



Festival to Food Hike – A Permanent Visitor Experience Expansion

Industry Topic Specialist

Name: [Chris Sheppard](#)

Position: [Executive Director](#)

Company: [Legendary Coasts Eastern Newfoundland](#) (LCEN)

Location: [Elliston, NL](#)

chris.sheppard@legendarycoasts.com

Specialist Highlights

Covid-19 forced the Roots, Rants and Roars (RRR) festival to innovate and create a product to offer in 2020. Food Hikes were so successful that they will permanently modify and expand the festival's offer to reach, and respond to new markets. Their secret to success:

- Stayed true to and leveraged their existing brand pillars and values, which were known and respected in the market.
- Engaged a working group to inform the experience design and produce win-win-win results for the RRR festival, participating restaurants and My Food Hike patrons.
- Took a core component of their flagship festival event – the food hike – and envisioned a new opportunity for visitors to curate their own experience through food, music and hiking in beautiful places.
- Shifted their focus from 'inward' at the festival to outward 'throughout different communities'.
- Reviewed emerging trends research during COVID which underpinned their design thinking – built on explosive interest in hiking, takeout food, being outdoors and doing activities in bubble groups.
- Considered how to create an event that would run regardless of how COVID-19 guidelines evolved.

Discussion Ideas & Tips

While COVID-19 resulted in the cancellation of festivals in 2020, there were also many that were adapted to provide a different visitor experience. This summary highlights the discussions held with 22 tourism operators/professionals regarding the role and importance of events in creating new audiences and new value for businesses and communities.

"If I'm an advocate for anything, it's to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. Walk in someone else's shoes or at least eat their food"

– Anthony Bourdain

Tactical Practical Take-Aways

- Built sustainability requirements right from the beginning from local foods, beverages, ingredients and containers.
- Approach securing COVID-19 funding support as an investment to offer an experience that has longevity and benefits to the destination, even if success is uncertain, plan for the long-term.
- Reimagine, re-envision and don't be constrained by what you were doing pre-COVID. Focus on what can be done on their own as RRR did when they took the "Food Hike" component of their core festival and redesigned it as "My Food Hike", a bubble-based experience.
- Involve the local and regional tourism marketing organizations early product development discussions – they can be very helpful when brainstorming ideas and improvements.
- Review events and identify if any can be spread out and run as a series of events over a longer period. Not only will it open the event to a larger audience, the longer time period can provide opportunities to build and strengthen awareness and interest.
- When marketing, leverage communities of interest, if available, from local/regional tourism marketing organizations.
- Contests can be a great source of user generated content (UGC) and were used to great effect by RRR to build their social media presence and create a buzz.

Ideas shared at this session

- Think strategically about 2021 funding opportunities. Leverage what has been learned in 2020.
- Collaborate with other businesses when seeking funding to demonstrate benefits to multiple businesses; focus on new innovations and how funding helps recovery while servicing the local/regional market.

- COVID-19 has changed what it means to be social. While large festivals may return, for the next year or two, people are likely to feel more comfortable at events that allow people to do something as a small group while participating in something bigger.
- Explore opportunities for past attendees to participate, even if they are unable to physically be there. Perhaps selling logo product they can purchase and use when doing the activity in their hometown and post pictures of this allows them to feel they are participating in something bigger.
- Consider how to extend your event into new markets. RRR started off in a single location for a single weekend and through My Food Hike became a month long event taking place across the region. With past chef partners located in locations beyond their region what opportunities might there be to create an experience that incorporates elements of the individual physical activity as well as the group based digital connection – a ‘phygital’ experience.
- RRR provided members of the LCEN’s community of interest (#HikeHL) with picnics and asked them to write about and photograph their experiences. The initiative generated significant interest with a new audience to RRR and generated website and social media content. Boost with affordable Facebook advertising.
- Debrief experience partners. Learning what worked on both sides and making changes creates a win for everyone and can lead to an even better visitor experience.
- Take advantage of the need to track visitors during the pandemic to build your database (ask if you can include them in your newsletter) as well as to better understand your draw (where they are coming from), if they are repeat customers. This information is also of interest to funding partners.
- Listen to your customers. When RRR heard that customers wanted to see their favourite restaurants’ picnic offering before choosing a date, they added a page for each restaurant thereby facilitating the purchase process.

Ideas shared at previous sessions

New approaches provided a variety of benefits for businesses that decided to continue to host an ‘event’

- Focusing on a core component of an event and looking at it from a different perspective allowed RRR to offer an experience at a much lower price point, thereby introducing the event to a new

audience that could become a future target audience.

- Going online provided the St. John’s International Women’s Film Festival exposure to new markets/audiences around the world that may never have thought to attend the event.
- Allowing people to curate their own experience from a set of elements can increase appeal amongst a younger audience.
- Spreading a large weekend event out over a month by creating individual/bubble experiences opens it to audiences not interested in being in large crowds.
- Some communities indicated small group events could be an effective strategy to address seasonal and geographic dispersion by holding events during non-peak periods in less visited locations.

Offering a series of events has become a creative way for businesses to tap into their customers’ passions and presents an opportunity for an ongoing revenue stream through a subscription model. For example:

- A food festival could target foodies who love to cook, with a subscription to a series of events where they cook along with a different chef every month.
- Offering a series of activities that tie into the passions of festivalgoers can be a great way to keep customers engaged between events as well as bring in a new audience.

When developing a new event, bring people along on the journey as RRR did with the My Food Hike experience.

Think of it as a teaser campaign that will build excitement and generate interest. For example:

- Show them elements of the new event e.g., what they might see, using stock images, or images from tourism partners.
- Engage people by having polls to get feedback on some of your ideas (e.g., present options for product designs or ideas for food items).
- Show your partners working on preparations; it gives them exposure, which they will appreciate.
- Show new products/items as they arrive and are being prepared.
- Introduce any influencers you may be bringing in to test the experience.

Successful partnerships occur when there is an alignment on brand values and an understanding of how each business plays a role in enhancing the experience.

Working with past partners that understand a business’ values and experience can be helpful.

For many, food is a core element of an experience and offering food experiences in unusual places has been an approach many operators have taken over the last year. However, some operators indicated they have had problems collaborating with food partners, as the opportunity was not seen as large enough. Suggestions provided to attract partners (not necessarily food related) included:

- Ensure the partner is getting good exposure on the business' website and social media channels.
- Collect and share the email addresses of anyone who purchases the partnered experience. RRR actually provided this opportunity by having the partner handle the sale - the partner then has the ability to remarket to that customer.
- Provide a higher margin for the partner by designing a bundled experience that cannot be purchased any other way.
- Structure the opportunity in a way that addresses operational issues, e.g., for a partner providing picnics, pre-sell the experience so numbers are known in advance and set the pick-up time to be before/after the lunch rush.

This was a year when many Chambers of Commerce successfully took their business achievement awards online.

- Brighton-Cramahe noted their multi-day on-line event that included a series of short videos provided increased exposure for sponsors.
- Other ideas for future awards nights / special events included involving more local businesses in the provision of items for gift bags and partnering with restaurants to provide a special event-based take out meal.

Additional Helpful Links

Platforms to support the technology needs associated with delivery of a digital experience, such as: [Patreon](#) for artists and [Uncorked Experiences / Mystery Towns](#) for amazing race/scavenger hunt type experiences.

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