

Things to think about when you're playing out

First up: be sure you know why you're doing this event outside or offsite. It's an awful lot of work and most shows work very well inside theatres that already have the infrastructure to support them. There should be a long term solid, strategic reason behind your decision to take the work elsewhere. It could be that you're wanting to make your venue more visible, to be a larger part of your local community, to reach new people or to introduce a new strand to your regular programme – or a combination of the above. Just be sure that the thinking has happened and has been communicated to the whole team; to your own staff and volunteers and to the company you're presenting. Make sure you're also communicating with the host venue or event organisers so they understand your aims and you understand theirs.

Second: Location, location, location. No site is ever perfect but try and find the best site for the event that you can. It may be important to site it thematically or as part of another event but make sure you've thought about how people can reach it (is it walking distance? Is there parking for cars and bicycles? Does public transport operate until after the end of the performance? Can the company drive their van on to the site and at any time?). If it's a pop-up event then having good footfall is vital and it may be better to compromise on beauty in order to get a site that people will see. Check if there's wheelchair & buggy access, toilet facilities, access to drinking water or even better refreshments.

Try and know as much about what the show needs and what you want before you choose your site, most shows will need a power supply and dressing rooms areas, and if the site doesn't have everything you want, think about how you can overcome these obstacles to make it as comfortable and accessible as possible. Leave lots of time to negotiate permission from the land owner. Requests often have to go to multiple parties and stake holders who don't work to the same brochure deadlines you do and you may have to rethink certain aspects of what you want to do to comply with feedback and local byelaws. You may also need to get a Temporary Event Notice from the district council.

Third: Health & Safety. We all regularly review our health and safety procedures and risk assessments in-house but when you're working in an outdoor or found space there are so many more variables, not all of which can be controlled. Do a thorough risk assessment of the site, the company you're presenting should also have their own risk assessment but make sure you read it in terms of your chosen location. Check your Public Liability

Insurance extends to external locations. It's worth having more staff and ushers than you think you need and there are set guidelines for ratio of marshals to audience numbers. Make sure everyone knows what's going on and what the protocols are – if you're part of another event then make sure you're asking these questions of the event organiser if they're not already giving you this information.

Four: The Great British Weather. If you're working in a space without a walls or a roof then weather is always going to be a factor. Know what your limits are – when the weather becomes too dangerous to continue. This could be because it's too hot, too cold, too wet or too windy. Do remind / warn audiences to dress appropriately including footwear, both in advance and on the day. Do find some nearby spots where people can warm up/cool down/dry out. Do know your cancellation procedures and the cancellation procedures of any event you're a part of.

Five: shout it out. So you're there, it's happening and lots of people have shown up to join in. Brand your area and make sure they know it's you – pull up banners, helpers in t-shirts, signs and a-frames, balloons, we even have branded bunting. If it's appropriate get the company and / or compere to include your name in any announcements. If you're part of a larger event make sure you're listed in their advertising, announcements and event schedules. If it's all your event then everything should be tied back to your venue and your branding.

Keep the space animated. When we toured our tent, between performance times we had colouring in, dressing up, a reading corner and other games and activities. It meant that we were attracting people throughout the day not just at show times. This might not be appropriate for your space and event but do consider if you can enhance the main attraction with other activities.

Identify some other events in your programme that have cross-over potential and make sure you take those leaflets plus your brochures to hand out (preferably kept in a water tight container, soggy paper doesn't attract anyone and leaflets blown all over the site doesn't make for good relations). We've used feedback postcards for people to let us know what they thought of the event, whether they'd been to us before and an invitation to join the mailing list combined with the incentive that every postcard would be entered in to a draw for free tickets to our pantomime. It was a great way to gather data but questions do need to be kept quite succinct - and if you do this don't forget to take lots of pens.

But better than all of these is making the time to talk to people, tell them who you are, where you are, what you do and listen to what they're interested in. Word of mouth remains the most powerful marketing tool.

Six: Smile. You may be soaking wet and freezing cold, the van's stuck in mud, you're next to a stand with really loud music and the leading man expected an en-suite dressing room but the audience don't care. They just want to experience something brilliant and unusual. Smile and remember that it'll all make for great stories in the pub later.

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