

Festival marketing - celebrating good times

 By [Mike Silver](#)

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South Africa appears to be following the developed market trend of the growth in the number of lifestyle properties/events and the involvement of sponsor brands that follow suit.

When one thinks of the beginnings of festival gatherings, it shouldn't take long before the iconic scenes of the original Woodstock are reminisced about.

Free love, peace, experimentation and sexual liberty were the order of the day as the masses rose up against the actions and constraints of the establishment. While open-air entertainment by some of the greatest musical talents of all time was a bonus, attendance was really an advertisement of self-expression and activism.

'Experience economy'

On the surface, things haven't changed all that much in terms of the motivation for attending lifestyle-type events. In what is now dubbed the 'experience economy', festival attendance, in part, could be viewed as a means of elevating the attendees' own social image/appeal. The ability to say "I was there" supposedly speaks volumes of who they are, what they know and what they stand for.

Unlike 1969, though, where it was a strict 'hippies only policy', these experiences are now available to a broad range of consumers, with different interests, living in all corners of the globe. One might argue that the rise of globalisation and of a hyper-connected digital existence have contributed greatly to this mobilisation of likeminded individuals. Either way, the demand from consumers for events that allow for the exploration of their various personal interests is an upward curve that doesn't seem to be slowing down any time soon.

From a SA perspective, we have seen an unprecedented emergence of new lifestyle-type festivals in recent years. This growth is similar to what was seen in the UK four years ago that lead to a rise in consumer shows, exhibitions, sporting events and, most notably, mainstream and niche music festivals (estimated at 450 in 2010).

We now host everything

For a country that has barely celebrated 17 years of democracy, it's remarkable to think that we now host everything from Sexpos to international jazz festivals to global food shows. Attendance figures for many of these properties (most in their infancy) are through the roof. In fact, Whiskey Live in SA is now labelled as the world's largest whisky festival!

With a national media savvy, upper LSM consumer base in attendance at festivals, it's no surprise that the brands have stood up and taken notice.

Traditionally, brands weren't spoilt for choice in terms of festival marketing in SA. Aside from sporting events, pretty mediocre fare was on offer, such as the Rand Easter Show, J&B Met and the odd performance by the 'athletes' from the WWF- Word 'Wrestling' Federation (now WWE).

Brands able to pick and choose

Today though, a very different picture exists. Brands are now able to pick and choose their properties according to their exact target audience. This means that for brands with varying consumer segments (main market, formal market etc), these offer a powerful platform for targeted consumer engagement.

Identifying the right festival is only half the battle won. In the UK and the US, numerous sponsorship consultancy agencies exist to investigate and negotiate terms with properties, thereafter developing activation plans upon selection. In SA, the likes of EXP, Octagon and Sail play this role to a degree for some of SA's 'super brands'.

Globally, we have also seen the rise of 'festival creation' whereby brands opt to develop their own campaign concepts that can be moulded and marketed as they see fit. The Smirnoff Nightlife Exchange product saw Diageo create a global dance event platform with mass appeal and intrigue.

Brand love through association

Ultimately festival sponsorship by default generates an almost guaranteed portion of brand love through association. Attendees have an obvious personal affinity for the property and the experience in general, with recognition by the brand noted. This air of positivity also creates the ideal for creative consumer engagement and activation participation.

Be warned though; brands can misread their selected festival crowd, as was the case with a the uproar caused by a national drinks group not stocking a competitor brandy at the KKK Afrikaans music festival.

More successful brands have strategically targeted the elusive youth market at festivals such as Rocking the Daisies, Rage Festival, Oppikoppie and H2O. They've successfully embraced their environment: executing inviting activations in sync with the festival culture. Absa Life Xtreme's leftfield sponsorship of (and high adrenalin activations at) the Ultimate X action sports festival created massive intrigue of a financial service sub-brand looking to challenge dull consumer perceptions of the market.

Impending alcohol advertising restrictions

With the impending 'dark market' restrictions [about to be imposed](#) on the alcohol industry, keep an eye out for their ever increasing participation in festival marketing, following the example set by their tobacco friends (now heavily restricted in terms of consumer engagement).

While this commercialising of lifestyle festivals may have had Jimmy Hendricks turning in his grave, unfortunately for him, the show must go on.

For more:

- Bizcommunity: [Gugulethu: introducing wine to black consumers](#)

For More link added 2.06pm on 3 June 2011.

ABOUT MIKE SILVER

Mike Silver is the founder of Stretch Experiential Marketing (www.stretchexp.com), a Cape Town-based experiential agency specialising in concept development and activations for national campaigns. He set up Stretch in 2009 after working in the UK for a number of years in experiential marketing and sponsorship consultancy for clients such as Unilever, Yahoo! and Diageo. Contact Mike via mike@stretchexp.com, tel +27 (0)21 802 1344 and [facebook.com/stretchexp](https://www.facebook.com/stretchexp). Follow [@stretchmike](https://twitter.com/stretchmike) on Twitter.

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