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The Impact of Technology on Customer Service

'At Your Service' Spotlight: Leveraging Social Media at Bonnaroo Music Festival



Bonnaroo 2022. Photo courtesy of Bonnaroo/ Taylor Regulski

Concerts and live events are big business. Music events worldwide generated about \$34 billion in 2024, and such events are increasingly being used as instruments for promoting tourism and boosting regional economies. According to Oxford Economics if an out-of-town attendee spends \$100 on a concert ticket, the local economy benefits from an additional \$334, resulting in a total spending impact of \$434.

One of the secrets to the success of music festivals is expert and, increasingly, innovative use of social media marketing aimed at promoting the festivals and encouraging customer loyalty. The Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival, held annually in Manchester, Tennessee, relies heavily on aggressive digital marketing campaigns both to generate publicity and attract visitors. Tactics include estab-

lishing relationships with bloggers to stimulate excitement for the concerts, leveraging social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to achieve maximum exposure, and exploring mobile technology.

Set on a 700-acre farm, Bonnaroo typically attracts 85,000 attendees annually to its four-day camping festival each June. Ranked as one of the '50 Moments that Changed Rock & Roll' by *Rolling Stone* magazine, it was developed by Superfly Presents and AC Entertainment in 2002 and they continue to produce it annually, utilizing social media to sustain the momentum. Superfly's website says that it 'transformed bonnaroo.com from a website with information about the festival to a content-rich and socially-driven destination for "good stuff".'

At Bonnaroo 2011, an air-conditioned barn in the middle of the festival ground, sponsored by Fuse TV, offered a private concert with an up-and-coming artist for those who checked into the barn via Foursquare. Once a visitor had checked in, their followers would be able to see that they were at the Fuse TV barn and then choose to go there themselves. Organizers provided the fans with a free buffet, ice-cold water, and a chance to see an intimate live show with just 40 other people. In return for their simple check-in on Foursquare, fans were rewarded with an experience not found anywhere else in the festival.

This music and camping festival, with added attractions such as an on-site salon sponsored by Garnier and a Red Bull music academy, notches up over \$50 million in economic impact every year. In 2012, instead of following the regular method and announcing the musical lineup on the official website, Bonnaroo started announcing its lineup on the music-streaming social media program Spotify. The initiative was a big success attracting over 25,000 subscribers who were able to listen to songs from all the attending bands and discover new, exciting acts playing at the festival.

But perhaps the organizers' greatest success with social media in 2012 was the use of radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to foster engagement. Each attendee was given a wristband which served as the only form of ticket to the festival. The wristbands had built-in RFID technology and could be swiped by attendees at one of 20 check-in portals around the venue. Scanning their wristbands at the towers would check visitors in on Facebook, enabling their friends to see exactly where they were and what band they were seeing. This could be used not only to share experiences, but also to provide a location so that friends at the festival could find them. At the end of the day, the system made a second post to each guest's Facebook: a recap of all of the acts the person had seen that day with a link to Spotify which provided each act's Bonnaroo set list and a playlist of studio tracks of those songs.

Now featuring 150 acts over 12 stages, Bonnaroo recently branched out into 'glamping', offering pre-pitched speciality tents, state-of-the-art cabanas and RVs. All of its annual innovations are broadcast through its multi-prong social media presence via Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Spotify, YouTube and Instagram.