult, Sweden)

Since 2021 Efterklang - the Danish indie band from Copenhagen - have organised Efterklang's Sommertræf, a six-day intimate summer festival. The first five days consist of a residency that they use for working on new ideas, and for new collaborations with other artists. On the sixth day they open the doors to the general public for a very communal day. Artists and punters all participate and experience the same events during the day. They walk together, dine together, enjoy concerts together, and late at night they might very well all dance together. Bass player Rasmus Stolberg explains the idea behind the concept of the festival:

'In the very first days of our career, back in 2003-2005 we organised most of our concerts ourselves and then during the last 10 years we've been heavily involved in other festivals, so it did not feel too scary to organise something ourselves. The Sommertræf is inspired by our participation in the People Festival in Berlin 2018, and different writing residencies we did between 2014 and 2016 with Liima, our other band that we share with Tatu Rönkkö. We used all those experiences together with our acquired organisational skills to put the concept together.

We worked everything out and wrote it down in detail. It is very much an attempt to create a different kind of event that is much more about community and creating. From the beginning it felt more conceptualised than other projects we do, mainly because it's influenced by playing different festivals all over the world. The concept still keeps changing however, and our idea of what the Sommertræf is, also evolves. Each year we have a different focus. 2021 was about developing a live version of our new

album *Windflowers*, 2022 was about writing and testing new songs, 2023 will be about our 20-year anniversary, and will have many more guests than the previous years.

If somebody wants to start their own festival, my advice would be to build it around your existing skills and network, and at the same time be brave and take some creative chances. There are plenty of commercial festivals - I suggest letting yours grow from community and a desire for creation - then perhaps later it can turn into a business as well.'



Photography:
Søren Lynggaard



Skinfest (Mierlo, the Netherlands)

Dutch hardcore band Raylin proved that coming up with a concept doesn't always have to be a complex process. There wasn't much going on in their hometown, and they desperately wanted to play more shows to meet new people. One of the bandmembers lived in a house with a large barn and a huge lawn that could easily accommodate 200 people, so finding a suitable location was one thing they didn't have to worry about. They then made a list of their festival philosophies:

- The whole idea was to make new friends, so to make it attractive for people to come to the festival ticket prices had to be low: €15 including free camping and an unlimited supply of beer. With the help of friends and family they set up a simple catering service with a menu consisting of sausage sandwiches for €1.
- One of the other reasons to organise the festival was to create a place where they could perform themselves, but they also wanted to give as many new bands as possible a chance to play, they therefore decided that they would never book bands twice, only Raylin would be included in each annual lineup.
- It had to be a "regulation-free" festival. No strict rules, and no security. It had to be an event with a freer atmosphere than what you'd normally experience at a festival.

The band explains that it all worked out wonderfully well: 'Our approach to the whole thing was, let's just do it, and see what happens. People often think that with an unlimited supply of free beer, and no security, you're heading straight for a chaotic mess, but nothing could be further from the truth.

It's really that laid-back atmosphere that makes people look out for each other. Over the years we have learned not to worry too much about the small details. Some things simply can't be planned. OK, the bands need to know exactly what to expect. You have to make sure they know what equipment is available, and what the other facilities are like. Other than that, you just have to go with the flow. As long as there's beer, and the bands are playing, people will always find a way to enjoy themselves.' →

Photography: Skinfest



STEP 2

THE PERFECT LOCATION

A sensible second step would be to find a suitable location. Big or small, it doesn't matter, one of the most important requirements is that it meets all safety standards. Additionally, the location must be a good match with your concept both in terms of atmosphere, and in terms of capacity. And not unimportantly; it must fit your budget. The choice of location greatly affects your production expenses: if your festival takes place in two regular music venues that are already fully equipped with everything a live show requires, you will obviously spend a lot less money than if you were to build your own festival site somewhere on a green meadow. One thing is certain, to find the ideal spot you need to have a bit of luck.

Outer Town (Bristol, UK)

Outer Town is based in Bristol's Old Market Quarter, on the outskirts of Bristol's city centre; the street hosts a great selection of small independent bars and venues which are within a very short distance of each other. The concept for the festival, amongst some other factors, originated from hearing complaints from punters of other multi-venue festivals, that most of their day was taken up walking from venue to venue and then waiting outside of a venue to get in. Outer Town crams as many bands as possible into the day, creating fast venue rotation within the crowd, as punters try to catch as many bands as they can. No venue is more than a 5-minute walk from another. The clashes, and the short distance between venues make it less likely for punters to hide in one venue all day. Organiser Harry Dodson talks about this setup: 'There isn't a shortage of venues on Old Market Street. But the majority of the venues are a small capacity. This means that we can introduce more stages and more bands, but we are limited in the scale of artists that we can book. Currently, the largest venue is a 500 capacity, and the smallest is 60, so booking artists for the correct venue is crucial for crowd management. The festival has a variety of options to grow capacity-wise, but this could mean some longer walks for punters. There are some 1000+ capacity venues nearby and we could open one venue up to host more stages. These are all options to discuss in the future.

Working on one street makes it far easier to run equipment around. The main struggle is that we're working with so many venues. Most venues provide a PA and backline, but there are always bits that need to be sourced prior to the event to prevent any hiccups. Glitch is a hair-dresser/tattoo studio day-to-day, so we have to bring in everything for this stage. We also

host an after-party in Moor Beer's brewery so that needs some planning too. All in all, it's not too difficult when you've got a solid set-up and breakdown plan.

You want to work with venues that hold the same values, and similar goals. The most important factor is capacity and how the crowd will move and react within the envisioned festival setting. Safety is important, and the punter's experience is what will keep them coming back. Just go to some gigs and when you find a cool venue you'll know.'



Photography:
Jamie Macmillan



Misty Fields (Astén, the Netherlands)

Misty Fields is an independent discovery festival on the edge of the wooded nature reserve *De Groote Peel* in the south of the Netherlands. Loek Hendrikkx, who is responsible for the marketing and promotion of the festival talks about the special location:

'Misty Fields takes place in an outdoor area that offers a lot of space for camping and parking, and not unimportantly: it has a great tolerance for noise. The location of the festival - around and in a small, but idyllic forest - makes Misty Fields what it is, and it definitely contributes to its success. Everything is centred around this forest. In addition to the forest stage, our main stage is also located at the edge of the forest, and we try to use the forest in our decoration and lighting. The experience and the atmosphere are just as important as the music at our festival.

Misty Fields was born 16 years ago from a neighbourhood party. They looked for a location and arrived at the current site because it was not only remote, but also had a large piece of land on a private property. The party was such a success that it became an annual event. This eventually grew into what we call Misty Fields today, with around 3,000 punters daily. The choice of location initially wasn't made with the intention of organising a large-scale festival, which makes it all the more special that it turned out so incredibly well. The local support for Misty Fields is still strong around here. We never receive complaints, and the festival is warmly welcomed. This is very important to us, because we demand a lot from the immediate area for a few days of the year.

Although we see our location as a big plus, it obviously also has disadvantages. Throughout the year, Misty Fields is a secluded forest with a large lawn surrounding it, there are no existing sanitary facilities we can use. Everything has to be built from scratch in a few weeks. From the toilets to the stages, and simple things like fencing, road plates, et cetera. It's a large logistic operation which isn't cheap. An outdoor location also means that we are dependent on the weather, which is one of the reasons why we have now placed two of our stages in large tents. The build-up of Misty Fields starts three weeks before the festival. However, our art and decoration team are busy all year round inventing new creations for our forest, and the field. One of the most amazing moments is when on Friday - the first day of the festival - the sun slowly sinks, it starts to get dark, and our forest lights up in the most beautiful colours. You can't put a price to that.

If you want to organise a festival yourself, remember that the location largely contributes to the atmosphere, so try to find a unique place to distinguish yourself from other festivals. First



of all, choose a location that is easy to reach for suppliers, and the number of punters you expect. Make sure there is enough space to park, for example. However, the most important thing is that you are in sync with your immediate environment. Make sure there is support, involvement, and tolerance. That way you don't get any complaining neighbours. →



Photography: Misty Fields



STEP 3

THE PERFECT LINEUP

At the end of the day, only one thing really matters: music. That should be the main reason to start your own festival. You might even have built your entire concept around a few artists (or your own band). But, if that's not the case, the lineup will be a matter of deliberation. Which artists suit your festival, who is available, which bands can you afford and, not unimportantly, which ones attract enough punters?

Leffingeleuren (Leffinge, Belgium)

A discovery festival for music enthusiasts and partygoers, that's how the organisers describe the three-day event in Leffinge. The lineup has featured many bands that were unknown at the time but subsequently managed to attract large crowds with their club shows, including Idles, Squid, Julia Jacklin, Amyl & The Sniffers, and Rolling Blackouts CF. While most of the bands are guitar-oriented, there's also plenty of room for global sounds, jazz, hip-hop, and DJs at the festival. Artistic director Lode Pauwels isn't satisfied until the festival offers not only the noisy guitars but also moments of quiet reflection and plenty of dancing. He talks about the process of putting together the perfect lineup: 'Each band must align with the festival's profile, although this profile is more intuitive than something we've detailed extensively on paper. We often perceive different musical themes running through the programme, but whether festival-goers experience them the same way is hard to say. Sometimes, we reject perfectly good artists who could sell many tickets simply because we believe they don't quite fit the festival's vibe.

Every year, we feature several Belgian artists, some of whom are crucial in terms of audience reach, serving as headliners or at least co-headliners. It involves consistently monitoring the local music scene and booking the relevant bands well in advance. However, for certain small, local Belgian acts, we can afford to wait a bit longer before confirming their participation.

At times, a single international artist defines an entire day, and we build the lineup around that particular name. However, this is easier said than done, and sometimes it's quite challenging to secure an early commitment from an artist who has the weight to anchor the programme. We aim to craft a unique narrative for each festival day while maintaining cohesion with the others. The pieces of the puzzle don't always fit together seamlessly, and there are instances where we must patiently await that one specific element to fall into place.

We engage international artists through various methods. Often, booking agencies offer them to us, but just as frequently, we actively pursue them ourselves. We create a list and

check which bands are currently on tour. This is especially important when dealing with American bands, as their availability is largely dictated by their tour schedules.

Clearly, finances also play a pivotal role. Ultimately, your budget needs to balance. However, even if a band's fee aligns with our budget, we wouldn't book them if we felt they were asking for an exorbitant sum. On the other hand, there are always bands in the lineup that we don't expect to draw massive crowds, but we simply adore them. Nevertheless, they still need to complement the other acts, perhaps providing a musical counterbalance if one genre becomes too dominant. Some bands are essen-

tially booked to boost ticket sales. Accurately assessing a band's value comes with years of experience and a keen awareness of trends in the previous season. Yet, the challenge remains in dealing with band availability and sometimes, bands that demand excessive fees. So, yes, there are days when a lot of frustration bubbles up...

If you're considering organising a festival yourself, the first step is to determine your primary motivation. Do you aim to generate substantial profits, or is it more about booking bands you genuinely love but rarely perform in your area? Regardless of your objective, start by establishing a budget.'



Top: Karen Vandenberghe
Left: Tom Leentjes

Sniester (The Hague, the Netherlands)

Sniester was founded in 2013 and is held annually in the center of The Hague. The festival serves as evidence that there's no harm in completely altering the artistic direction of your programme if, along the way, you sense that something isn't quite right. Head of talent Marco Bijsterbosch explains:

'When we first started out, we had five talent buyers, each with their own specialisation. As a result, we indirectly expected our audience to have an extremely broad taste in music, but that was just too much to ask. Everyone has their own preferences. This made the festival a bit too diffuse, and people were left wondering what kind of festival it really was.

Over the last three years, we've chosen a clear direction: Sniester is an explosive alternative festival that still pushes boundaries, but the lineup is no longer as diverse as before. I wouldn't call Sniester a guitar-based festival; other genres will also fit just fine, as long as they are "loud" and alternative.

As a talent buyer I get a lot of emails with offers from bands, and booking agencies and I really do try to check everything that comes in. I often immediately search YouTube for a live video of the band in question, so that I know what to expect. I also listen to a lot of (online) radio such as BBC6, Studio Brussel, Kink and Pinguin, which often feature great bands. And of course, I also regularly visit showcase festivals such as Left of the Dial, Reeperbahn Festival and Eurosonic. At Left of the Dial I spot several bands that I then try to get to Sniester. Sometimes I manage to book those bands, sometimes it doesn't work out, alas, because you obviously have to deal with the availability of artists.



Top: Parcifal Werkman
Next down: Mees Trouwborst
Left: Nikki Born

If you are putting a festival lineup together for the very first time, you should try to give your event a clear image from the start. That works best and it makes it a lot easier to find the right mixture of bands. Make sure you have a good team with like-minded people behind you. Be positive, you are the engine behind everything, try to get (and keep!) everyone excited about the bands you've booked. Oh, and always check a live video of the band you book. A band can sound super cool on Spotify, or look great in a professionally directed video, but that doesn't necessarily mean they'll deliver live.' →

STEP 4

THE ALL-ENTAILING PRODUCTION

The word 'production' covers just about everything that is needed to organise a festival, besides the financing, programming, and promotion. Overall, and in the simplest of terms, a good producer ensures that the artists can do their job, and that the punters ultimately go home safely and satisfied. That may sound easy enough, but it involves quite a bit of work.

Levitation France (Angers, France)

Levitation France celebrated its tenth edition this year with 2,000 revellers. The two-day festival in Angers, France is exceptionally well-organised. Anaïs Carre of the production company Radical Production explains how much work goes into simply getting bands on stage:

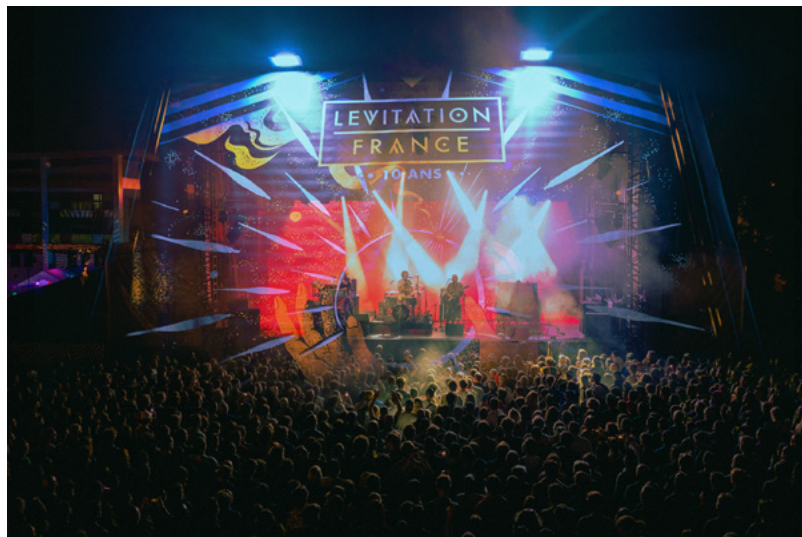
'The biggest mistake you can make is not being organised enough. We start the preparation, or as it's called in the music industry "the advancing" one month before the show dates. Firstly, we ask the bands, or their agents all the details. For example: how does the band travel, their technical and hospitality riders, the number of people traveling with the band, do they bring everything themselves, or do they need any backline, et cetera. When we have all that mapped, we can start booking hotels and arranging equipment. That's a lot of information, so when doing production Excel sheets are your best friend.

The biggest misconception about festival production work is that it's just welcoming the bands. People usually don't consider all that the other things we have to deal with. During the festival we constantly check if bands have everything they need, we make sure they get the right passes, show them where they go for catering services, and we resolve any problem that might occur like unexpected guests, or extra hotel rooms for example. At the same time, we're also dealing with the volunteers, the staff and everyone on site. The production person is the one who gets called for ANY problem, so you have to be ready for anything and everything.

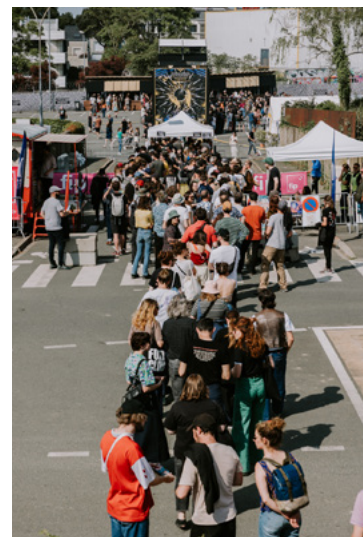
It helps when the artists are friendly, but they can really make your life easier by checking all the documents you've sent them, because generally that's where they find all the relevant information, and that saves time answering questions. But still, if you want to do this kind of job, you have to learn how to react quickly

and efficiently when something unexpected arrives. And without stress.

There are some "production rules" you learn when doing a production job, such as "one security guy for 100 people", but mostly it's kind of trial and error. You have to take some risks when you first start out and just try things. Eventually you learn with experience.'



Top: Ameline Vildaer **Next**
down: Mickael Liblin
Bottom: Mickael Liblin





Trænafestivalen (Træna, Norway)

The Træna Music Festival is proof that paradise doesn't always equal tropical. The festival takes place annually on a few Norwegian islands, on the edge of the Arctic Circle. The organisers strive to use the surrounding nature as the perfect backdrop for their concerts, and the remoteness of the location hasn't stopped them from booking acts like Manu Chao, Damien Rice, Wardruna and Yoshinori Hayashi. Venues have included an ancient cave, a church with blacked-out windows (to block out the midnight sun which shines for 23 hours a day), and tents. The islands are only accessible by boat, which could make the production side of the festival a rather daunting task. Festival organiser Viggo Randal always stays positive however.

'The main challenge is the fact that Træna is situated 33 nautical miles off shore. The capacity of the ferries is limited, so we often have to charter extra boats for both artists and the ticket holders. Normally the society of Træna houses 400 people, and it's almost six times as many during the festival. We welcome about 20% to 25% of foreign guests to the festival, which is a high number for a Norwegian festival. All hotel capacity on the island (30 rooms) is used for artists and staff, so the punters are mainly camping, and some of them bring their own boat.

Nearly all of the equipment is brought in from nearby cities. The island is connected to the mainland through a two-hour ferry trip. So, logistics are a massive part of what the planning of the festival amounts down to. You have to make really sure that all the equipment is on the car, you can't just go back to get something you forgot. Another complicated thing is the concert we have on Kirkhellere on the Saturday. It means we have to transport everybody back and forth to the other island, and that involves a lot of coordinating.



Photography:
Ludvik Baksaas

Last year we had a huge challenge getting both artists and audience to the island due to an ongoing airline strike, and we had to become very creative in how to get people to and from Træna. Since the festival is situated on a remote island far out at sea, we are also vulnerable to the weather. If the wind starts blowing, you might get cancellations of boats and ferries and then you have little time to come up with a solution. But all the things that make Træna seemingly so impossible to organise, are what makes it so spectacular in the end. To be stranded on an island far out at sea, makes the entire Træna experience magical, and creates an atmosphere you won't find in too many other places. So, my advice is don't give up. If it's easy it's probably not worth doing! →

STEP 5

THE FINANCIAL SIDE

All well and good, but there is always a financial side to consider. Even if everyone works on a voluntary basis, you will always incur costs that have to be covered one way or another. Manage your risks. You need to have a list of all your expenses, and you need to have a plan to cover them. Ticket sales, subsidies, sponsorships, those are the obvious things that will bring in money, but what else can you do to balance your budget?

Sea Change (Totnes, UK)

Sea Change is an intimate festival held in various venues across the southern UK town of Totnes. This year, Sea Change made the bold move of not increasing ticket prices like most festivals did but reducing them by 33%. Founder Rupert Morrison explains the importance of financial management for a festival: 'I hate to admit it, but the financial side is not just more important than the name, artistic direction, and vibe; it's essentially the most important thing. Sea Change has always had a very lo-fi aesthetic, and we've deliberately run it in an intimate and quite simple way. But without a strong understanding of what money is coming in and going out again, you can really get into trouble fast. Any decent providers for things like security, backline, or bars will gladly provide a quote, so ask around and put together a simple spreadsheet. Right back at the very start, we just ran through each day slowly and tried to foresee anything that needed covering to make for a rounded experience. There are quite a few resources for anyone looking to start out, like the website of the International Festival Forum, but really put in the research, as some slightly dull aspects like insurance, licensing, cooperation with your local residents and council are hugely important and might not be at the front of your mind. Be pessimistic. Project fewer ticket purchases, less bar revenue, and more costs; worst case, you'll end up with more revenue than you think!

We've always worked with really great and understanding beer providers. We have a great relationship with Verdant, for example, and they can see what we're trying to do and support us in getting there. We're lucky to have the support. Attracting commercial partners in this climate is difficult, but even if you do, you have to really think about what you're giving away and how that feels from the outside. Nobody wants to try and enjoy music with a huge logo obstructing their view. Just play it through: Is the money worth it?

The current economy in the UK is really bad and having big day-to-day impacts on people, especially among the audience who have regularly attended Sea Change over the years. We



Photography:
Sea Change

just felt that we needed to respect that community we'd built up by ensuring that they could afford to join us. Lowering the price for us really worked; we sold out very fast and avoided extra marketing costs, but I am sure that for some events it's not viable. It wasn't easy, but it was a good exercise in focusing on what was important and what could be cut. We saved money, saved resources, and passed it all back to the customers, which we know was greatly received.'



Punk Rock Raduno (Bergamo, Italy)

Punk Rock Raduno is not your regular summer festival. Together with youth centre Edoné, and with the full cooperation of the city of Bergamo, they offer the global pop punk community their favourite bands in the friendliest surroundings possible. No barriers in front of the stage, and no tight security check. And best of all: it's completely free. Punk Rock Raduno manages to attract an openminded crowd who are more than happy to spend the money they saved on admission tickets on other things to keep the festival running. Andrea Manges (who started the festival in 2016 together with Franz Barcella) on how they came up with creative ways to finance their festival:

'Organising a free festival is not easy! Not at all. However, it does make some things simpler. For example, selling tickets is obviously not an issue not an issue for a free festival. So, we can completely focus on booking the artists we like and we put all our energy in planning the best possible experience for our scene. That makes the work really enjoyable.

For a festival without ticket revenues, the help of sponsors is clearly important. We also get a percentage of all food and beverage income but really, there are many other ways to raise the budget. From the beginning we were lucky enough to finance the whole operation through merchandise sales, the sale of a magazine, a compilation LP of all the artist involved in each edition, a raffle, and a pay-per-view live stream. For years, we've booked all the rooms of a hostel in our town. We organised exclusive shows there, and we resold all accommodations to fellow punk rockers. That was another way of earning back some of the costs. I should also mention that we can rarely afford the regular fees of bands. Luckily it is a scene, or rather, a family reunion and most of the bands come on exceptionally friendly terms.

Our crowd is very grateful for the chance to see all these free shows and that makes them more than willing to spend money on merch, and to eat and drink at the venue. Our food is great, and fairly priced though! That's also because we care about the experience. Fair prices, no stress, no long queues, and great music. Our festival is nothing else than a passion project that has gotten slightly out of hand. And we wish to keep it that way. We consider ourselves lucky because the event never got unpleasantly big. We think our community and scene should be taken care of. It's not about the money, the biggest satisfaction is when I realise people are booking their trips even before we announce any of the artists.' →



Photography: Punk Rock Raduno

STEP 6

PROMOTION

You may have thought it all out down to the very last detail, but if nobody but the bands shows up, you haven't organised a festival; you have, more or less, arranged for a very expensive rehearsal session. So, the big question is: how do you get people to buy a ticket to your festival? Or if you're organising a free event: how do you get people to come down and spend their money at the bar?

Le Guess Who? (Utrecht, the Netherlands)

Le Guess Who? is an annual multi-day music festival in Utrecht. The festival was founded in 2007 and takes place in November at various locations in the city. While the festival certainly doesn't have a run-of-the-mill lineup (it focuses on avant-garde music from all over the world), it has managed to build up a loyal international audience over the years and ticket sales are already booming long before the full lineup is announced. Zsarà Grünfeld works for the festival's marketing and communications department and talks about the ways Le Guess Who? tries to reach its punters:

'We are very committed to creating content involving the artists on our lineup. We try to widely spread the background stories of their music on various social media platforms. To do this effectively, we engage in numerous media partnerships. I'm not talking about acquiring ad placements; we are looking for real collaboration with these partners. Partners that suit our festival, and they must have a following of the target group we want to reach. If they enthusiastically share our content, there's more than just a good chance that their supporters' interest is sparked.

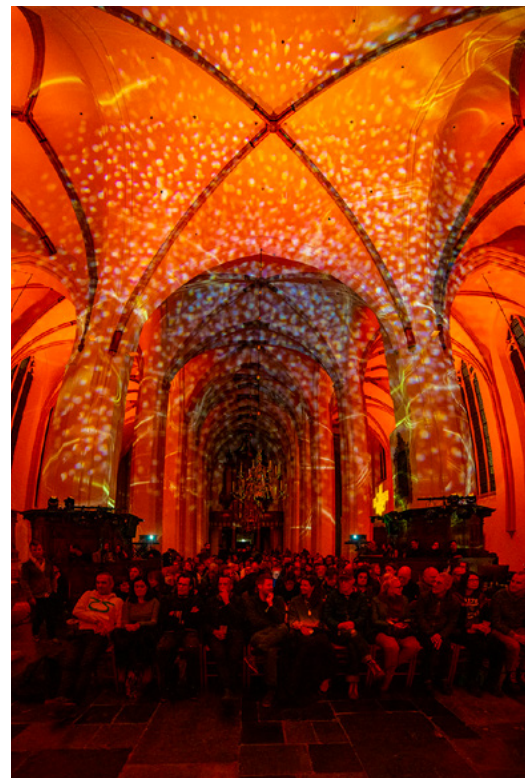
Often, the journalists working for our media partners mainly want to write a review of the festival. We then try to see if it is also possible to get some coverage of the festival beforehand, for example, through a preview or an interview with one of the artists to create some buzz. If you're aiming to reach an international audience, that's the most efficient way. You can place an ad, but if someone has never heard of the festival, and most of the announced names mean nothing to them, it's usually not enough to get them to buy a ticket. So, you'll have to figure out another way. You initially have to earn their trust. We managed to gain that trust from our regular punters. Le Guess Who? has no real headlines, and people are primarily there to discover new music, to be surprised. And each year they have discovered new music, and they have been surprised, so that makes it a lot easier the next year, of course.

It is important to keep in mind that every festival has to start from zero. For example, when we first set up an Instagram account, it was a fairly new medium. At this time, we have a



Top: Maarten Mooijman **Next down:** Lisanne Lentink **Right:** Le Guess Who?

substantial following, and it is actually the most important medium that we use. But now there's TikTok. We sometimes wonder if it's really a medium that suits us, but we'll explore all possibilities anyway because you have to keep up with current developments. It's important to always invest time in those kinds of things. Even if you don't like the idea of working with influencers because it perhaps doesn't feel like a good fit for your festival, you still have to look for other kinds of collaborations, including with your artists. Even as a brand-new festival, this is the best way to increase your reach quickly and drastically. You really don't have to do it all by yourself.'





It made it possible to travel from the Netherlands to Hungary in one go, on a train where the party starts as soon as it departs. At the time it made the headlines, and the attention for Sziget exploded. Now, it is considered an important part of the full Sziget experience.

To us, creating a festival that is successful internationally doesn't just start with promotion. I would advise you to organise your entire festival with your international punters in mind. Think of booking artists based on your focus markets, set up your website so that it is more accessible to other countries and provide advice to your potential audience regarding all available travel options to the event. Make it as easy as possible for them to decide to attend your festival.' 📍

Photography:
Sziget Festival

Sziget Festival (Budapest, Hungary)

Every year, thousands of "Szitizens" from all over the world travel to the Hungarian capital to spend six days on The Island of Freedom in the Danube. The festival offers a varied programme of big names, emerging bands, theatre, circus, workshops, dance, and art installations. It's remarkable how the festival manages to attract a large number of foreign punters to Budapest. A lot of work is put into this with the help of local partners. Dutch promoter Tomas Loeffen talks about Sziget's promotional efforts:

'The festival website is available in ten different languages, and we feel this tailor-made approach really makes a difference. The personal way of communicating – namely, in their own language, but also with content tailored to the target group – ensures that the threshold for potential ticket buyers is low. Its effectiveness has been proven by the great international growth we have experienced in the past ten years.

One unique aspect about Sziget is that we work with marketeers in different countries. We have a number of key markets. These are the most important countries to which we pay as much attention as possible, such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Because it is such an internationally orientated festival we came up with this system. The marketeers for those crucial countries know best how we can convey Sziget as a festival, and we then determine per country whether the focus should be predominantly on social media, influencers, or traditional media, for example.

If you take the Netherlands as an example: about 20 years ago, we sold a handful of tickets in the Dutch market. Over the years, this slowly increased to 200, 400, 1,000, and at one point we had close to 15,000 Dutch punters. Sziget turned out to be the perfect festival in terms of location, lineup, and the overall feeling of a "festival holiday". We managed to expand our ticket sales to more countries over time, making it a huge international festival.

A major breakthrough moment in the Netherlands was the organisation of the Sziget Express, which we started in 2009.

