

Guide

Hyperlocal journalism and your cultural organisation

Sarah Hartley

Journalist and blogger



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/uk/)

Published 2013

Supported by



Created and managed by



In partnership with



Introduction

In truth, the term 'hyperlocal' has become a bit of a catch-all term for all manner of online publishing that's based around a place so don't let the title put you off, there's plenty to be gained by engaging with these publishers. We could be talking about websites or blogs, YouTube channels or even a Twitter stream or Facebook page but the one unifying factor is that the locality is the defining thing.

And there are hundreds of these services operating up and down the UK. If you're not yet familiar with those nearest to you, check out this map of the main, active sites:

http://openlylocal.com/hyperlocal_sites

Most of these sites are operated by small groups of volunteers or individuals giving up their spare time to run them and with tiny or non-existent budgets. So how could they help with your arts marketing activity?

A good local website, Facebook page or Twitter stream will have an outstanding local network, including many people who organise stuff and get things done locally. The people who subscribe to the local site will be, by definition, local communicators who are interested in what's going on and most likely have excellent networks of their own. The audience is also likely to be more specifically local than a paper or radio station. It's a very potent audience for an arts organiser, BUT this potency is often derived from the site not being a conventional media outlet. Sites vary, but their sense of community often means they won't welcome obvious PR material. To work well with a local site, page or feed you often need to put more effort in than just sticking them on a mailing list, at least at first.

Here are six examples of hyperlocals working in ways that could support local arts activities:

1. Previewing upcoming events

Details of what's on events are the bread and butter of local websites and they can play an invaluable role in connecting people locally with what's happening. There's a host of different ways they are displayed from publishing posters to using a calendar format to display them like this site from [Tongwynlasi in Wales](#). There's unlikely to be a change for inclusion but contact the site owner to find out exactly how to include your information; being able to provide an RSS feed is a common requirement so ensure the publicity material is produced in a shareable format and avoid PDFs.

2. Creating a searchable archive

A local website can become a local archive for a recurring event that the organisers can then draw upon when promoting or talking about the following year's production. In the Black Country, the Caldmore Village Festival blog now has reams of material about the event over several years. In Heeley, the local site documents the Heeley Festival (and draws a lot of search traffic as each year's event comes around) and in Doddington a [Doddington Carnival](#) website spun out from the village site devoted to the Carnival – and now is an invaluable source of information about the event.

3. Mapping artistic activity

Many local blogs and sites utilise mapping tools as a way to visualise activity happening around them. Free tools that are easy-to-use even for non-technical people lend themselves to mapping issues by theme or topic. This website mapping the galleries of south London is a great example: <http://www.southlondonartmap.com/map>

4. Hosting conversations and consultations

Because local sites and blogs often have a trusted position in a local area, they are ideally placed to host discussions and debates around themes and issues. Some enlightened local authorities and organisations have found ways to harness that ability and reach out to people. At this West Midlands site, the publishers got involved in the consultation process for a new privately funded public art project designed to form links between a retail partner and [Wednesfield Village](#) as they said, it meant people were “literally laying the foundations of the art that is created.” As well as the online survey and commenting facility at the blog, the site also ran activity across Twitter and Facebook making this a very cost effective approach to public consultation.

5. Getting offline

Organising an event can be a great way to strengthen connections in a community. Meet-ups, show previews or special nights with something out of the ordinary are great ways to specifically interest the audience of the local website or blog. This example from the York-based hyperlocal magazine and website One&Other shows how the magazine chose to discuss ‘hidden’ community issues by using a photography competition to engage people. More than 200 people attended the launch of the [New Chapters Arts Prize exhibition](#), a collaboration between One&Other and According to McGee to raise awareness of many of the issues that are out of sight, out of mind – from poverty to mental health problems.

6. Displaying multimedia content

Local sites using modern blog platforms or Facebook can host your video far more easily than the local newspaper website can. This gives an arts organiser a potential local outlet for video media without the faffing of dealing with a newspaper or regional TV company. In London's tough Caledonian Road, local blogger William Perrin uses his site to post videos of the local festival: <http://kingscrossenvironment.com/?s=cally+festival>