

5

Planning, Logistics and Management

by Paul Kelly

After reading this chapter you should:

- Have an insight into the factors involved in producing a good festival
- Understand several project management planning processes
- Understand how different venues affect planning requirements and the implications of using outdoor venues
- Understand the interests and role of the emergency services in festival planning
- Know what documents you will have to produce to ensure your festival is legal
- Understand about artist contracts and riders

Introduction

The safe and efficient organisation of your festival is not just crucial to the artists who perform and the audiences who attend, it's crucial to your finances, your brand reputation and, ultimately, your career. Festivals are a chance for artists to show their inventiveness and brilliance and for audiences to be transported away from the daily humdrum of everyday life; to be entertained and inspired.

Those interactions between artist and audience can result in a range of outcomes from intellectually challenging, to entertaining and sometimes life-changing. But the perceived glamour that creative festivals inevitably suggest is built on the rather dull yet essential disciplines of planning and logistics. These days, given the increasing complexities of new technology and larger productions to bigger and bigger crowds, plus the creative desire to continually push boundaries and a growing concern for public welfare, planning and logistics have become ever more vital.

Benjamin Franklin famously said, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail". It is a saying widely adopted by the military, who are generally very good at planning. We would add to that, if you fail to plan, you will also heap stress on yourself and all your problems and challenges will probably arrive at the same time.

Successful festival operational planning should cover three main areas:

- ◆ Artist-related requirements
- ◆ Audience-related requirements
- ◆ Technical requirements

The nature and level of these requirements will very much depend on the type of festival you are staging and venue(s) you are operating in.

This chapter and Chapter 7 on operations contain the bedrock of festivals management. Get the festival planning right and even if your marketing doesn't produce the audience numbers you'd hoped for, even if your finances are awful or your creative content is disappointing, you will live to fight another day. But if you neglect planning and operations management, you put your reputation at risk with both artists and audiences, you may fail to secure future event licences and you may even, in some circumstances, put peoples' lives at risk.

There are three stages involved in taking your festival idea from conception to delivery:

- ◆ Plan
- ◆ Licence
- ◆ Manage

This chapter deals with the planning aspects. Chapter 6 covers the detail of licensing law and insurance and Chapter 7 looks at issues concerning operational management – that means what happens on the day, weekend or week of your festival and what you need to enable that. Your festival may take place in venues which are already fully licensed and insured, so you may not need to obtain these yourself. But you need to know what permissions are needed and what you need to do to comply with the law.

An essential reference point for festival planning, logistics and management is the *Event Safety Guide* (1999) also now known as *The Purple Book*. Produced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), a government agency in the UK, the *Event Safety Guide* has a health and safety focus. It does not cover the various types of planning processes you can use in developing your festival, but it does give you an invaluable introduction to the areas you need to consider: things like crowd management, barriers, special effects, provision for people with special needs – 33 topics in all. Some legislation and practice has changed since it was first published. The original 1999 edition is available for free online (HSE, 1999) but an updated version, *The Purple Book*, has been developed as an online resource by the Events Industry Forum, a consortium of 24 UK events industry trade bodies (Events Industry Forum, 2015). It is available for an online subscription fee.

Planning case study: The Millennium – New Year’s Eve 1999

On 31 December 1999 towns and cities all over Britain staged events to celebrate the arrival of the new millennium. These were often led and organised by local councils. One large city council spent several months planning an outdoor event involving an open-air stage on an exposed site with live bands, films and, inevitably, fireworks hosted by a compère. A crowd of around 30,000 gathered and, in spite of deteriorating weather, all went smoothly until about five minutes to midnight when a seven-minute long film about community activities was re-screened to fill a gap in proceedings. Suddenly just as the sounds of Big Ben were about to be broadcast, the compère came on stage and announced “It’s midnight!” and the fireworks went off. The night concluded with a Scottish piper playing Auld Lang Syne and the audience dispersed, some expressing disappointment. This resulted in criticism in the local press which blew over after a week or so. There was never any internal enquiry. The council had staged its millennium event. So why did such a pivotal evening ultimately feel so very disappointing? We believe so many people had got involved in the event from the council and external contractors, and there was so much discussion about special effects including lasers, fireworks, stages and bands, that the very purpose of the event had been overlooked. The purpose of the event was actually very simple; it was the countdown to midnight. For technical reasons which are too complex to go into here, that countdown never happened, leaving many of the 30,000 people feeling rather deflated rather than the elation they expected from the dawn of a new millennium.

Event planning is a complex process which can involve a lot of people and a lot of factors. But if there’s one lesson from this it’s this; in the course of the complexities, don’t lose sight of the purpose of your event. The role of the planning is to support that.

What makes a festival successful?

There are two things that are crucial to the success and sustainability of your festival. First, that people attending are safe – and those people include audiences, artists, technicians, retailers and your staff. Second, and just as important, that you – the festival manager – are safe and happy. By safe, we mean that you can cope with the inevitable challenges, stresses and strains that live events and festivals inevitably involve.

Debating point:

You will probably either have a vision, expectation or experience of what a successful festival looks and feels like. That’s worth writing down and being as specific as you can. Ask what are the things you need to do to make that vision a reality? What are the component parts of your vision? If you cannot think of any or more than two or three, don’t worry, this chapter will be identifying plenty for you.