How to organise an event

Insights and encouragement from friends of GL events

1. Ideas

Starting out with your new event idea

A letter to my former self

By Louise Young
Founder, Strawberries & Cream

A lot of what I'm about to write in this letter may seem daunting, so I'll start of by saying that what you're about to do, you should do. Definitely.

Organising a major event isn't going to be easy. There's no way you can prepare for how tough it will be; or the emotions your journey will throw at you. But you can't imagine just how rewarding the best bits will feel.

Writing to my former self reminds me that Strawberries & Cream started out with a great idea born of your love of music, the world of festivals, and a desire to bring people together. It's your vision that will drive the event into existence and surround you with a loyal band of people, from the production team, to your suppliers, and even volunteers. These people will become supporters and friends as well as contractors, and will help to shape the event into Strawberries & Creem. But remember: it's your event, your creation, and you should know that it succeeds... because you worked extremely hard and stayed true to your vision.

You may come across people who don't want your event to happen, and that will always be the case – partly because they have nothing to gain by it happening. Rise to the challenge of getting people on your side in support of your event, because once it achieves success, they will soon get behind you to advocate your event and your team.

Live events take time to build and there's no such thing as an overnight success; so hope for the best; but prepare for the worst. Learn and adapt after every event, take risks and enjoy yourself! Manage the event as it grows and embrace the excitement!

Finally, there will be times when you think the challenge has become too much. But as I write, I'm able to look back at a series of amazing events, enjoyed by thousands of people, and I couldn't be more proud.

Good luck, you won't need it!

Advice for producing new events

Creating worlds

By Gill Tee
Managing Director, Entertee Events

I'm sitting in London's Leicester Square, Head of Entertainment at Capital Radio, on a great income with all the perks. But I'm restless. Sure, I love the money, the people are great and the job is a very good one, but I'm not fulfilled. I needed a change.

Fast forward 14 years. I'm stressed, I'm cold. I'm watching a festival to which, working for a promoter, I have given everything for the past five years, potentially take down my event production business, my employees, and ruin me financially.

Fast forward another five years to the present day and I'm about to do it all again, and this time for myself! Why?

Why? Because I love this industry, and I love what I do. And, although it continues to stick the knife in whenever I least expect and certainly don't need it, creating events remains one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.

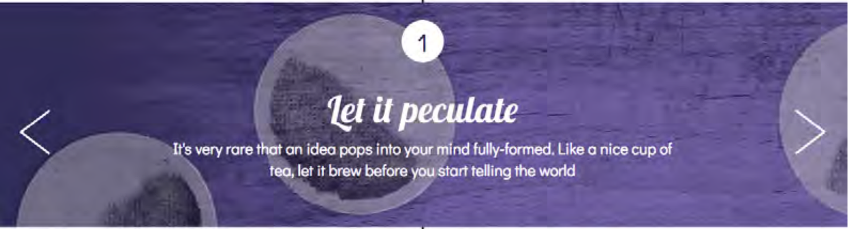
You have to hand it to the senior team at Capital Radio. When they asked me to create Party in the Park, I had no experience in event production. But I understood creating teams, I knew music, I knew how to form partnerships, and I was creative. I still am. I don't think my bosses realised then how addicted I would become to this process of creating worlds.

The job of an event producer can be so immersive, imaginative and awe-inspiring that we will endure any amount of crap just to get the buzz of creation once again. I've been involved in failures and fallouts, as well as losing money and respect for others along the way. This can be a cruel business and unfortunately it can be unstable.

But when it works it is truly magical. We create worlds and watch as people walk through them in their thousands. We see the live effects of our work upon all kinds of people, as they create memories that will stay with them forever. We watch imagined concepts grow out of the ground and into reality. We breathe life into new and inspiring spaces where people gather and have a great time.

So, I have a new idea. I want to create another world where this time I make the decisions. I take the risk; but it is my risk. I may sink or swim. Who know? But I'm loving every minute.

Gill's Top Tips



1

Let it peculate

It's very rare that an idea pops into your mind fully-formed. Like a nice cup of tea, let it brew before you start telling the world

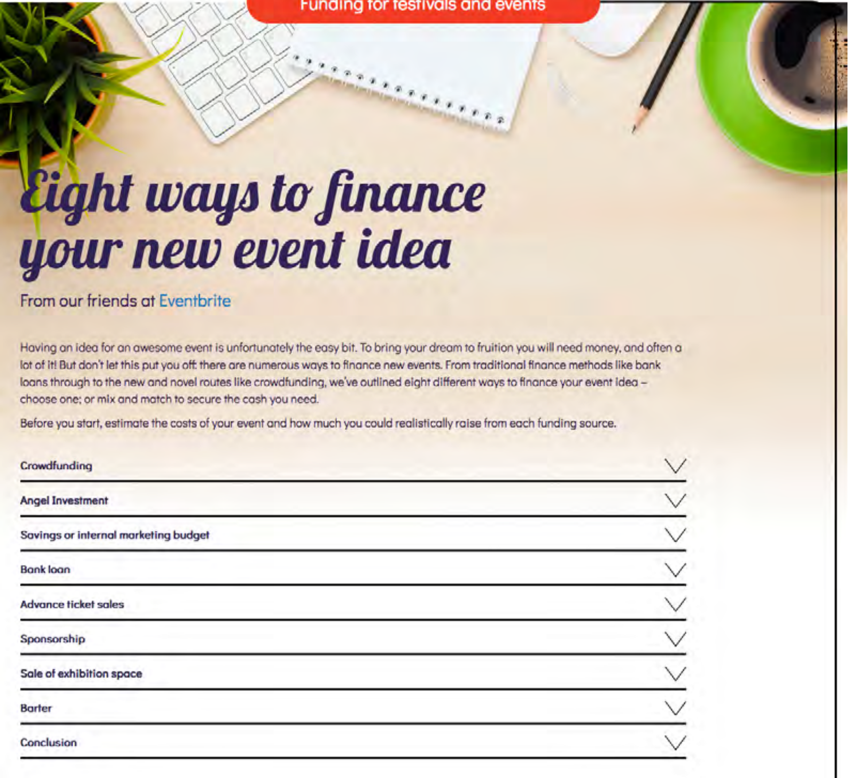
Organising your own festival

How Lee brought his idea to life

By Lee Denny
Founder, LeeFest

2. Funding

Funding for festivals and events



Eight ways to finance your new event idea

From our friends at Eventbrite

Having an idea for an awesome event is unfortunately the easy bit. To bring your dream to fruition you will need money, and often a lot of it! But don't let this put you off: there are numerous ways to finance new events. From traditional finance methods like bank loans through to the new and novel routes like crowdfunding, we've outlined eight different ways to finance your event idea – choose one; or mix and match to secure the cash you need.

Before you start, estimate the costs of your event and how much you could realistically raise from each funding source.

Crowdfunding

Angel Investment

Savings or internal marketing budget

Bank loan

Advance ticket sales

Sponsorship

Sale of exhibition space

Barter

Conclusion

Planning for a successful event

Five reasons why festivals fail

By Kevin Jackson
The Experience is the Marketing

Kevin Jackson is Founder and Director of Ideas and Innovation at The Experience is the Marketing, a marketing and consultancy agency and an investor in major events. The business is best known for its growth programmes and has been the force behind the establishment and growth of some of the most successful events in the UK.

Few have as much experience in what makes major events succeed, but also fail.

Edition Capital is an investment company that works within the festival and outdoor events industry. Edition Capital has been the driving force behind Rewind, and special advisors to Bestival, Camp Bestival, Common People, Field Day, and South West Four.

Financial Expertise

Forecasting

Supplier Selection

The Business Model

Weather!

Top tips for crowdfunding events

Make your event crowdfunding campaign pay

Increasingly, new events are financed by crowd funding platforms, with many success stories. These allow the event organiser to offer consumers different opportunities to 'invest' in the event, through advanced ticket sales, sponsorship opportunities or direct financial investment.

But, for every success story, there is another idea that failed. So, how to navigate this tricky opportunity to bring your event to life?

1

Have a plan

Not just for the event, but also for your crowdfunding campaign. Don't just put it out there!

Making money from events

Crowdfunding: our experience

By Flora Blathwayt & Josh Beauchamp
Founders of Samphire Festival

It probably shouldn't come as a surprise that people who organise events, like the two of us, naturally find themselves at home with crowdfunding.

It's a means of generating funds that involves engaging your community, your customers and supporters: the people who most benefit from the event, and the people with whom you want to build a relationship. Crowdfunding also involves you telling your own story. Bringing your vision to life really helps to get people on board. It's worth seeing crowdfunding as a marketing platform, not just a platform for raising funds.

For us, starting out with crowdfunding allowed us to fully commit to making Samphire a reality. Without the funding, we wouldn't have been able to commit 100 per cent to organizing our event. Once we'd found our crowdfunding platform, we researched like mad, looking at successful project campaigns, putting a plan in pace.

As a rule of thumb, successful campaigns generally achieve 10 per cent of their funding on day 1, 30 percent by day 3, and 50 per cent by end of first week. The reality is that it's a crowded marketplace for festivals, and we knew we'd have to work really hard to succeed. In the end, we were able to reach our initial funding target within two weeks, and our extended target within 50 days. It's hard to describe the magical feeling when pride and fear are equally balanced – it was time to put on our event!

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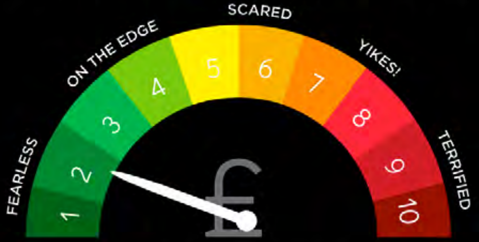
3. Spending money

Making money from events

Samphire Scary-O-Meter



Asking for finance

People are excited and willing to invest in our project.

Choosing the right event suppliers

The importance of good conversations

By Rachel Baker
UK Group Marketing Manager, GL events

Great customer relationships are brilliant and our business, like many others within the events industry, is built around them. However, over here at GL events, we've become increasingly aware that you can get too close. Sometimes, we forget to ask the basic questions, and look too quickly to the solution that solves the problem, without digging a little deeper.

We work with a lot of new events. We see the production team full of enthusiasm and vision: they know what they want and their briefs are incisive and clear. We immediately assign our best people to the job of designing a solution that fits the bill, to the best of our knowledge. Hey presto. You can't lose!

But there's a risk that this approach devalues our people and what we're really here to do. Our job isn't just to design and install the temporary structure or seating solution specified by our client; but also to consult on what's best for their event, making sure we understand why they want a specific solution, what it will be used for. Sometimes it's a matter of interrogating the brief, or even starting from scratch.

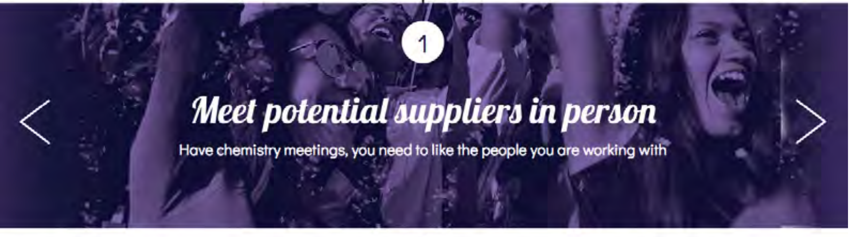
This sounds harsh, but the one thing we know from GL events UK's century of heritage in this industry is that new events are a massive undertaking of risk, and every line of the budget needs to be right. It's as much our responsibility as the organiser's and, as event partners, we need to make sure that we're lending our experience to this process, as well as our expertise.

This is important because, in outdoor events, the risk goes both ways. An unsuccessful event exposes the supplier as well as the buyer; so it pays for us to be invested in the success of the event, and if we can, we'll bring more to the party.

We're keen to encourage this kind of conversation in the industry. We believe that suppliers should act and be considered as partners, and if you're supporting an event, you bring everything in your personal arsenal to make it work. If it doesn't succeed, everyone loses. If it works then everyone wins.

We're keen to create a new model for working with customers, particularly new ones; but also with those we know so well that, on occasions, we forget to go back to business. So, make sure you're asking (and benefitting) as much as possible from your suppliers and, if you're not, let's talk!

Working with event suppliers: Ten top tips



1

Meet potential suppliers in person

Have chemistry meetings, you need to like the people you are working with

Event technology for beginners

A word on event technology

By Adam Goodyer
Founder and CEO, LiveStyled

The explosive and fast-moving world of event technology would probably warrant a guide book in its own right. So let's keep this short. If you're a new event organiser, technology is going to come up. You will read about it in the trade press, see lots of solutions online, and no doubt have sales people contacting to you from all angles. Therefore, you may well lose sight of what's important.

So, for now, let's look, top line, at what some of the new stuff can do. If you start thinking about tech at an early stage, you can make it work for you. We'll start with the essentials, and then get more exciting and complex! Good luck.

Ticketing

Engaging attendees at your event

Sentiment

4. Scary things

Potential threats and risks to events

10 point safety and security guide for event organisers

By Jill McCracken
Director of Tournament Safety & Security, England and Wales Cricket Board

A police officer for more than 27 years, Jill worked on major national and international sporting and music events, establishing Operation Gothic which, through sharing of information and intelligence with event organisers, security and venues, significantly reduced crime, threats and risk at festivals and events. She held unique operational coordination roles on behalf of the Police Service for the London 2012 Olympics, 2014 Commonwealth Games and 2015 Rugby World Cup. In her current role, Jill's remit extends to team and match official security, hotel and route security, as well as venue stadium security liaison.

As an event organiser, you take on legal responsibilities. These responsibilities extend to your workforce, performers, exhibitors, and members of the public attending your event.

It's worth remembering that although safety and security are nearly always grouped together as a subject title; measures to keep the public secure from attack may inadvertently cause a public safety issue; so the two must be considered together and a balance struck. So....

Set your safety and security objectives

Document your intelligence and information

Understand the risks and be prepared to change your event plans accordingly

Engage with safety advisory groups

Work with suitably qualified, competent and experienced people

Ensure your communication plans are effective

Test and exercise your plans

Document your risks, the mitigation for those risks and stay vigilant

Ask yourself: have you have taken all reasonable steps to keep people safe and secure?

Debrief your event honestly and openly

Common event planning mistakes

A rant!

By Phil Day
Partner, Lacey's Solicitors

I never fail to be astounded by the naivety of so many "new" event organisers (and, dare I say it, a number more experienced professionals, who really ought to know better).

I am by nature a cynic; but a pretty common approach by newcomers appears to be as follows:

- Think up wonderful idea for event
- Find friendly farmer with field you can use
- Start booking bands
- Try to find sponsor
- Set up website
- Start selling tickets
- Do deal with beer-sellers, caterers and other concession-holders
- Start countdown to event
- Sort out some volunteer stewards with promise of free tickets
- Realise you need a licence
- Download an application form from the local council's website and fill in the boxes with something or other (but usually something that makes little sense; or worse, is cut and pasted from the Glastonbury application, even though their event is probably a bit bigger than yours), and send it off, not infrequently less than four, three, or even TWO months before the event
- Pay the fee (usually a mere £100 because this is a small event in a field) and stick up some blue notices. The more organised get this right and even manage to place a public notice in the local newspaper

It is at this point that everything usually starts to go pear-shaped.

This can happen in a variety of ways but, most commonly, one of two things happen. Either the council's licensing officer asks a question along the lines of, "have you mentioned this to our Safety Advisory Group?" (or their local version - known by a variety of titles but basically a group of people whose job it is to make sure that events held on 'their patch' are safe – i.e. well planned).

Or, the police or Environmental Health Officer gets in touch, stating that they are not satisfied that the application promotes the licensing objectives, and they intend to object.

Suddenly, it dawns upon our would-be event organiser that he/she has a problem and needs to produce an awful lot of paperwork. An event management plan for starters, and all the bits and pieces that feed into that: security and stewarding, crowd control, noise management, traffic control, medical provision, drug and alcohol policies... and so on and so on.

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Planning to prevent event disasters

Prevention is better than cure

We all know that (I hope). So, for the novice event organiser, the best way forward is as follows:

Think up wonderful idea for event

5. Go Commercial

Selling event tickets online

How to increase event ticket sales in a digital economy

Food for thought from the Eventbrite team

One of the biggest costs in your event budget will be marketing. So, if you're going to make the most of this spend, you need to understand what makes today's digital economy tick.

You're probably already well aware of the many changes driven by the digital economy; but as a starting point, let's focus on one specific area: customer-centricity. Let's face it, one of the key factors that differentiates the major e-commerce players from their competitors is their relentless focus on the customer: think Netflix and Amazon.

How does this help an organiser to create, market and sell their event?

The content of any event will always be key; but it's important to note that the wider customer experience is also vital to selling tickets for your event. Every detail of your attendee's experience matters. This begins with the initial discovery of the event, continuing through to the online ticket purchase; all the way to their arrival at the event and, of course, customers' experience of the event itself.

Read More

Event sponsorship for beginners

Working with event sponsors

By Yvonne Turner
Communications Director, Castle Triathlon Series

The world of sponsorship has evolved from the old transactional model and is now an agreement of partnership between like-minded brands.

We turned a corner some years back when we decided we had as much to gain from a sponsor's reach, expertise, experience and enthusiasm, as we did from their money. After that, we looked to renegotiate all of our agreements.

The main conversation was not just around financial investment; but what else our sponsors could bring to the partnership, to the events themselves, that could make them grow. We looked at joint marketing campaigns, efforts that could be made pre- and post-event, as well as brand activations that could take place at the events themselves.

More and more, this rang true with the sponsors' own objectives for the event. Like us, they wanted a higher level of engagement with the event, and not just to be a logo on a banner. My favourite example is the Speedo team, who created an 'exit team' to help our competitors out of the swim section of the race. The swim section of our races takes place in lakes, and it gets muddy! This allowed Speedo to establish a personal relationship with competitors, and for the brand to play a part in their experience, literally 'helping them out' of the water.

Read More

Promoting new events

Nick Morgan's five minute masterclass: 15 minutes every day on marketing

By Nick Morgan
CEO, The Big Cat Group

Profile your audience

Create a loyal community: Build Your Platforms and Engagement

Create a community: growth

Engage your community

Spread the word

Partnership marketing

Everyone else: targeting

Budget

6. Good luck!

Make your new event idea a reality

I've just read this guide and it's really helpful. Its part warning, part advice, part scaring the living daylights out of you.

So, the team at GL events asked me to write a sign-off because, well, they – and the rest of the events industry – really want you to bring your event to life. I do too. And, as someone who speaks from experience, I just want to let you know that producing my events has given me more pleasure than I could possibly image. It's an amazing job, an amazing world. It's everything you could wish it to be right now, and a whole lot more.

So do it. Do it well, with your eyes wide open, but do it. The world needs people like us, who make masses of people happy, bring them together, and enrich their lives. We're memory-makers, smile-creators; we're builders of worlds and global life-enrichment officers. We do things that no one else can, so we do.

Welcome to the best club in the world,

Lee Denny

Creator of LeeFest

Bring your event to life!

GL events UK

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GL events UK enables event professionals, both new and experienced, partnering in the creation of all kinds of occasions: from product launches, fun-runs and pop-up markets, to festivals, sporting events, temporary theatre productions and exhibitions. We provide quality, tailor-made temporary venues, audience seating solutions, a wealth of expertise, and complete event solutions, allowing event organisers to transform their concepts into realities and deliver outstanding events!

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