



Cracking the Code to Festival Success: B&A's Seven Key Insights for Brands from the Summer 2023 Festival Season

Qualitative Research Report

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Research approach

As part of B&A’s ongoing commitment to in-house research initiatives, we decided to dive headfirst into the world of festival-goers this Summer.

To do this, we recruited a diverse range of festival-goers and got them to document their time at a festival they planned on attending **using videos and pictures** - and then to create a 'festival scrapbook' of their experience.

This creative approach gave us as researchers at B&A a **‘fly on the wall’ angle into the festival experiences that attendees actually have**. The highs, the lows, the memories, as well as understanding which brands managed to really connect with them and why.

This hands-on approach to research, uncovered **seven key insights for brands from the Summer 2023 festival season**.



Insight 1: 'Expected Brands' Often Need Extra Effort

When thinking about brands' presence at a festival, attendees often **differentiate between 'expected' festival brands and 'unexpected' festival brands** in their minds.

'Expected' brands are the ones that attendees have **seen at festivals before** or ones that they anticipate **being there** (particularly the alcohol brands).

To ensure that these 'expected' brands are getting good bang for their buck, they need to continually **go beyond presence** and consider how they can make an **emotional impact with attendees**.

A key finding from this research was that 'expected' festival brands can sometimes fade into the background unless they present themselves in a **novel and engaging manner**.

Kopparberg managed to do just that this year with an innovative and engaging POS stand and adjacent assets that invited customers to engage with the brand.



“ I was also at the Kopparberg tent with my girlfriend chilling out in the area they provided. This was good to kinda get away from the madness of the festival for a bit.

Attendees expectations are higher from 'expected' brands in a festival setting - they want these brands to elevate above what they see and experience elsewhere from the brand in the day to day.

Insight 2: The Democratisation of Festival Sponsorship

Interestingly, ‘unexpected’ brands can garner more attention due to novelty and the element of surprise.

Their presence at a festival can catch attendees off guard, getting them to look twice, with their very presence at the festival having a significant affect on moving the dial on brand perceptions.

This highlights the potential that exists for a wide variety of brands to integrate festivals into their marketing activity during the year.



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Bank of Ireland did some eye catching doorway designs with their logo on wood boxes. Their tents looked very enticing with the string lights, white picket fences etc. I really didn't expect to see them there at the festival.

Brands that previously didn't feel they had a role to play at festivals may now have - as the needs of attendees continue to diversify.

Insight 3: Brands as Pioneers of Discovery

Festivals offer an **escape from the ordinary**, a chance to break away from routine and the day to day.

During this experience, festival-goers are **highly receptive to trying new brands and products**, seeking novel experiences.

If for anything else but to **mark the experience as a break away** from their usual consumption behaviour.



“ DeLonghi stand stole my heart. They were giving out coffee for free, they were really nice and their customer service team was amazing. I enjoy that they had a variety of milks, such as almond, soya and even ice for iced lattes!”

Brands can **tap into this consumer curiosity** by providing interactive and engaging interactions with attendees.

Beyond just selling products, brands should aim to make attendees **'feel' their brand** through unique and enhanced experiences. This should be a central goal for any brands festival strategy.



“ The white Hag was the best sponsor at it. I noticed they did a great job offering click and collect cans upon arrival which we did. Very handy and cool.

Festivals are the perfect opportunity for brands to take risks and to encourage customers to trial something new and unexpected.

Insight 4: Building Emotional Connections – A Festival Essential



“*Believe it or not... one of the high points of the festival was huddling into a tent with a group of friends during the thunder and lightning storm, talking about past body and soul experiences. We were laughing through the whole storm together.*”

At festivals, **emotional bonds amongst friend circles takes centre stage**. Whether it's new friends embarking on their first festival adventure or groups of friends reuniting, at festivals brands have a **golden opportunity to facilitate these special moments**.

Schweppes nailed that this year, providing attendees with an insta-worthy opportunity that encouraged attendees to share a **deeper moment of connection** with each other.



“*There it was in vibrant yellow. I passed by several times during my few hours there and it was always packed with groups of people taking photos. Bit early in the day for gin for me though!*”

Connection is a key needstate that resonates across different lifestages and types of festivals, making it a valuable area for brands to consider as part of their festival strategy.

Insight 5: Aligning Brands with the Festival's Visual Identity and Story

The increasingly competitive festival landscape means that festivals have to **work harder than ever before to nurture their unique 'festival identity'** (essentially, what makes the festival stand out and a different experience to every other festival that is out there!).

As festivals work harder to nurture their unique 'festival identity', brands need to also **consider how they can tie their own visual identity and story to that of the festival**. This cohesion between festival and brand is highly important for attendees experience - as it provides **harmony between what they see and feel**.



Yet, there's more to this story. **Attendees also seek to immerse in the festival's visual world**, reflected in their clothing and consumption choices - admitting themselves into the tribe of festival goers, if even only for a few days. This **desire for belonging presents a golden opportunity for brands**.

Syncing your brand with the festival's identity **fosters deeper emotional bonds between brands and attendees** at festivals. Think festival-centric merchandise, POS, and experiences embodying the festival's essence.

Brands must innovate uniquely for each festival to enhance this festival-brand-attendee alignment.

Insight 6: Leaning into Anticipation – The Thrill Before the Festival

The festival experience doesn't start at the entrance; **it begins way before that**. For some, the excitement of preparing for a festival is **as enjoyable as the festival itself!** The lead-up, from picking the right outfits to planning activities and discussing logistics, is all part of the experience.

At present, the large majority of the discussions between attendees pre festival surrounds music line ups. However, attendees are also highly **receptive to hearing more about the role that brands plan to play at festivals.**



As such, there is an untapped opportunity for brands to capitalise on attendees anticipation, by **building intrigue and excitement for the experience that they are planning to offer at the festival.**

Arming attendees with this in the lead up to the festival allows them to **plan interactions with your brand into the light itinerary for their time at the festival.**

Doing this from a brands perspective makes total sense as playing a more active role in the lead up to festivals will maximise the exposure that brands get from their festival investment.

Insight 7: Sustainability – Balancing Reward and Responsibility

Let's be honest. **When at a festival, attendees are in a reward mindset.**

It is a **ringfenced break away from the responsibilities of the day to day** in which attendees are focused on **immersion, excess and being care free**. This mindset shift means that other priorities can often fall down the hierarchy of needs – one of which is sustainability.

Sustainability efforts that are made by festivals and brands are **noticed and applauded** – even if it imposes some inconvenience on the part of festival-goers.

Electric Picnic banning the use of disposable vapes is a good example of this. Promoting good sustainability practice is a signal of a **well run and responsible event**.

Making a concerted effort on sustainability is important as poor sustainability behaviour at a festival can become **infectious and lead to what we call in behavioural science 'herd behaviour'**.

“*Recycling bins were widely available. It was clean and tidy which was a definite high point when you can see an event being run well with no mess about.*”



“*Hard Plastic glasses, €2 refundable price which I thought was an excellent idea. Would love to see more and more of this sustainability.*”

Getting attendees to engage with sustainability needs to be made easy, and is something that they need to be continually reminded of to 'jolt' them out of the release state mindset they naturally enter into during a festival.

Thank You



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