NEW MEETS OLD: THE MUSIC FESTIVAL

A Digital Analysis of One Music Festival’s Online Presence

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The idea of a music festival often conjures up flashbacks of Woodstock, hippies, drugs, alcohol and the free expression of a generation. Why are most of the music festivals that come to mind from the sixties? The era that gave us Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, space exploration, rebellion, drugs, free love and of course, the music festival. What happens when a small resort town on the west coast of Michigan is turned into a four-day festival that has been created in the past year to celebrate “music, art and action?” The whole festival has been summarized and explained on it’s website: rothburyfestival.com. The site provides basic information in an easy-to-find manner, while allowing those who are more interested to delve deeper and navigate through seemingly endless menus that play-off the general “green” theme of the festival, which may attract a crowd of passionate festivalgoers.

At first glance, the website appears to be professionally created because it does not follow the average template for a do-it-yourself job. Centered at the top of the page is the logo for the event that gives off a western feeling that relates to the venue at which the festival is held. The Double JJ resort has many Wild West
inspirations throughout the property, and the western type font of the title plays-off that fact. Since the festival focuses on being environmentally friendly (the Action part), the site has a green theme that carries through each link, tab and sponsor. A banner extends outward from the right and left of the main “Rothbury” logo and contains links to more pages that include Festival, Tickets, Sleeping, Tap In, Details and Partners (left to right). When the site loads, viewers witness a box that appears on the left-hand side of the page. The box contains the names of the five main attractions/artists coming to the festival. Immediately after the box appears three boxes slide in below it from the left and include the tagline: “Music, Art and Action.” All of this sits on top of a fantasy-like forest scene that subtly contains a character that appears to be Mother Nature. The use of movement and color is done in a way that attracts the viewer to the main points without cluttering the flow of the site. On the top-right hand corner, orange text draws attention to “Rothbury, Michigan USA” and “A Music Festival Revolution,” which change places with each other while the dates of the festival sit below. The combination of color and moving text allows visitors to find the main points of the site. The creators of the site refrain from just using solid green in empty spaces; instead, hues of green and blue are fused with subtle stripes that help keep the viewers attention. For those truly interested in the site’s contents the design acts as nothing more than cherries on ice cream, but for those who just take
in the basics, everything acts as a selling feature.

Festivals are often advertised through word of mouth by die-hard fans of various musicians, but for those who hear about them second-hand, the website is the number one source for raw information. The banner at the top of the screen is set up to answer your question in the order that they will most likely appear in your mind from left to right. These first timers to the sight are asking one question, “Who’s coming?” In this case, the box on the left-hand side expands to a list of sixty-seven artists and bands. Each name is clickable and leads to a picture and bio about each act. This small window that pops up gives a huge insight into the artists identity. Some have small cult followings, while others are household names. If the list is intriguing enough, then the next step is learning about ticket prices. Many decisions are made either easier or harder based on the cost factor, and in this case, the difficulty of the decision is increased immensely. Tickets range from two hundred and fifty dollars for a normal weekend ticket and four hundred and seventy-five dollars for the VIP ticket. So, why go VIP? This is where the more interested viewer would take over and begin the hunt for more information.

The package includes access to special viewing areas, parking close to the venue and space for those who plan to camp out the old
fashioned way. This, of course, does not include traditional lodging, but on the same page as ticket prices there are links to “Good Life Lodging Packages,” and “RV Passes.” For those that have sufficient funds in their pocket books, these options may seem feasible, but will probably prove to be unattainable to the average event-goer. The festival creators have offered an option to those who may not be able to afford the four-day event: Work for us! Under Tap In, those who are more interested than the average person can find out how to be part of the festival’s work exchange program. Also under this link, people can find more information relating to the “Green” identity of the festival and how they could help those various causes. Most visitors to the site will find this an unnecessary addition to an already informative page, but the creators of the festival have recognized that this plays an integral role in developing their identity. Finally, the most determined festivalgoer would stumble across Details, which is arguably the most important tab behind Tickets and Sleeping. This is where participants will find out how to live the Rothbury lifestyle. Lists of restrictions are clickable and open up to other lists that offer more explanations. Information regarding pets, what constitutes an RV, suggested items that should be brought and any other questions regarding facilities is located under this tab. These rules and regulations could be viewed as contradictions to the whole idea of a music festival.

These events usually conjure up memories of young people
expressing themselves through the art of music and the use of substances, but the set-up of the Rothbury Festival is not conducive to such activities. While the creators of the festival use terminology on their website such as “getting lucky” in an attempt to sell this as an old-school event like Woodstock, restrictions are in place to give them some control over the situation. For example, there is a limitation of three cases of beer for each ticket holder. There are also restrictions on fires, generators, space, and sound levels. The no rules atmosphere of old has given way to a corporatized moneymaking event hidden under the cloak of memories. The young people that would normally show up to such an event would most likely be deterred by the financial hit that they would sustain if they decided to go. Maybe this is a conscious decision by the festival creators? The tickets automatically weed out those who could cause harm to the festival’s reputation. Also, just as possible event-goers made choices based on their pocketbooks, so too do the festival creators. A love of music is powerful, but it can be trumped by greed and one’s love for money.

A truly “green” festival would discourage against the use of RV’s that guzzle gas, but the site seems to point in another direction. It seems as if these beasts of the road have been catered to in an attempt to gain a greater turnout and even more important: a greater profit. There are many considerations that have to be made in response to the changes that popular culture has gone through since

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1969. Event participants will most likely need electricity to charge their various gadgets that have become daily necessities (cell phones), but such access is limited to the VIPs and gas generators are strictly prohibited. It is easy to let the mind wonder and think what are people coming to this event for?

With more restrictions than an airplane, the draw of the various artists must have much more pull than the festival’s “green” identity. Then the festival’s creators better hope that people are willing to bare the financial burden, and literally camp out in order to see their favorite artists. The goal of creating “action” starts to be hidden when those participating are indifferent to the reason that action is needed. Woodstock reached out to a generation of young people that wanted to speak out against the war and live a “free” lifestyle, but who or what the Rothbury Festival will attract and create is still in question. A music festival for RV-going, Jacuzzi demanding people does not hearken memories of that infamous festival from so many years ago. But maybe the festival is reaching its intended audience. Those who can afford to go “green” are often able to purchase new or more environmentally friendly versions of things that they already own (hybrid cars and organic food), compared to those on a tight budget. Furthermore, one could agree that the American society is run by wealthy individuals that can exert their influence in policymaking and on the country as a whole. Then, in
this case, the festival reaches a wealthier clientele that can actually take the *Action* that is underlying this four-day event. What age group could be considered when thinking about a “wealthier clientele?”

Normally, wealthier people have had established careers and an educational background that facilitated growth in their professional lives. This could encompass people in their thirties and up, but for this event, the target audience would probably be below the fifties. The latter part of this age group could contain a famous group of Americans known as the Baby Boomers. They were alive to witness the sixties, The Beatles, Vietnam, and most importantly in this case, Woodstock. The Rothbury Festival may be inadvertently targeting those who have fond memories of the ideals that so wholeheartedly represented what the sixties and their teenage years were all about. Rothbury is a modified Woodstock for those who have moved on with their lives. Think professionals in tie-die, receding Afros and long hair, and monogamous free love. Another way for those who want to change the world to take a stand for at least one more time. No more posters and word of mouth advertising, they are going to visit the site and e-mail old friends.

The website allows easy navigation for those who want basic information, while answering almost any question possible through seemingly endless menus that are infused with the “green” theme of
the festival. Festival creators have sacrificed sheer numbers for a
crowd that shares their passion for Music, Art and Action. The
“limits” of this festival are yet to be seen since this is its first year and
there has been nothing in recent years to package a weekend’s worth
of music with a cause in the state of Michigan. Websites are
advertising tools created to sell the viewer on, in this case, an
experience. Just as a commercial would be scrutinized and then taken
with a grain of salt, why should a website be taken as fact? We as a
society must be skeptical and analytical of the information presented
to us online.

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