



The Power of Social Media

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For the past 15 years I've had the pleasure of producing an amazing annual festival in Winthrop, Washington. In addition, I have been part of the Waterfront Blues Festival in Portland approaching its 32nd year, drawing over 80,000 people to Portland's waterfront over the 4th of July holiday each summer to see upwards of 100 plus amazing artists ranging from local favorites to legendary headliners.

Now in its 32nd year, the Winthrop Rhythm & Blues festival returns to the banks of the Methow River in picturesque Winthrop each summer for a long weekend of camping and great music. While smaller than Waterfront, this festival has a dedicated, loyal fan base and has become a favorite venue of artists in the blues, roots, Americana, and R&B genres.

For many years we approached marketing these festivals with entirely traditional methods: poster campaigns; radio, tv, and newspaper ads; and other sponsorships to get the word out. While successful, we realized a few years ago that we were missing out on opportunities with new media. Then we were introduced to the social media agency, Project Bionic while at a WFEA conference.

Project Bionic showed us how building and maintaining an active presence on the major social platforms could help us engage people at every step of the customer journey, from young people who are interested in festivals, but have never heard of ours, to lifelong fans who return year after year. Our profiles on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become a go-to resource for people to learn about our events, share experiences, ask questions, and get excited about the coming festivities. These platforms function as much more than just a one-way ad, they have helped us connect to, interact with and grow our community.

Since partnering with Project Bionic for the 2016 festivals we have seen huge growth in attendance. We sell more tickets every year, and we are selling them earlier, before we even announce our lineup. The tracking possible on these platforms enable us to see where ticket sales are coming from and measure the return on our ad spend.



Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival

Last year, for every dollar we invested in social ads we got between 9 and 12x return on investment in directly tracked ticket sales. In addition to that direct benefit, we further grew our audiences and gathered more user generated content, both of which help us do even more in the future.

We haven't abandoned traditional marketing methods. In fact, the team at Project Bionic recommended we continue what we know works, and selective print and radio advertising still works for us. But we have started to shift more of our marketing budget to the digital space simply because it provides reach, interaction, and measurability that are not possible with print, television, and radio.

For the last two years we have fully sold out the Winthrop festival. My goal this year is to sell out again, but a month before the festival gates open. Our social media efforts are the number one reason that may happen.

If you don't already have a robust social media marketing strategy, I strongly suggest you pull one together. And if you need help you know who to call.