



## Festival to Food Hike – A Permanent Visitor Experience Expansion

### Industry Topic Specialist

Name: [Chris Sheppard](#)

Position: [Executive Director](#)

Company: [Legendary Coasts Eastern Newfoundland](#)

Location: [Elliston, NL](#)

[chris.sheppard@legendarycoasts.com](mailto:chris.sheppard@legendarycoasts.com)

### Specialist Highlights

The Roots, Rants and Roars (RRR) festival developed a band-aid solution that was so successful it will continue to be a part of future RRR festivals. The following are some of the key elements contributing to the success of the new format:

- 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 their existing concept from their flagship festival event – the food hike – and envisioned a new opportunity where visitors could curate their own experience through food, music and hiking in beautiful places
- Reviewed extensive research to understand emerging trends during COVID 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 avoid changing COVID guidelines and run regardless of how the guidelines evolved.

### Discussion Ideas & Tips

While COVID-19 resulted in the cancellation of many festivals and events, there were also many that were adapted to provide a different guest experience. This summary highlights the discussions held with 11 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

- 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.
- If COVID has resulted in an inability to run an event, review the core elements and identify if there are some that 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.
- If creating a new festival, or considering a major revamp to an existing festival, involve the local and regional tourism marketing organizations early on in the 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.

### Ideas shared at this session

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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