

Arts Alive - A Guide to Marketing Your Event, Part One

Introduction

Thank you for taking part in this year's Arts Alive. We hope you enjoy your festival experience. Over the past twelve years, Arts Alive has grown in popularity with both the public and participants. There are usually over one hundred events in the festival.

Therefore with so much going on throughout October, it is important that you dedicate some time and energy towards marketing your event. The aim of this guide is to provide festival participants with some advice and ideas regarding marketing and publicity. We cannot guarantee a sell-out event. That is down to you! However we are happy to hear from you and to give what advice we can. But please take note, the Arts Alive committee remit does not include the individual marketing and publicity for every single event taking part in the festival, that is the responsibility of each individual artist, performer and organiser.

Marketing Responsibilities of the Arts Alive Committee

The principal function of the Arts Alive Committee is to market the festival as a whole, to both the public and media. It is also the responsibility of the Arts Alive Committee to find much-needed sources of sponsorship to support the Festival. We market the Festival in a number of ways:

- We produce and distribute a festival brochure
- We produce and distribute Festival posters and banners
- We produce and distribute a comprehensive press pack listing every single event in the Festival
- We look for PR and promotional opportunities
- We organise the Arts Alive launch party and opening day

The Brochure

We compile and produce a full-colour brochure. Approximately 25,000 copies are printed. These brochures are also available for publicity use by festival participants. It is important when writing your brochure copy that the information given is accurate and truly reflects your event. It is often a good idea to avoid jargon or unfamiliar phrases as you only have 50 words to get your message across to the public. It also helps to use eye-catching photographs or images, preferably in full-colour.

From the beginning of August the festival brochure is distributed to all the local media, venues, libraries, shop, restaurants, and tourist attractions, as well as mailed to approximately 2,000 people on the festival mailing list.

It is essential that your event appear in the festival brochure. We are happy to give advice on copy writing to ensure that the main selling points of your event are effectively communicated to the public.

It is your responsibility to ensure all copy and images are submitted for inclusion in the brochure on time. Failure to do so could result in your event not being featured in the brochure.

Posters

We produce generic festival posters. These posters are distributed to local shops and other suitable sites along with the brochure. We also produce a template festival poster that can be used by participants to promote their own events.

Banners

We produce some large 'pop-up' banners that go on display in the foyer of Dorking Halls and Leatherhead Theatre as well as other suitable sites as decided by the Arts Alive Committee. We have also booked a large banner to be displayed across Dorking High Street and several smaller banners.

The Media

We actively promote the whole Arts Alive Festival via the local media. We are fortunate that the local media has always been very supportive of Arts Alive. BBC Surrey has been the festival's media partner for a number of years, and the festival enjoyed extensive editorial throughout October in the Surrey Mirror series of newspapers and a number of the glossy monthly publications.

We do not write an individual press release for every single event but organise the releases into genres that do mention every single event.

Press releases are distributed to all the local media and the Press Association listing editors. This press pack is with followed up by telephone calls to ensure arrival and to check if more information is required. The Arts Alive committee also endeavours to meet up with the key journalists in the local media to discuss the festival. At these meetings we highlight events that are particularly newsworthy, discuss potential interviews and interesting photo opportunities.

We may from time to time contact individuals that we believe are newsworthy and will result in an interesting photo call or possible interview. However you must approach the media yourself either as an individual or on behalf of your group/organisation. Do not simply rely on the brochure to generate sales or interest in your event. Remember that with almost 100 events taking place across the district during October, the general public will be spoilt for choice.

Digital Media

Arts Alive has a dedicated website – www.arts-alive.co.uk and all events are listed on this site. Arts Alive also has a Facebook site www.facebook.com and search for Mole Valley Arts Alive Festival. If your group has a Facebook site do link up with Arts Alive.

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How much marketing you undertake will of course depend on your budget. Be realistic! When preparing your budget, allow some money for marketing and publicity. Your event will be featured in the brochure, but together with many other wonderful events - all of who are also vying for the public's attention. However there is plenty you can do, even on a shoestring.

Posters, Leaflets and Distribution

Many people find reassurance in producing large quantities of print. This can be expensive, and does not guarantee ticket sales. Print is only effective when it is distributed carefully and with some thought. Local shops, restaurants, cafes etc are usually very supportive when it comes to displaying posters and flyers. The more attractive and professionally produced the print, the more likely local shopkeepers will agree to display your posters or leaflets in their windows.

When designing your print remember who your target audience is going to be. If you are promoting a children's event then stick to bold images and bright colours rather than lots of text. A good idea is to ask someone unconnected with your event (who will give you an honest opinion) for some feedback. Ask them the following questions.

- Will your poster attract the attention of the public?
- Does the image and information on the poster engage their interest?
- Does your print make the onlooker want to book for your event?
- Finally, and most importantly, provide the means by which to book? Have you remembered to include the date, box office number etc?

When distributing your print, again think about who your target audience is going to be. Using the children's event example think of where children and parents spend their time; children section of the local libraries, toyshops, local swimming pool etc. Concentrate on these areas rather than a random blanket coverage. Please note that fly posting is an offence and can result in an ASBO. Always ask permission first.

Direct Mail

If your organisation has a friends' scheme, or a mailing list, then it would be a good idea to contact them directly about your event. We provide brochures for you to mail out. There are companies who do sell names and address for mailing purposes. A word of caution. These databases tend to be very general and not always necessarily up-to-date. It would be in your interests to thoroughly check the credentials of the business selling you data.

Please make sure that your direct mail campaign does comply with the Data Protection Act. This is very important. For more information about data protection go to www.data-protection-act.co.uk. In addition, Business Link has some useful information at www.businesslink.gov.uk.

Promotions and Discounts

Often organisations offer discounted tickets and promotions in reaction to an event that is not selling well and then are disappointed when these promotions are ignored by the general public. It is better to have offered discounts or promotions in advance rather than as a knee-jerk reaction to bad ticket sales.

'Early Bird' bookings are far more successful and encourage advance sales. For example, some organisations offer a discount on tickets purchased in advance but not for those tickets purchased at the door on the day of the event. Others organisations prefer to offer a discount for tickets booked in advance but there is a deadline. For example, tickets booked up to a week before opening night are entitled to a discount or a free interval drink or the chance to meet the artist/performer after the show? If you are promoting a children's event, why not offer the discount or free ticket to the parent? Discounting tickets and general promotions are worth considering and including within your budget.

The Media

It is worth setting aside some time to think about possible photographs or stories for the local press. This is an excellent way to publicise your event, boosts the morale of those taking part, and is completely free of charge, so ideal for those on a tight budget. All it takes is a little creative thinking. The local media are wonderfully supportive of Arts Alive and will be interested to hear what you have to say, provided that it is topical and well presented.

There are two sides to the local media, first is display advertising when you pay for an advertisement promoting your event, and then there is editorial. We are going to discuss editorial because it is an effective marketing medium, and more importantly, is free!

Local newspapers such as the Surrey Mirror Series (includes Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser) and the Surrey Advertiser can be divided into two sections. You have the news pages, which are dealt by the journalists on the News Desk, and you have the features section, which is written and edited by journalists on the Features Desk. The same format applies to radio. Some programmes are news based others are features. Occasionally the two are mixed. This is sometimes referred to as a 'magazine' format.

In newspapers such as the Dorking/Leatherhead Advertiser these two sections are quite easy to distinguish. 'Go, which is the colour supplement within the Dorking/Leatherhead Advertiser, is the features section. Here you will find longer articles about the arts and entertainment, days out, television listings etc. The rest of the paper is the news section.

If you want to give your event as much exposure as possible think about your event in terms of a feature or/and as a news item. There is a difference between the two. As a general rule, the News Desk is looking for interesting photographs and stories with a local connection, or that are topical or have a strong human interest angle. Whereas the Features Desk is more likely just to write up a general piece about your event the week of your performance or opening. The copy deadlines for News and Features are different, so call them to check their press days.

Remember that local journalists are always short of time and working to a deadline therefore the more information you give them presented in clear and concise way, the more likely it is to reach the pages of the newspaper.

What Makes A Successful Press Release?

Remember that journalists work under pressure. News is breaking all the time and their working day is governed by deadlines. Therefore it is crucial that your press releases are accurate, well presented and has a daytime contact number.

When writing a press release, try if possible to keep to one side of A4. Copy should be doubled spaced with a decent margin either side. Press releases must be typed!

It is essential that the first paragraph catches the eye of the journalist. Therefore the name of your event, a few words of description, date, time, box office/information line and venue need to be included in the first paragraph. Highlighting these facts in bold throughout the release is also a useful technique.

Keep to the facts when writing a release. Do not say anything that you cannot prove. Think what is topical about your event; what is the relevance between your event and the journalist's readers or listeners. What are the local angles, any funny stories (remember news can be good as well as bad) are any landmarks being celebrated, is this a premiere, and so on. You can also include quotes from the subject of your release i.e. the artist whose work is on display etc. As a general rule, the media are not interested in quotes or reviews from other journalists; so only include them if you or your event is being premiered or an international company/performer on his or her first visit to the UK.

What Makes A Successful Photograph?

Getting your photographs into the local newspapers is a good way to get noticed!

There are two ways to go about this. You can either send in your own photographs or images (high resolution jpeg files), or you can request that the News Desk send a staff photographer. However bear in mind that the local papers are often short-staffed or lack resources and staff photographers are not usually available during the evenings or weekends as a rule. Also just because you ask a newspapers to send a photographer it does not guarantee that they will turn up. Journalists and photographers will go where the story is. Therefore if a more important story (in the opinion of the editor) is breaking at the same time as yours, the editor will direct all resources to that particular story. However this does not happen too often with the local newspapers.

The photograph that is most likely to be printed in the newspaper is one whose composition is simple and immediately conveys the story to the reader. Invariably each photograph will be accompanied by a small caption but this is only usually a couple of sentences so it is very important that the subject matter of the photograph clearly communicates your message. It is a good idea to read the newspapers over a couple of weeks and study the composition of photographs in the news pages.

Good Luck!