



Choosing your digital platform: Scottish and global case studies

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the live webinar on 23 March 2021. There were so many questions from the audience that we didn't manage to answer during the webinar, so our speakers kindly answered them post-event for you.

Speakers:

- Ben Avison, Editorial and Event Director at Host City and Cavendish Group
- Caitlin McNaughton, Communications and Partnerships Manager for Melbourne Fringe
- Lesley Shaw, Producer of Celtic Connections

	Additional questions
Question:	What advice would you give to a first-time event planner who is looking at using a virtual platform?
Answer:	<p>Ben – Identify your must-haves – start with what you need to deliver.</p> <p>Lesley – Similar to Ben, consider what you absolutely need and elements that you can't compromise on. Once you know the functions that you need, you can then do a comparison of available platforms to work out which is most suitable for your needs.</p>
Question:	Based on your experience of using virtual platforms, is there anything specifically that you learnt about your event and how it differed from previous events?
Answer:	<p>Ben – We learned that our core strength of high quality of content and speakers became even more important in the digital domain.</p> <p>Lesley – Presenting an online festival was a whole new experience for us. We had to quickly adapt and learn, and our role changed from live music producer to small-scale tv producers.</p>
Question:	How did you approach the concept of 'on demand'? Both festivals had set date / times for content but was there also an 'on demand' window or multiple listings, and why?
Answer:	Caitlin – Yes, we had some shows with on-demand content. We encouraged artists to schedule their events but some preferred to make them available for a longer period (anywhere from 48 hrs to the entire 2.5 weeks of the festival). In our context, this worked best for digital content where there wasn't much need for an audience chat functionality, e.g. exhibitions, podcasts, downloadable apps, some pre-recorded theatre shows. It also provides better accessibility – some audiences with access requirements are unable to watch a whole event at once or can only watch at certain

	<p>times of day. Obviously, anything with a live element is hard to have on demand but you can put the recorded version of the live event up for a limited time afterwards.</p> <p>Lesley – All of our shows had a transmission date and time and were then available to view on-demand for 7 days afterwards. Our aim was for audiences to enjoy as much of the festival as they could, and we wanted to make the content accessible to international audiences. The festival took place over 19 days so as the festival went on it meant that audiences could catch-up. We also saw people buy some shows after the ‘live’ event after seeing reviews/social media reactions, so making the content on demand for a limited period of time also allowed us to attract additional customers.</p>
Question:	How early was Melbourne Fringe able to communicate about the ‘in-person’ events you were able to stage? Were audiences happy to attend, and did you also stream those events?
Answer:	Caitlin – From the beginning we knew that we wanted to keep the option open to be able to do both in-person and digital. We had a “physical distance rating” for all events which indicated the level of physical distancing (e.g. a digital event would be 100%, and in-person event with physical distancing measures in place would be 50%), and we also tagged events as either in-person or digital, and had a search filter. Most of our in-person events were small and outdoors – e.g. there was one in a backyard, one in a glass house in a park, a couple in shop windows – but on the day restrictions lifted we put on a 100 capacity event in a venue. Tickets sold out in ten minutes – our audience were really keen to attend.
Question:	Interested to hear more on the delivery of content, and the resolution of that content. Considering the variable download capabilities of your audience, how did Celtic Connections balance that?
Answer:	Lesley – The download speed of our audiences was a consideration in our planning and with variable speeds, particularly in some rural areas, we wanted to ensure that customers could enjoy our programmes in the highest resolution possible. We worked with Vimeo and took advice from them re. optimum upload resolution – they also give audiences the option to choose their resolution (although most videos are set to ‘auto’ where it detects what is optimum for your download speed / device).
Question:	What platform or solution did you use to facilitate interaction between delegates, networking tables etc?
Answer:	Ben – We ran speed networking on Hopin which worked OK, but we find the best way to get delegates to interact is through engaging them in content through chat, workshops etc. We are also looking at other potential solutions.
Question:	Was there a huge difference in cost between live event and digital event approach? Was there a difference in ticket sales due to the approach?
Answer:	Ben – The direct cost of the Host City digital platform was slightly less than the cost of staging a physical conference. A delegate pass for the physical event would cost up to £1,200, but access was free to the digital platform. Our model focussed not on ticketing sales but on sponsorship – and the cost of sponsoring digital was less than a physical event.

	Lesley – Difficult to compare - it was a different event for us entirely; we didn't have costs such as front of house, security, box office, full PA etc but we had filming, audio and editing costs.
Question:	Were there any barriers that impacted your events online?
Answer:	Ben – We had a brief technical outage. Lesley – Most barriers were technical where some customers couldn't stream from their phone to tv for example. We created a list of FAQs and our team answered and helped with technical set-up as best we could but there were a few customers that just couldn't get their home set-up to work. It's also worth noting that while we think that making an event online is accessible, there is still a proportion of the population without access to internet at home which is a barrier in itself.
Question:	How did you overcome any issues with consent / permissions for young people taking part in live online activities, whether as contributors or audience members?
Answer:	Caitlin – In terms of audiences, we removed the audience chat from all digital events aimed at 13y/o and under. We also changed our event age restrictions to meet the National Classification Codes for film/broadcast and required all users to agree that they understood and adhered to the age classification before entering the event
Question:	How do the Celtic Connections in-person numbers compare to digital festival?
Answer:	Lesley – We sold 27,000 passes for the digital festival – a mixture of full festival passes and individual passes. Our evaluation showed that approx. 4 people per household used each pass which multiplied made our figures close to our live audiences in 2020.
Question:	Are you familiar with the SXSW platform? They seamlessly incorporated advertising for their sponsors with pre-roll videos. Do you see this as a potential revenue source for your events and how do you ensure this does not annoy your audience?
Answer:	Lesley – I'm afraid I didn't get to attend SXSW so can't say that I'm familiar with the platform. I did tune into the BANFF Mountain Film Festival last year and their platform seamlessly linked between live, adverts and film content (similar to cinema). I think key to adverts is to make sure that they are relevant to the event / audience. Pre-roll (or end-roll) means it doesn't interfere with the flow of the programme too much but there may be instances where it works well at a natural break in the content.
Question:	Did Celtic Connections get much in donations?
Answer:	Lesley – We had a positive response to donation messaging and an increase in donations this year could be a result of the affordability of tickets (along with increased messaging)
Question:	At Host City, is your main target market Event Organisers or is it mainly PCOs?
Answer:	Ben – The audience of Host City includes rights holders, organisers, hosts and the supply chain of major sports, business and cultural events. Our core audience is sports events, festivals, major congresses/exhibitions and everyone involved in hosting and delivering them, including PCOs.