



The Country Music Festival Craze

by Bob Galombeck

The festival business is going totally crazy. Big festivals are selling out and drawing thousands upon thousands of concertgoers, mid-size festivals continue to grow their capacities and lineups, smaller festivals that have been running with regional talent are converting over to bringing in National Acts, and communities seeing other communities building their festivals are jumping in on the band wagon. An average of over 32 million people go to at least one music festival each year and casinos who are not partnered with a festival in their area in some way should consider doing so.

You can find big festivals in all genres from country to rock to techno, and so on. New country is one of the most dominant festival types, and artists are enjoying having so many opportunities to work in so many markets as a result.

This boom has had a positive impact on the industry, but at times, front line agents, managers, talent buyers, production companies, artist tour crews, etc. have felt the effects and many have been getting stretched a little thin to keep up, whether it is on the paperwork side, the advancing of details side, or the onsite side. It has slowed the process down at times, but overall, it is a good problem.

So what does this mean for the casino industry?

- It's an opportunity to get a routed date on an artist coming into your region if the radius restrictions work along with pricing and scheduling.
- It's an opportunity for your casino to become a community partner. Perhaps you can sponsor the stage or another aspect of the event or perhaps have a presence at the event with a vendor booth promoting your venue and encouraging new players club signups and some free play.
- It's an opportunity to reach a new potential population of concertgoers and increase your casino database.
- Rather than compete with them, become involved.

If your casino has considered its own mini-festival on site, here are some thoughts focusing on the new country market:

- The 4 figure quote artists in general are eager to take dates to get more exposure, even if they have to drive half way across the country. Building their social media and fan base is important to them as they develop their discography and hopefully eventually land a string of #1 hits. They are not too difficult to secure overall.
- The 5 figure quoted artists are not as easy to secure. Management wants them to take the better markets or

the best priced shows if not a major market as long as the date and billing makes sense in their travels. Many of these artists piggy back as support acts on big name artist tours and their calendar fills up rather quickly. And many eventually go on to become a headlining act. Securing them will depend on your date, budget, and market.

- The big name 6 and 7 figure artists are proven headliners and securing them for a festival will be the most difficult. Many have their calendar full well in advance and are more selective on what dates they will confirm.
- You may find yourself paying a premium price to get the artist you want if they are available. Trying to book a 5-6 figure artist at the low end of their price point and well in advance will leave you most likely with a very long delay or a decline altogether.

Festivals are more than just music. There are a lot of positive options for the concertgoer. Camping, VIP experience options, a variety of vendors, etc. And they all play a role in many multi-day larger festivals. The smaller community festivals have many strengths of their own, including donating profits to the local community, building partnerships, and bringing local, regional, and national talent to their community, which again your casino could be involved with. If your casino is near a festival that does not provide camping, you may consider offering camping on your property to a limited number of concertgoers, as well as shuttle service to and from the concert site.

There are a multitude of smaller community festivals that a casino can partner with, but there are also major festivals with tons of traffic to consider partnering with. Here are several with capacities:

Lollapalooza – Chicago, IL, 3 days, 325,000 attendees

Bonnaroo – Manchester, TN, 4 days, over 80,000 attendees

Summerfest – Milwaukee, WI, 11 days nearly 900,000 attendees

Austin City Limits Music Festival – Austin, TX, 6 days, 450,000 attendees

Coachella – Indio, CA – 6 days, 579,000 attendees

Some may argue there is an oversaturation of festivals, but until that proves to be true, it's all good and has made the industry healthier. ♣

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