



# Aberdeen Festivals Growth Fund Case Study

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Aberdeen – Where Festivals, Food &  
Drink make for Special Weekends

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## Project Overview

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A cultural initiative, Aberdeen Festivals brings together ten festivals to sustain, further develop and promote Aberdeen's vibrant and distinctive festivals offering.

During 2015 the group delivered a marketing campaign across print, radio and digital formats called 'Visit Aberdeen - where festivals, food and drink make great weekends'. In total, the campaign was worth £50,000 - 50% funded from a £25,000 Growth Fund grant and the remainder match funded via funds from Aberdeen Festivals, VisitAberdeen, and Statoil.

Features of the campaign included targeting travel routes to the city via rail and air. And working alongside local businesses in Aberdeen to create an overall 'Festival Deal' - it collated a range of offers from festivals, craft beer outlets, independent hotels and locally owned restaurants, in a drive to bring more visitors to the city from target areas. This deal was significantly

marketed in the target markets of Norway and Newcastle.

The rationale for this Growth Fund Project was two-fold. Firstly to increase the profile of Aberdeen's festivals with both national and international audiences. And secondly to increase the profile of the city as a cultural destination. Underlying these was an objective to get people that already have links to the city to view it from a different perspective.



## Activity Impact & Learning

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The digital and social media activity channels were immensely successful, as well as achieving good engagement (predominantly through Trip Advisor and Facebook), there was significant learning. In-house technical capability was enhanced. And further to this Aberdeen Festivals now have hard evidence of the results that can be delivered through digital social media. Having this evidence is highly beneficial from a strategic point of view. Previously they had invested little resource into digital campaign channels because they had little evidence to present to their board to justify the investment. There was also a third element of learning in the way of filter down learning to member festivals.

Since the successful delivery of the Growth Fund project, Aberdeen Festivals have offered free sessions on digital social media marketing to their member festivals to enhance their knowledge in this area.

Each festival now has a digital social media plan and there is evidence of much more consistency across the festivals in terms of digital marketing. Inflight magazines were also highlighted as a successful and value for money activity delivery channel, particularly as inflight magazines have a good shelf-life (usually for a quarterly period).

Overall the two key learning points in terms of activity delivery were:

- Contrast in the measurable value created from investment in digital social media channels versus the more traditional marketing routes (this will be reflected in future campaigns)
- In retrospect the campaign was too light touch, as activity only happened in three bursts, while targeted at the correct regions it should have been for longer periods to create more traction.

## Wider Benefits

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The Growth Fund project has proved to be a very successful engagement tool for Aberdeen Festivals. Engagement with member festivals has been strengthened, especially in the context of a relatively young but growing cultural confidence in the region, members were surprised that the project had performed and delivered so well. This has increased members will to partake and deliver marketing campaigns of this nature.

The realisation of the project, particularly the 'festival deal' aspect has seen an increase in partners wanting to work with Aberdeen Festivals – for example there is a consistent flow of emails from hotels who want to be partners. More widely, the project has resulted in increased local business and community recognition of the work of Aberdeen Festivals.

Having the majority of festivals in the region under the one banner, and the traction created around this from

the Growth Fund, has provided the whole festival scene with an increased local profile. The significance of this impact is demonstrated by the fact a notable number of local residents commented that they didn't know the area had so many festivals. Nomination of Aberdeen Festivals for two awards (Chamber of Commerce, Arts & Business Scotland) further shows the positive engagement impacts achieved by the project.



## Growth Fund Experience

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The monitoring and evaluation aspect of Growth Fund was a mixed experience but nonetheless provided a lot of learning. Monitoring approaches were put in place for all the digital elements, such as Google analytics, Facebook tracking, etc. However, it was difficult to track the more traditional/paper channels of the campaign- for the most part monitoring of these was based on anecdotal evidence. The 'festival deal' package proved challenging to track in terms of the hotel/food & drink aspects. There were too many places (4 hotels, 6 food & drink establishments) involved, which diluted the trackable impact. Thus, in any future packages they will look to work with fewer partners.

Prior to Growth Fund, Aberdeen Festivals had not had experience of public sector grant administration, thus found the reporting aspect of the grant demanding. However, they now feel they are in a better position for any future public sector funding, as they know what to expect.

The Growth Fund project has had a considerable positive impact on Aberdeen Festivals (and its member festivals) relationship with VisitScotland. Previously there was confusion around the role of VisitScotland and EventScotland - now the nature of this relationship is much clearer. There also much more knowledge among festivals on the resources that VisitScotland hold (content calendar, visitor segmentation information, insights research, etc.) – 'what a resource of information VisitScotland hold'.

On a practical level, engagement with VisitScotland through the Growth Fund has 'opened doors' and connections with other relevant members of VisitScotland staff (e.g. advice on producing an e-book). More generally for reputation and recognition, it is a positive for the festivals to be associated with VisitScotland, and there is acknowledgment that this aspect goes both ways.

## Looking Forward

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Aberdeen Festivals was successful with a second Growth Fund application in late 2016. This second project very much builds on the initial project learning, which was the focus of this case study, and also takes on board the evidence of the independent evaluation. The focus will move away from internationalisation and instead target the untapped market of the central belt and London.

Delivery of the Growth Fund project assisted Aberdeen Festivals in making new marketing connections – it is their intention to go back to these people and see what other synergies can be developed. The success of the Growth Fund project has given them confidence in doing future joint funded applications. It has also highlighted the need for income generation, thus they are looking at a range of options, e.g. merchandising.



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