

Case study



# Building a community and maintaining momentum with a biennial event



Katie Moffat in conversation with Robert Martin, Digital Marketing Manager at Manchester International Festival



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*The Manchester International Festival (MIF) is a biennial international arts and culture festival with a focus on original new work. It was first held in 2007 with the most recent festival taking place during three weeks of July in 2013. PR consultant Katie Moffat spoke to Robert Martin, Digital Marketing Manager at Manchester International Festival*

**Katie Moffat:** Can you provide us with some background to how you came to be working with MIF and what you were tasked with doing?

**Robert Martin:** I was engaged to deliver a strategy for the digital marketing for the 18 months from June 2012 to October 2013. I wrote a report that had three main parts: 'Bursting the bubble', 'Love MIF' and 'Recreate'. 'Bursting the bubble' was about trying to level off the peaks and troughs that can be common when you have a large gap between events, so considering how we could ensure a stream of engaging content all year around, not just immediately before and during the festival. 'Love MIF' focused on engaging our online communities and building loyalty and 'Recreate' specifically looked at how we could make better use of content from past festivals.

**KM:** Can you tell us a bit about the approach you took?

**RM:** I was certain that we needed to be content focused but that engaging content wasn't just about official announcements. We made short teaser films out of footage from previous festivals and worked hard to spread the message, across the organisation, that interesting content can come from all sorts of sources, back stage at rehearsals, a meeting on-site at a potential venue, even a 'no entry' sign on the door has a story to tell.

We also focused quite deliberately on the artists themselves, since their own backstories and catalogue of work provided a rich source of compelling content.

**KM:** Apart from you, who else contributed to the digital marketing, particularly the social media activity, which can be time-consuming to do well?

**RM:** We had a small team in marketing that, especially as we got closer to the festival itself, started to help maintain our blog, Twitter account and Facebook page. To ensure everyone always had social media in the back of their mind I would send around a sheet every Wednesday, to all MIF staff, that asked them to jot down anything they had planned in their

diaries that might be of interest for our online profiles, maybe they were going on a site visit or meeting with a producer for example. It was quick and simple for people to complete and it meant I had a big picture of all the interesting activities. I'd review this and then ask people to get some photos or try and grab a quote, as relevant, and this way it meant we had a steady flow of all sorts of interesting bits and pieces.

**KM:** What was your biggest challenge?

**RM:** Without a doubt I'd say that the biggest challenge initially was the fact that many of the producers wanted to keep the detail of the commissions and performances completely secret until the first night. This was understandable but also presented a challenge when we were trying to feed our online communities with background information about the different shows and events, beyond the official announcement. I worked hard to build relationships with the producers and took the time to explain the value of our approach.

As you draw near to the event, the obvious challenge is one of time, you have to be very organised, we had a social media planner outlining both key events and also which member of staff was managing the social accounts, on each day and evening.

**KM:** With what were you most pleased?

**RM:** We had some great results and I'm very proud of the team. For example, comparing MIF 11 with MIF 13, during the 2011 festival we had 32 referrals to the website from Twitter, this went up to 12,500 in MIF13, our traffic from Facebook went up by 30% and from Facebook mobile by 1000%. There were other great statistics such as we had 72,000 visits to our blog posts and 24,000 visits to the artists section, an area that was new for the 2013 festival and something I had championed strongly.

Overall though I was most pleased with the relationships that we built with the producers, the venues, journalists, key stakeholders and our online communities, the value of this may be difficult to accurately measure but is hugely important and can't be overstated.

**KM:** What tips would you give to anyone responsible for marketing a one off or periodic event?

**RM:** Be clear about what you want to achieve and be organised but you also have to be prepared to be flexible and responsive. We used Google Analytics to track how different digital marketing tools were performing for us and how much our activity translated into ticket sales on the site. Always work with those you trust, when rebuilding the MIF website for example, I chose a trusted partner that I knew would deliver for us. Never underestimate the value of good relationships!

**Further information:**

<http://www.mif.co.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/mcrintfestival>

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*This case study was produced as part of CultureHive, a free knowledge hub where you can discover and share best practice in cultural marketing. Visit [culturehive.co.uk](http://culturehive.co.uk) for more great resources.*