



# FACING THE MUSIC

The Hidden Cost of Festivals

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THE FAMOUS PYRAMID STAGE AT GLASTONBURY. IN 2014 THE EVENT PULLED IN £37M BUT SAW PROFITS OF JUST £86,000: LESS THAN 50P A TICKET.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Can you make money from festivals, or do overwhelming logistical demands – plus the British weather – mean most festivals will cease festivities?

1. Coachella, the biggest festival in the world, sells 198,000 tickets and pulls in \$84 million for the Californian event. The UK's largest festival – Glastonbury – has a turnover of £37m but sees profits of just £86,000: less than 50p per ticket.
2. In the wet summer of 2012 57 UK music festivals were cancelled. It's a tough business: famous events such as The Big Chill, Sonisphere, Oxegen and Cloud 9 have all fallen silent recently. This year Austin's 3-day Levitation Festival, Manchester's All Today's Parties festival and the Forgotten Fields 2016 Festival have already joined their ranks.
3. This year 14 million UK residents plan to attend a festival, (3.5 million music festivals alone). Around 1,000 festivals are planned in the UK for 2016 and, with the average ticket price being over £200 for major events, it's a £2.3bn industry!

4. The logistics behind a big event are amazing. The five stages at Download weigh 278 tons and require 57 artics to transport them. There are also 160 tons of lights, sound and video equipment to move.
5. You might think festivals are green, but they generate 23,500 tonnes of waste and less than 32% of material is recycled. Music festivals are responsible for 20 kilotonnes of CO2e onsite and 100 kilotonnes of CO2e including audience travel. No wonder Festival 6 spends £30,000 simply taking waste away.
6. Artists aren't cheap. Organisers pay over \$1m for Bruce Springsteen, Justin Bieber and Madonna; however, Bob Dylan can be hired for \$150,000, Ed Sheeran \$125,00, the Kaiser Chiefs are a snip at \$25,000, and MC Lars is just \$2,500.
7. Stars also have some unusual riders: Adelle asks for six large tea mugs and a packet of Marlboro Lights; Kanye West requires a barber's chair; Madonna insists on a new toilet seat, and Paul McCartney won't have any animal products– even his black limo can't have leather seats. But Van Halen's notorious rider that they should never be given brown M&Ms was a test to see if organisers were reading contracts!
8. Book Festivals are nearly as heavy as heavy metal. 60,000 books were sold at the Edinburgh literary festival last year: 60,000 hardbacks weigh at least 60 tonnes - the equivalent to 38 delivery van loads! 230,000 people went to Hay on Wye's Festival in 2013.
9. The 2012 Cheltenham Literature Festival sold 135,000 tickets for £4,887,251 – but spent £4,937,645: a loss of over £50,000!
10. Rain can make all the difference. Cornbury sold 1,200 tickets on the day in 2013, but in wet 2012 just 200 were sold - £80,000 less.
11. Festivals make money through catering stalls. Download welcomes 120,000 festival goers who drink 1.2 million pints and eat 650,000 burgers.
12. Festival and tour sponsorship is a \$1.3bn industry: around 450 major brands chase the main 3000 festivals worldwide.



STAGES FOR A BIG FESTIVAL CAN WEIGH 278 TONS AND REQUIRE 57 ARTICULATED LORRIES. PLUS 160 TONS OF LIGHTS, SOUND AND VIDEO EQUIPMENT!

## INTRODUCTION

This summer 14 million UK residents plan to attend at least one festival of some kind, and 3.5 million music festivals alone; while in the USA 32 million people will attend music festivals. There are just shy of 1,000 festivals planned in the UK for 2016: from music festivals to literary festivals to beer festivals.

With the average ticket price being over £200 for the major music festivals in the UK, it's a billion-pound industry: in fact, Think Money states the value as £2.3bn! With profits like that

to be made, some of us may be considering putting on our own event, rather than simply attending someone else's.

But what are the logistics behind staging a successful festival? Why do they cost so much to stage? If you are planning putting on your own festival be warned: the industry term for outside loads that don't fit containers and pallets easily is 'ugly freight'... And sometimes the logistics infrastructure of a festival can get very ugly indeed.

## THE LOGISTICS

If you feel faint at the sight of red tape, give in now! You'll need licences, certificates, permissions etc. But before we even go there, it's useful to get an idea of the scale of what needs to be booked and moved when putting on a festival

Of course, it's all a question of size when it comes to the logistics behind an event. For a small event, say an audience of about 100 people, hiring the equipment for an afternoon's worth of music will probably set you back about £300, says Cammy Forbes of Hyper PA, Glasgow. 'That includes your PA, sound desk, monitors, mics, and an engineer to oversee it all.'

Setting up the Download festival (120,000 people attending over three days) could be a little more involved! Download booker/Live Nation promoter Andy Copping explains: 'The building of the site takes about 10 full days (24 hours), as well as four days to take down. Organising the festival is always hard. We always try to better ourselves year on year and the festival and site are continually evolving. When we started we were a two-day festival with two stages with 54 bands and three days' camping. Now we're a three-day festival, with five stages with 130+ bands and a week's worth of camping! There are always things to improve, so we work hard with the fans/ticket buyers to get their input to make Download better.'

And it's this commitment that's turned Download into something of a miracle: The festival employs 8,643 people each year – that's 2,097 back of house staff, 4,223 front of house staff, 1,800 security guards and 520 medics

75,000 people camped at Download over three sites: and that needs a lot of infrastructure. The promoter has to pay to hire the site, put up the fencing, build the stage, lay on water, electricity and waste management, sort out security – and more.

"For a 10,000-capacity festival, your power will cost you between £60,000 and £100,000," says Gareth Cooper, co-founder of Festival No 6.

"We would spend up to £30,000 taking the waste away."

The question of loo waste is always an intriguing one. Small wonder when Creamfield Festival estimates 1257 km of loo roll are used each year!

And the bigger the audience, the greater those costs are. "At the Isle of Wight festival, between security and police, it costs £1m," says John Giddings, the event's head. He has to employ around 5,000 people to ensure he can lay on all the necessary amenities and a greenfield site isn't immediately fit for a festival just because you've made it fine for campers and live entertainment. Giddings says he spent £250,000 building roads into the site's car park.

The logistics behind a festival like Download are eye-opening:

- The five stages that house all of the bands at Download weigh a combined 278 tons, requiring 57 articulated trucks to transport them

- It then takes 5,500 man-hours to put up 5 miles of scaffolding and 1.5 miles of trusses to create the 30,000 square foot of stage floor
- That staging is covered with 160 tons of lights, sound and video equipment
- There are 150 speakers to set up on the Download main stage alone

It takes a specialist kind of logistics company to serve this market. As Agility Logistics' Andrew Bates told Event Industry News recently:

'With respect to other HGV drivers, hauling a load of groceries for a supermarket is vastly different to taking a full trailer of AV equipment or back line concert equipment across Europe. The drivers who work with us understand the value of both the equipment and its critical importance to the event itself. Drivers are expected to supervise the loading and unloading of their truck in conjunction with the crew. On a tour, a driver and his truck will assume responsibility for the same load at every stage, ensuring continuity in how the load is packed and unpacked.

As with other aspects of organising events, the technology used to plan event haulage has also moved on considerably. Along with some of the other specialists, Agility now use purpose built software to load-plan trucks and containers, allowing them to pack equipment in the safest and most efficient way.

Says Andrew: 'How a truck, container or aircraft pallet is packed affects both the safety of the load and the overall cost of transportation. It's

common sense that by getting more in to a truck or container then you'll save money on the total cost, but it's also vital that we can calculate total packed weights to ensure safe transit.'

Andrew adds: 'It's vital that organisers keep us informed of any changes to venues, especially due to the size of the vehicles we are dealing with. Some events allow us to leave trailers on site so that the truck itself can be deployed elsewhere. We've had instances where this has changed but not been relayed to us. As some events grow, the space for moving trucks has also been reduced, which has caused issues. It's important that organisers let us see detailed site plans ahead of the event so that we can plan exactly how our trucks can load, unload and, crucially, manoeuvre.'

As well as set up, the dismantling process can be demanding. Powerful Thinking's new report - The Show Must Go On - reveals UK music festivals are responsible for 23,500 tonnes of waste; with less than 32% of material recycled. That's 2.8KG of waste per person per day.

There are other green issues surrounding festivals too. Music festivals are responsible for 20 kilotonnes of CO2e annually through onsite emissions; and 100 kilotonnes CO2e annually, including audience travel.

This is because a surprising 61% of festival goers arrive by car (plus 5% by the ever favourite campervan!) and just 15% lift share. Only 4% arrive by coach and 15% by rail.

## PROFIT AND LOSS

You might now be asking can any festival show



THE ELECTRICITY BILL FOR A 10,000 CAPACITY FESTIVAL WILL SET YOU BACK £100,000.

a profit? The answer is a big yes. In 2015 the US festival Coachella sold 198,000 tickets and pulled in \$84 million in revenue making it the most profitable music festival in the world.

But, in case you are thinking hosting a festival is a get rich quick scheme, the cold fact is that most don't make much, if any, profit!

The company behind the Glastonbury festival – the UK's largest - declared a pre-tax profit of just £86,000 for 2014 after costs and administrative expenses wiped out almost all of the £37m of ticket sales. That's a profit of less than 50p a ticket.

Around 175,000 music lovers attended Glastonbury in 2014, helping to lift turnover by 5.5 per cent to a £37.3 million. But pre-tax profits fell from £764,000 in 2013 to just £86,000, mainly because of running costs, artist

payments, charitable donations and upkeep costs.

At least it did make a profit. The Big Chill, Sonisphere, Oxegen, Global Gathering, Cloud 9 and Underage Festival have all fallen silent. Reasons varying from increased costs to venue issues have ensured they disappeared from the festival circuit.

This year Austin's 3-day Levitation festival was cancelled with hours to spare; Manchester's All Today's Parties festival and Forgotten Fields 2016 in Tunbridge Wells have also been cancelled at short notice as the realities of putting on a festival bite.

Why do such festivals fail? One good example is the Bloc Festival/Bloc Weekend. The electronic music festival kicked off in Butlin's Minehead in 2006 and was a success through to 2011. In 2012 it was decided to move the venue to

the new, bigger venue: the London Pleasure Gardens. But crowd safety concerns – perhaps due to overbooking or lack of control at the venue - led to the event being cancelled and evacuated by police on its first night. It took some time for the event to recover, becoming more of a music venue in East London. In 2015 the event did return to its original Butlin's home however where it was repeated for one last dance in 2016. As with this year's All Today's Parties attempted last minute switch of venue to Manchester, it was a change of location that lead to complications for this previously well-oiled event.

With the power for a 10,000-capacity festival costing £100,000 and security/policing for the Isle of Wight Festival costing £1m; it's not hard to see why so many festivals have ceased festivities.

And then there is the dreaded British weather, as we will see later!

## IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE

If, after reading that you still think you have the deep pockets to support an event, you will want to consider catering requirements. It's no easy task feeding thousands of hungry festival goers, but potentially a money making exercise.

Download – as mentioned - welcomes 120,000 people each year over three days. That's a lot of people that need feeding and watering: those festivalgoers consume an average of

- 1.2 million pints,
- 650,000 burgers

- and 650,000 litres of water.

The favourite five most popular foods at festivals are:

- Pizza
- Sandwiches
- Hot dogs
- Kebabs
- Burgers

At a recent Isle of Wight Festival (attendance of over 58,000)

- 1,070 burgers an hour were eaten
- and a peak of 35,000 pints of beer were served an hour.

Remember, 97% of festival goers drink alcohol (and 22% admit to taking drugs, but we won't go there).

Food and drink is a key way for festivals to recoup money, either by selling it themselves or bringing in external companies and charging them rent (or sometimes running on a profit split).

Graeme Merifield, director of Wychwood, estimates that ticket sales only go to pay for 60% of running his festival. "The other 40% is made up from pitch fees from traders and caterers, sponsorship money and our bar profits as we run our own bars," he says.





AT THE DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL, WHICH WELCOMES 120,000 PEOPLE A YEAR, 1.2 MILLION PINTS AND 650,000 BURGERS ARE CONSUMED.

Hugh Phillimore, festival director of Cornbury, suggests that he would charge a trader between £300 and £400 to have a stall at the festival. “You have to be careful,” he cautions, “that you don’t have too many as then none of them will do any business.” Get it right, though – enough stalls to cater for everyone without massive queues, offering good food and drink – and your food can become an attraction in itself.

## SITE PERMISSIONS

If the mass catering requirements haven’t put you off then perhaps you really are ready to stage an event. First things first: booking a venue.

Ideally you will know the location of your event, and its size, twelve months ahead. In the spontaneous world of music events that’s not

always possible: but highly recommended. Of course, what is ideal is to use the same venue for more than one year; as, with each event, things will get smoother.

Make sure your site or venue is suitable for your specific size and type of festival. If you are lucky enough to own a castle or a large farm, so much the better – but even then you will need to liaise with local authorities.

Remember, as well as sorting out the financial aspects you must get written permission to use the site or venue, whether it is private or public. Public squares, streets, parks and beaches are cared for by your local Council.

The regulations surrounding what you can do on your site will be a mixture of national laws

and local regulations... and picking your way through them won't be easy!

## LAW AND ORDER

You may breathe a sigh of relief when you have fixed your venue; but that genuinely is the tip of the festival iceberg. Once your permissions are in place you will need to know the, oh so many, regulations your event must conform to.

For those of you grimly determined to know all the details, a good guide is online at [https://www.dorsetforyou.com/media/186254/West-Dorset-District-Council-Safety-Advisory-Group-guidance-for-organisers-of-large-events/pdf/WDDC\\_SAG\\_Guidance\\_for\\_Organisers\\_of\\_Large\\_Events.pdf](https://www.dorsetforyou.com/media/186254/West-Dorset-District-Council-Safety-Advisory-Group-guidance-for-organisers-of-large-events/pdf/WDDC_SAG_Guidance_for_Organisers_of_Large_Events.pdf)

For the rest of us, let's take a quick look at the main regulations that will need to be met by your event. They could kill your festival before you've even got as far as choosing a date!

Ideally you will be in a position to employ a contractor clued up on all the relevant HSG195 Guidelines that are considered safe working practises in the event safety guide.

As well as national laws you will need to obey local bylaws on events, noise limits etc. For example, any paid event in an urban area is going to be more difficult to get the official go-ahead.

Here are some of the areas that can make or break a festival:

**Hearing Damage:** How loud can your event be? For a paid for event with no local rules in place you must ensure the event equivalent continuous sound level (Event Leq) in any part of the audience area does not exceed 107 dB (A) (that's the sound of a power mower at 3ft), and the peak sound pressure level does not exceed 140 dB (that's louder than a pneumatic drill and the equivalent of standing near a jet engine 100ft away. Even temporary exposure can cause hearing damage).

**Medical Emergencies:** First aid for staff must be provided in accordance with Regulations. A First Aid point should be provided for the public with a minimum of two first aiders for events of up to 500 attendees; or in accordance with Chapter 20 of HSG 195 The Event Safety Guide – commonly known as The Purple Guide! You are also best advised to consult on plans for medical emergency cover with the Local NHS Ambulance Trust.

**Lasers and other special effects:** Every good music festival needs lasers (though they are perhaps less necessary at a literary or beer festival!). Some lasers can cause eye damage if aimed directly into the eye, and can also cause burns or skin damage if enough energy is directed at a person close up. Safety precautions used by laser lighting professionals include beamstops and procedures so that the beam is projected above the heads of the audience.

It's fun, but potentially dangerous, to include audience scanning with lasers at festivals. If this is planned, the show is supposed to be designed to keep the beam moving, so that no



UK MUSIC FESTIVALS GENERATE 23,500 TONNES OF WASTE; LESS THAN 32% OF MATERIAL IS RECYCLED. NO WONDER A TYPICAL FESTIVAL SPENDS £30,000 SIMPLY REMOVING THE WASTE.

harmful amount of laser energy is ever received by any individual audience member. Audience scanning was banned for a short while in the UK, and is generally frowned on in the USA; but it is still a popular part of some UK festivals. Lasers may need permission from the licencing authority, and a full risk assessment made.

**Public Disorder:** Amongst the many security considerations, there must be an adequate number of trained security staff; numbers of people admitted – and to which areas – must be controlled; rules such as ‘no glass allowed’ at the event should be publicised beforehand, etc.

It is highly recommended to employ accredited security staff rather than rely on volunteers. The 1969 Altamont Free festival is the ultimate festival horror story and the model for how not to organise your event: and its main mistake

was in the organising of its security. The festival venue was switched to a speedway just two days before the event and members of the Hells Angels were asked to provide security around the stage... They were paid in \$500 of beer.

Not only did the Hells Angels attack the crowd, but also the performers. Marty Bailin of Jefferson Airplane was knocked unconscious by a Hells Angel. When the Rolling Stones started to perform audience member Meredith Hunter made his way on to the stage with a revolver. He was stabbed to death by the Hells Angels. There were also three accidental deaths at the event. Today the festival is seen as the antitheses of Woodstock and has been described as ‘Rock and Roll’s worst day’.

## BOOKING THE BAND

If even that salutary tale doesn't put you off, you really can start booking the talent. Now it gets expensive.

Remember, before you start, 3% of your revenue goes to PRS, (formerly the Performing Rights Society) which collects the money owed to songwriters for performances of their songs.

For a writer/composer to get paid whenever their music is used by businesses, played in public or used by third parties in places like radio and TV, their works need to be registered with PRS. This also includes royalties from artists performing their own live shows - such as at your festival - or other artists performing cover versions of their tracks.

To get a band playing for cheap or free, it might be worth aligning yourself with a charity - preferably one with existing band connections. 'Lau would be keen to be involved in a Folk Against Fascism event because it's an organisation we are involved with already,' says Martin Green, accordion-player and pianist with the band. 'As for people putting on events and what makes them appealing to bands, creative groups of people are exciting for musos to work with.'

Assuming your performers are not doing your event for charity or love, the expense of booking acts is currently rising considerably: musicians are steadily hiking up their appearance fees, as a means of offsetting declining income from record sales. Festivals are effectively bidding against each other to secure the all-important headline acts.

Don't forget artists' bookers can change pricing whenever they want; sometimes it is negotiable and sometimes it is not.

Originally stated prices are just the cost to book the act. Transportation and accommodations aren't usually included so when you make an offer, make sure that offer includes the whole package.

Artists and bands CAN be represented by more than one agency. It's important that you do your research in order to find the most accurate price for that act.

And how much will you actually need to shell out to book your favourite bands? According to a Variety article from 2014 you will pay:

- Over \$1m for Bruce Springsteen, Justin Bieber and Madonna;
- \$750,000 for Adele (she may have gone up now!), Coldplay and Lady Gaga;
- while Bob Dylan and Ed Sheeran have to be good value at \$150-300,000 and \$125,000 respectively.
- Down the A list a little more and Kaiser Chiefs will cost just \$25-35,000
- And if you are on a budget G Eazy is just \$5,000 and MC Lars \$2,500

But don't assume that your artist will be available at the drop of a hat, the major music festival Download are working two years in advance to ensure the artists they want will be able to attend.



FESTIVALS ARE A £2.3BN INDUSTRY AND GLOBALLY CAN GENERATE \$1.3BN OF SPONSORSHIP ALONE. BUT HEADLINE ACTS CAN COST OVER \$1M EACH AND SECURITY COSTS FOR AN EVENT THE SIZE OF THE ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL ALONE £1M.

Once you have booked your band, remember to think about things like changing rooms for them: there are 57 performers changing rooms at Reading (necessary with over 200 artists appearing over the three days) and 53 at Leeds. You will also need to keep them housed and fed:

Some stars have some, well, distinctly unusual riders to be borne in mind.

- Beyoncé can't have any Coke drinks near her as she endorses Pepsi products. And her dressing room should always be at 78 degrees.
- Adele asks for a kettle and six large tea mugs, plus a packet of Marlboro Lights!
- Kanye West requires a barber's chair
- Kate Perry's requirements say ABSOLUTELY NO CARNATIONS
- Sir Paul McCartney likes a variety of flowers in his room – but no leather or animal products as he is a vegan – and that includes leather seats in his limo.
- Eminem requires dumbbells
- Madonna requires a new toilet seat
- And that famous rider we have all heard of: Van Halen's request for M&Ms - but absolutely no brown ones - turns out to be a test! Says the band's star David Lee Roth: 'If I saw brown M&Ms on a catering table, then I knew the promoter did not read the full rider.' And as that might have included more important matters such as safety issues.



LASERS ARE GREAT FOR ADDING ATMOSPHERE: BUT, LIKE SO MUCH ELSE INVOLVED IN STAGING A CONCERT, THEIR USE IS STRICTLY CONTROLLED BY SAFETY REGULATIONS, PERMITS ETC.

Just in case you think it's only stars that will play havoc with your festival logistics, think again. At the recent New Zealand arts event, the NZ Festival, one artist failed to mention there were feathers in a container shipped from the UK, and a sheep's tail with pine cones glued to it incorporated in their sculpture.

New Zealand's rules on organic material imports are notoriously strict. The shipment had already been delayed, and having it whisked away to be fumigated, in order for it to be allowed into the country, meant, instead of having four or five days to set everything up ahead of the show, the event organisers had about 12 hours.

## SPONSORSHIP AND STALLS

As well as making money through food, some events make considerable income through

sponsorship. "Sponsorship is like a safety net that helps cover the cost of putting on the event," the Isle of Wight festival's John Giddings says.

It's estimated that festival and tour sponsorship is a \$1.3bn industry, with around 450 major brands chasing the main 3000 festivals worldwide.

There's no doubt it pays off for some brands: Tennent's long term sponsorship of T in the Park for example, with the brand and event becoming synonymous in the minds of most festival goers.

As well as overall sponsorship there are other interesting marketing ideas. In 2013 Hunter – the well-known Wellington boot maker - opened a welly exchange and gave away 3000 pairs

of wellies, doubtless converting a number of festival goers into loyal Hunter buyers of the future!

The type of sponsor really can sum up the spirit of the event. The most common sponsor of a music festival is brewery companies. But for a smaller event, such as Cornbury, Dorset Cereals and Waitrose have been sponsors!

But it is not just a case of taking the money and running. Sponsors want to be more directly involved, seeking to do “experiential marketing” on the site. Some festivals believe, if done right, this can improve the event for attendees. Others face bigger moral quandaries. “Finding ethical sponsors is never straightforward, so we have never relied on sponsorship,” explains Womad director Chris Smith. “If we were approached by a car manufacturer, it wouldn’t work for us at all. You have to make sure it’s the right motivation behind it.”

Others don’t have the luxury of saying “no” to sponsors – simply because they are too small to attract other offers. “We are interested in sponsorships, but one of our problems is our size,” says Marina Blake, director of the 1,000-capacity Brainchild, which takes place at Bentley Country Park in East Sussex. “But just reaching 1,000 people is not very exciting for a lot of sponsors.”

In other ways though, Brainchild have an easier job: the artists, crew and festival goers all camp together!

## GLAMPING

Another promising source of income if you are

still planning your festival is the Glamper! “We probably sell more boutique camping per head than any other festival,” says Bradley Thompson, festival director of Festival No 6. “It’s around 15% of people.”

There is a growing demand for it – glamping enclosures often have their own toilets and showers, and phone-charging tents – and festivals are keen to provide them.

For example, Volt sell a swappable charger service at festivals such as T in the Park and Reading; there are also hireable – or sponsored – charge locker facilities; and at events such as former Big Chill Festival and the thriving Green Man Festival you can get on your bike if you want extra power: Electric Pedals’ bikes provide pedal power to generate electricity for your phone.

Chris Carey, CEO of Media Insight Consulting, spells out the benefits of glamping in harsh fiscal terms. “Against the backdrop of a lot of festivals coming into the market, the big ones are doing a much better job of monetising people on site,” he explains. At Latitude you can get an Airstream caravan for between £2,150 and £2,750 – and a chunk of what you pay for your glamping goes back to the festival promoter.

## BOOKING AUTHORS

There are an ever widening number of festivals for every creative art. One that has grown exponentially is the book festival; today seemingly every attractive town in the UK stages one to boost tourism!



BOOK FESTIVALS ARE GROWING IN POPULARITY. 60,000 BOOKS WERE SOLD AT THE EDINBURGH LITERARY FESTIVAL LAST YEAR.

There are the 'Glastonburys' of the Book Festival world, such as Hay on Wye; but most are small events.

The biggest literary festivals include Edinburgh, which sold 123,000 tickets last year; Cheltenham, which sold 136,000; and Hay, whose last published ticket sales in 2013 showed it had shifted 230,000. The biggest can charge admission ranging from £5 to over £20 for each event.

Simon Prosser, publisher of the Penguin imprint Hamish Hamilton, as well as a co-founder of the Port Eliot Festival in Cornwall, told the Financial Times recently: "The largest tent at Hay might hold more than 600, and so for a certain author who has a book just out, there could be a signing queue of hundreds of people, each of whom will buy that book." In 2013, the Hay festival bookshop sold 35,000 books and the

Edinburgh festival shifted 60,000. If the sales go through Nielsen BookScan, the point-of-sale software used by booksellers, they also count towards chart position.

You may be worried by the logistics behind setting up a heavy metal festival, but 60,000 hardbacks weigh at least 60 tonnes; and, as the maximum UK weight limit for a lorry (vehicle and load) is just 44 tonnes, you are looking at some interesting logistics! In fact, it's the equivalent of two artics or 38 average delivery van loads. (3.5 tonne vans with a 1.6 tonne payload capacity)

But before you go thinking this is a better way to make money than a music festival, have a look at the maths: at the 2013 Cheltenham Literature Festival, 135,000 tickets were issued for 518 events at an average price of £8.60. The festival is a registered charity and the most recent audited accounts – from the year ending





IN THE WET SUMMER OF 2012, 57 FESTIVALS WENT OUT OF BUSINESS AS THE COSTS OF ADDRESSING FLOODING OR DEALING WITH CANCELLATIONS WERE BEYOND THEM FINANCIALLY.

December 2012 – show that the overall festival organisation (responsible for the four events) had income of £4,887,251. In the same year it spent £4,937,645 – a loss of £50,394.

And these are the major events. Most are far more modest. Many festivals do not actually pay authors for coming to the event: believing that the publicity and opportunity for book sales are adequate recompense. However, there is an increasing backlash against this. The Society of Authors recommends a payment of at least £150 per author and where payment is made the average is £150-£200.

Authors attending an event will expect accommodation and, ideally, feeding! For example, the Cheltenham festival organises a supper event for authors.

Booking a venue or multiple venues well in advance is key; and again you need to consider sound equipment, such as microphones; stewards for the event, etc.

Authors will expect to see copies of their books available for sale at the venue; and ideally with a discount offered to the author. Otherwise the audience will save their money and buy from Amazon! That might not sound too difficult, but remember, if you are organising the Edinburgh festival that's 38 van load of books to deliver! And that's not counting unsolds.

Advance publicity is increasingly vital. Some publishers are reportedly checking up on the level of pre-sold tickets and pulling authors if they are not encouraging.

The format for such an event is often an



interview. It seems an obvious thing to say, but ensure the interviewer has read the book(s) being discussed! It's one of authors' top complaints about festivals.

It's also vital you have (any remaining!) local bookshops informed and on board your event.

While a music festival might be able to boast Adele or Lady Gaga, the star performers at a literary festival will likely be celebrity chefs with their latest cookbook. As with a music festival, the key is to get the balance between the stars and other performers right: and cover all the genres of fact and fiction.

## HEAVY WEATHER

Even if you have got all the logistical elements successfully in place, met every bylaw and installed every loo, one final element might undo you right at the very end. In the wet summer of 2012, 57 festivals went out of business as the costs of addressing flooding or dealing with cancellations were beyond them financially. Says Festival No 6 co-founder, Gareth Cooper: "You plan for a year and it could all be washed away. That's not a sensible business. It's a reckless business."

The better news is that there were 929 events that year, so that's only 6.13% events actually

cancelled: but there is no doubt many did see a significant drop in revenue.

This year the huge three-day Levitation Festival in Austin, USA, was cancelled hours before the start of the event because of potential flooding. Many festival goers were already arriving and the organisers are having to place a significant insurance claim.

Even if not totally rained off, inclement conditions can also affect "walk-up" sales (people buying a one-day pass on the day itself). In 2013, Cornbury sold 1,200 day tickets during the event itself, but the year before, because of rain, it only sold 200 – equivalent to a shortfall of around £80,000. Not every festival can sell out in advance, so walk-ups can mean the difference between disaster and success.

Even if it doesn't rain, hot weather could impact on your margins: "When it rains, you have to pay a lot of extra money for straw to go on the mud," as the Isle of Wight event organiser John Giddings says. "When the sun shines, you have to pay a lot of money to give away water for free."

Maybe, on reflection, it's better just to attend your favourite event this year. Perhaps with a new found respect for the logistics organisation that has gone into staging the festival!

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