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Festival Marketing

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After reading this chapter you should:

- Have an overview of the principles of festival marketing
- Understand the motivations and processes involved in deciding to participate in a festival
- Understand and be able to apply marketing tools including segmentation and targeting, branding, customer relationship management, the marketing mix and marketing research
- Understand the strategic role of marketing within a festival organisation

Introduction

Marketing, promotion, sales, communications, audiences, participation – the concepts covered in this section are a fundamental part of festival management, whether your event is a community fête or a globally recognised music festival. The word ‘marketing’ originated from the simple forms of buying and selling that can be seen in a local street market, but the term now encompasses a range of sophisticated techniques that have developed to help companies decide what products and services to produce and how to persuade people to buy them. This chapter introduces marketing concepts and illustrates how festivals and cultural events can adapt the techniques to develop appropriate experiences for festival-goers, artists and communities.

This chapter will introduce concepts such as supply and demand, segmentation and targeting, CRM (customer relationship management), experience marketing and its relationship to service design, and branding. It will raise questions about the extent to which a festival’s artistic programme can or should be led by market demand, whether the relationship between artists and festival-goers is more complex than those expected in traditional marketing models and about the ethics of storing and using data collected on festival-goers’ behaviours and preferences.

Definitions of marketing

Although dating back to the late 19th century the acronym AIDA remains an easily remembered and useful starting point in defining marketing. AIDA stands for:

- ◆ Awareness (or Attention)
- ◆ Interest
- ◆ Desire
- ◆ Action

This neatly summarises what you are trying to do: gain customer awareness that your festival exists, gain their interest in it, turn that interest into desire and finally encourage them to action through buying a ticket and attending (or just attending if the event is free). Arguably in the busy mediatized world of the 21st century the first of these principles has become even more important – we are all in the business of competing for people’s time and attention.

Modern marketing is defined as:

“The management process which identifies, anticipates and satisfies customer requirements” (Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2015: 2)

The UK-based Chartered Institute of Marketing’s definition places marketing as a management function alongside other core areas such as finance, operations, and human resource management. It has three components: identifying customer requirements, usually through market research, which means understanding what sorts of products or services different groups of people want and need now; anticipating what they might want in the future; and ensuring that the products and services provided are suitable, available and affordable.

Understanding what sort of festival will fulfil customer requirements means having a thorough understanding of why people choose to attend a festival, what processes they go through when making that decision and what they expect to be there. There are some shared basics, such as central places where people can meet, entertainment, and usually colourful decorations and a festive atmosphere that we have discussed in the chapter on festival design. How much people will be willing to pay for a ticket will depend on how interested they are in the social, artistic or comfort elements of the festival you produce. Some people love camping, for instance, while others would prefer to stay in a hotel or go home. Having good research into these preferences will inform your festival’s production and programming as well as decisions about core marketing functions such as communications, pricing and promotions.

“Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association, 2013)

Whilst also being concerned about satisfying customer needs, the American Marketing Association’s definition introduces the concept of exchange. At the heart of marketing is a bargain: the company will trade products or services that customers value for something it values, usually money, but in the case of festivals it might be volunteer time or artistic skill. The needs of both the company and the individual must be satisfied.

“The aim of Audience Development Arts Marketing practitioners is to bring an appropriate number of people, drawn from the widest possible range of social background, economic condition and age, into an appropriate form of contact with the artist and, in so doing, to arrive at the best financial outcome that is compatible with the achievement of that aim” (Diggle, 2017)

Keith Diggle’s definition of arts marketing broadens the concept, moving it beyond commercial considerations and encompassing public policy outcomes, such as the need to ensure cultural events are not exclusive and that artists’ needs are also met.

This definition hints at the complexity underlying the management of many festivals with multiple stakeholders such as local authorities, funding bodies, donors and sponsors as well as audiences, participants and volunteers. The needs of each of these groups have to be understood and strategies developed and implemented to try and fulfil them.

From these definitions it can be seen that marketing is more than simply selling to anyone who turns up at your stall. It involves having a deep and long-term understanding of who your existing and potential customers are, what they value about what you do, where and how they want to engage with your festival(s), how many of them there are and what they are willing to pay. This knowledge has to be communicated to all parts of the organisation in order to inform the decisions taken by content producers such as artistic directors and programmers; staff such as those in charge of front of house operations or the design of the festival site, as well as people directly involved with functions traditionally designated as marketing. These can be seen in Figure 9.1.

In spite of the definitions there can be a significant difference in the way that many commercial companies and arts companies approach marketing. The ‘pure’ marketing approach is to identify your customer desires and needs and to then design a product or service to meet them.