



# **An Analysis of Brand Activations:** The Case of Music Festivals



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# Preface

## Brand Activations as a Marketing Tool

Music festivals represent an ideal scenario for brands to showcase new products and services, raise awareness to relevant causes or to simply maintain (or enhance) brand awareness. The hedonic environment and behaviors of festivals, combined with the values and behaviors associated with music, allows brands to effectively communicate and interact with fans while they are influenced by positive emotions. Thus, marketers seek creative solutions to trigger novel hedonic experiences or to simply solve utilitarian problems that frequent during a festival experience. Either way, an effective brand communication and relationship is established and the festival goer benefits from having a more memorable experience.

*This insight report highlights common practice trends developed by marketers during brand activations in music festivals.*

## Methodology

The report displays a sample of results from a content analysis of **120 brand activations**, which took place in over 60 music festivals from 2007 to 2019. Festivals ranged from markets such as North America, Europe, Africa and Oceania (Australia). The activations were analyzed in 21 categories.



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# Sample of Brands and Festivals

Brand	Festival	Location	Year
Amazon	Coachella	California, USA	2019
Amazon Prime Video (2)	SXSW	Texas, USA	2019
American Express	Coachella	California, US	2019
American Express	Panorama NYC	NYC, USA	2017
American Express	ACL Festival	Texas, USA	2019
Beats Music	Pitchfork	Chicago, USA	2014
Beautyrest	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Benefit	Glastonbury	Worthy Farm, UK	2017
BMW	Coachella	California, USA	2019
Bobo's Oat Bars	Summer Camp	Illinois, USA	2018
Brussels Airline (3)	Tomorrowland	Belgium	2018
Bumble	SXSW	Texas, US	2018
Calvin Klein	Coachella	California, USA	2019
Casper	SXSW	Texas, USA	2017
Chevrolet	CMA Festival	Nashville, USA	2017
Chipotle	Pitchfork	Chicago, USA	2014
CITI	Global Citizen Festival	NYC, USA	2017
CLIF	Pitchfork	Chicago, USA	2017
CNN (2)	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Comedy Central	SXSW	Texas, USA	2019
DC Comics	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Durango	Boots & Hearts	Canada	2014
EE	Glastonbury	Worthy Farm, UK	2015
Energizer	Camp Bestival	Lulworth Estate, UK	2015
Fever Tree	Festival N°6	Portmeirion, UK	2017
Ford (3)	Bonnaroo	Tennessee, USA	2013
Gatorade	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Google	Panorama NYC	NYC, USA	2016
Goose Island	Pitchfork	Chicago, USA	2014
Gordon's	Concert at sea	Netherlands	2019
Greenpeace	Glastonbury	Worthy Farm, UK	2015
Guitar Hero	Bestival	Lulworth Estate, UK	2015
Harvest HQ	SXSW	Texas, USA	2019
HBO (2)	SXSW	Texas, USA	2017
HBO (4)	SXSW	Texas, USA	2019
Heineken	Coachella	California, USA	2016
Heineken (2)	Coachella	California, USA	2019
H&M (2)	Coachella	California, USA	2019
HomeAway	ACL Festival	Texas, USA	2018
HP (2)	Coachella	California, USA	2019
HP (2)	Panorama	NYC, USA	2016
HP + Intel	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
HP + The Verge	Panorama	NYC, USA	2016
Innocent Drinks	Lowlands Festival	Biddinghuizen, NL	2016

Jack Daniel's	TW Classic	Belgium	n.d.
Jim Beam (2)	Pitchfork	Chicago, USA	2014
Lacoste (2)	Coachella	California, USA	2013
Levi's (3)	Splendour in the Grass	Australia	2015
LinkedIn	SXSW	Texas, USA	2019
Lowe's	ACL Festival	Texas, USA	2016
Mazda (3)	Tomorrowland	Belgium	2015
McDonald's	SXSW	Texas, USA	2016
Naked Juice	Humble Festival	Belgium	2017
NHS Blood & Transplant	Glastonbury	Worthy Farm, UK	2015
Nikon (4)	Rock en Seine	France	n.d.
NYX (2)	Coachella	California, USA	2019
Perrier	Pemberton	Pemberton, Canada	2016
Pinterest	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Ray-Ban (4)	Oppikoppi	South Africa	n.d.
Ready Player One	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Red Bull	ACL Festival	Texas, USA	2018
Revolve	Coachella	California, USA	2019
Rimmel+Elle	Bestival	Lulworth Estate, UK	2015
RNIB	Glastonbury	Worthy Farm, UK	2017
Samsung (2)	Lollapalooza	Chicago, USA	2013
Sephora (2)	Coachella	California, USA	2019
Sephora	Panorma	NYC, USA	2016
Showtime	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Spredfast	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Strongbow	Isle of Wight	Newport, UK	2015
Tesla	SXSW	Texas, USA	2017
Timberland (2)	Cornbury & Camp Bestival	Oxfordshire, UK	2011
Tito's Handmade Vodka	Bestival	Oxfordshire, UK	2011
TOMS	Governor's Ball	NYC, USA	2017
Topman	Firefly Festival	Delaware, USA	2015
Uber	Pitchfork	Chicago, USA	2014
Vice (3)	SXSW	Texas, USA	2018
Virgin Trains	SXSW	Texas, USA	2019
Virgin Trains	Kendal Calling	UK	2015
Virgin Trains	Festival N°6	Portmeirion, UK	2016
Vitaminwater	WayHome	Ontario	2017
VOS	Wireless	Finsbury Park, UK	2017
WaterAid (2)	Glastonbury	Worthy Farm, UK	2019
We are what we do	T in the Park festival	Scotland	2015
Weedmaps	Coachella	California, USA	2017
Wired + ADP	SXSW	Texas, USA	2019
World Vision	Camp Bestival	Lulworth Estate, UK	n.d.
Wrangler Jeans	Lowlands Festival	Biddinghuizen, NL	2007



# Activations with Hedonic Solutions

**Hedonic brand activations:** Core value lies on eliciting pleasure and excitement through memorable services and experiences and adding to the overall festival experience. Here are a sample of examples, grouped by the required level of *interaction* among participants.

## Hedonic Activations with High Interaction

- Internet lounges with free Wi-Fi
- Mattresses and music for relaxation
- Party flights pre-festival
- Ferris wheel rides
- Art installations
- Art and product exhibitions
- Photo taking booths
- Interactive games
- Online gaming
- Beer gardens
- Exclusive parties
- BBQ lounges
- Performing experiences
- Bull riding competitions
- Bar and lounges
- Skating areas
- Train rides
- Music stages and DJ's
- Sword fights
- Free arcade machines
- Meet and greets with artists and celebrities
- Mirror selfie spots

## Hedonic Activations with Low Interaction

- Temporary tattoos
  - Face paints
  - Makeovers
  - Hair Stylists
- AR and VR Experiences
  - Food giveaways
  - Product testings



# Activations with Utilitarian Solutions

**Utilitarian brand activations:** Core value lies on on solving functional problems for visitors and, consequently, contributing to the overall festival experience. Here are a sample of examples, grouped by the expected *social impact* (social and/or natural environment).

## Utilitarian Activations with High Social Impact

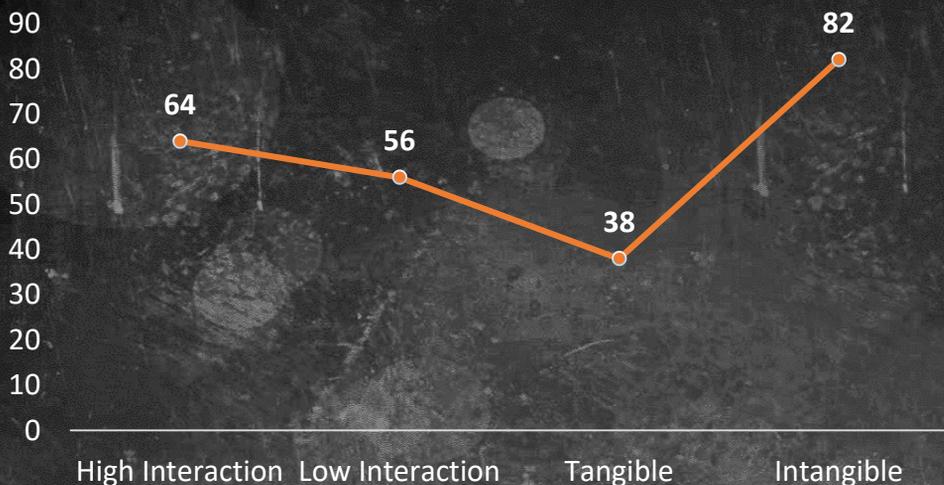
- Workshops about nature preservation practices
- Campaigns to alert for the right and importance of voting
- Recycling bins
- Booths to take professional photos for one's career
- Medical eye tests
- Blood donation stands
- Professional career support

## Utilitarian Activations with Low Social Impact

- Water refill stations
- Phone charging stations
- Escape rooms for distress
  - Internet lounges
- Mattress and music for relaxation
- Lockers to collect ordered items
  - Meeting points
  - Laundry services
- Online order delivery stations
  - Free foods and snacks
- Live screen printings: shirts and bags
- Special transport to and from the festival
  - Photo cameras to borrow

# Overview of All Brand Activations

### Interaction *versus* Tangibility



During music festivals, marketers have focused on developing activations which induce both interaction, and a memorable experience, among visitors.

**94.2%**

of total activations were organized by the **private sector**.

**4.2%**

of total activations were organized by the **public sector**.

**1.7%**

of total activations were organized by **non-profit organizations**.

**81.7%**

of total activations were aimed at visitors of **both genders**.

**13.3%**

of total activations were aimed at **female participants**.

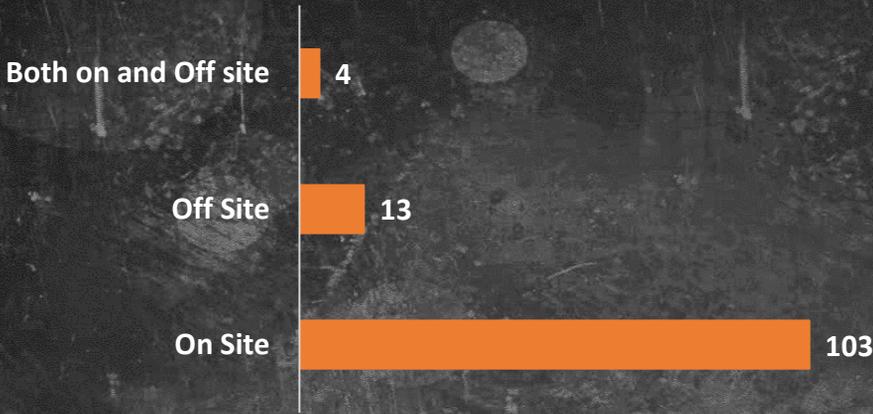
**81.3%**

of total low-tech activations were targeted at **female visitors**.



# Overview of All Brand Activations

## Location of Activations



Brand activations do not necessarily happen on site. After-festival parties and transportation to and from the festival were the most common forms of off-site activations.

**72.6%**

of total activations with high social impact (focus on social or natural environment) were also highly hedonic.

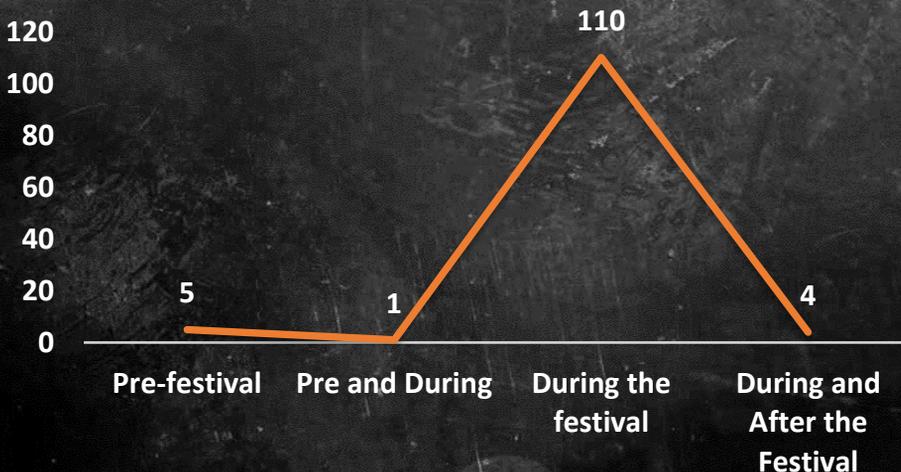
**52.4%**

of total activations with high social impact (focus on social or natural environment) were also highly utilitarian.

**68.3%**

of total of activations were services, without any tangible offering for visitors.

## When Did the Activations Happen?



Marketers have focused broadly on actions taking place during the event. Pre-festival activations with the local community or early visitors still represent an untouched opportunity.

# Overview of All Brand Activations

82.5%

of total brand activations had **low social-impact**. This means they were not related or focused on any cause, such as the environment or minorities. Only **17.5% (21 activations)** focused on such themes.

80%

of total activations were **low-tech**. These focused on human experiences, not triggered by any technology innovation. In 20% of the cases, the activation adopted some kind of technology innovation.

42.7%

of total activations that were services, were characterized as **low-interaction**. They focused on solving consumer problems. Contrarily 57.3% of service activations triggered high-interaction.

## Hedonism versus Utilitarianism



Given the context of festivals, marketers have focused on creating activations which triggers hedonic, pleasurable feelings in participants. Also related, often such activations have low utilitarianism. In other words, they rarely fulfill a functional purpose.

# Creative Examples of Brand Activations

Amazon  
(2019)

**Description of activation:** During Coachella 2019 in California (USA), Amazon installed lockers for festival goers to collect items they had previously ordered online. This provided an immense value of convenience, triggered unsought purchases related to the festival experience, enabled easier commute and enhanced visitors' overall experience.

HBO and  
Red Cross  
(2019)

**Description of activation:** During SXSW 2019 (Texas, USA), HBO created an activation, staging all the famous scenes of the wildly popular TV series – Game of Thrones. This enabled fans the experience of engaging with the popular TV show and taking creative photos. At the same time, HBO partnered with American Red Cross to promote the social message of blood donation, aligning positive associations between the brands and social causes.

Red Bull  
(2018)

**Description of activation:** During ACL 2018 Red Bull created an activation where challenges were Airdropped to iPhone users. Fans competed to win VIP wristbands. The activation triggered hedonic and utilitarian experiences to festival goers by engaging with the brand and encouraging the interaction among fans during the completion of challenges. Positive associations were then built for a highly exciting and rewarding activation.



# Creative Examples of Brand Activations

RNIB  
(2017)

**Description of activation:** During Glastonbury 2017 RNIB introduced an activation of an eye test karaoke. Participants joined an hedonic environment, with a karaoke stage where lyrics became smaller as the song played along. It was not only a free eye test for participants, but it also raised awareness for the importance of regular medical eye checks. A creative example of an utilitarian activation with an hedonic character.

Heineken  
(2016)

**Description of activation:** During Coachella 2016 in California (USA), Heineken created a lounge with a kinetic dance floor. Essentially, the energy of participants' dancing moves was stored and applied directly in the environment. It represents an engaging and interactive activation which highlights methods of collecting energy, the importance of clean energy and triggered positive associations with the brand.

McDonald's  
(2016)

**Description of activation:** During the SXSW Festival in Texas (USA) in 2016 McDonald's offered a virtual reality excursion into a Happy Meal. Attendees were able to design their own Happy Meal box from inside by virtually painting and decorating the inside walls. Finally, participants were able to share their creations on social media.

# Creative Examples of Brand Activations

HP +  
The Verge  
(2016)

**Description of activation:** During Panorama Festival 2016 in New York City (USA), HP teamed up with The Verge and developed a laboratory combined with a 360-degree virtual reality theater. The facade of the laboratory was made out of an ultra high-definition projection mapping that created a journey throughout the festival. Within the lab attendees were able to try out new innovative products and to participate at workshops. Further, the theatre was built out of a 360-degree 4k screen where participants could watch art shows as well as documentaries.

Sephora  
(2016)

**Description of activation:** The cosmetic retailer Sephora developed a virtual reality experience at the Panorama Festival 2016 in New York City (USA). In a tent located on the festival ground, attendees were able to try out an augmented reality with a facial recognition tool that allowed participants to test product versions and preview the end result of the new looks.

Wrangler  
Jeans  
(2007)

**Description of activation:** During Lowlands Festival 2007 in Biddinghuizen (Netherlands), Wrangler Jeans offered free laundry service and provided participants with Wrangler overalls to wear while their clothes were being washed. This represented not only fantastic value of convenience for festival goers, but also a very positive brand association and exposure when overalls were being worn.

# Final Thoughts for Marketers

**Brand activations** have the potential to, and should, be much more than a simple tool for brand exposure. As seen through the examples, brand activations have the potential, for example, to enhance a music festival or any other live hedonic experience, while at the same time, raising awareness to relevant social and environmental causes.

Moreover, activations also have the potential to provide valuable solutions to utilitarian problems and basic needs during the consumption of the experience. These may include transportation, safety, illness, communication, hydration, hunger, well-being and much more. The 120 brands investigated here have shown fascinating creative solutions that can be replicated or adapted to other contexts.

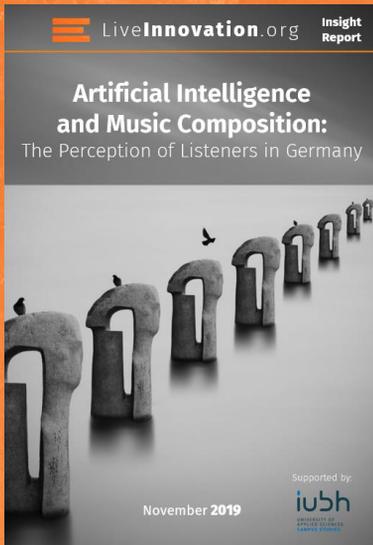
Furthermore, these examples show that when a brand is indirectly communicated in association with a customer solution or macro-environmental cause, the impact is often very positive. The affective response, as consequence to the solution of the problem, is directly transferred to the brand in a hedonic environment where affective emotions are running high.

The combination of context, situational factors and consumer value indirectly related to the brand makes brand activations in music festivals an extremely effective marketing communication tool.

Cheers!

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