

April 8, 2008

Great Smokey Mountain Summit Case Study:  
Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival

**History**

In 2002, Axis Ventures, LLC, a partnership between AC Entertainment of Knoxville, Tennessee, Superfly Productions of New York City, New York, and Red Light Management of Charlottesville, Virginia leased a 700+-acre pasture in Coffee County to host a three-day music and arts festival, the Bonnaroo. The event surprised middle Tennessee and the nation when it sold more than 70,000 tickets with no traditional advertising. The annual festival has lived up to its reputation drawing big-name artists performing in a wide range of music genres and attracting music lovers from all fifty states and two dozen countries.

Since its inception, Bonnaroo has drawn strong praise in the national media. The *New York Times* noted that the festival has “revolutionized the modern rock festival.” *Rolling Stone* magazine dubbed Bonnaroo 2003 “The American music festival to end all festivals,” and in 2004 named Bonnaroo “one of the 50 moments to change the history of rock and roll.” The festival’s reputation remains strong; *Filter* magazine’s Benjy Eisen reviewed Bonnaroo 2005 as living “up to its reputation as the single greatest music festival in America.”

Moving toward the 2008 festival, Bonnaroo continues to raise the bar not only with stellar lineups that discard the notation of music genre in favor of groundbreaking and spectacular musicians but by also featuring a comedy tent, a cinema tent with director Q & A, an arcade, silent disco, a jazz club and much more. In addition, Bonnaroo is the leader in social responsibility, not just from an environmental standpoint but also a community investment. The visionaries at Bonnaroo understand to stay competitive in this industry one must not only maintain their core audience but also continue to stay ahead of what the potential audience is looking for in a social and entertainment experience.

In addition, in January 2007, the promotional team of New Era Farms LLC purchased the site that hosts Bonnaroo, now named Great Stage Park. It quickly became apparent that the same factors that have led to the success of Bonnaroo, direct access to Interstate I-24, nearby Nashville and Atlanta airports, and the easy travel from nearby metropolitan areas, could also lead to other successful events. Marketing and promotion for Great Stage Park are now underway.

### **Economic Impact\***

In 2003, Middle Tennessee State University's Business and Economic Research Center (BERC) conducted an economic impact study of the first Bonnaroo music festival. The study found that Bonnaroo's overall economic impact on the region was positive. However, it notes several data limitations because of the retroactive nature of the study, which relies on conservative estimates of attendee spending outside the festival venue. The 2003 study concluded that "future festivals would benefit from a survey of fans to estimate more precisely their spending in the region."

In 2005, the BERC followed up with a more extensive, yet still conservative, survey of Bonnaroo attendees reveal that Manchester and Coffee County enjoyed both tangible and intangible effects of the festival, including substantial economic and fiscal impacts.

Economic benefits from the festival are enormous for Coffee County. *Direct spending* in Coffee County alone was as follows:

\$1,902,229 by festival organizers

\$8,630,575 by music fans from across the U.S. and overseas.

The total economic impact of Bonnaroo Music Festival 2005 on Coffee County is estimated to be:

\$14,087,231 in business revenues

\$4,353,887 in personal income

191 new jobs

In addition, Bonnaroo Music Festival has made substantial contributions to the local government revenues. The estimated fiscal impact of the festival was:

\$412,796.

This includes local option sales tax on local spending, hotel/motel tax, fines and fees for activities, and direct contributions to the local government by the festival organizers.

\*Numbers are all based on the finding from the 2005 BERC Economic Impact Study and do not include any numbers for any festival after 2005.

## **Greening and Social Responsibility**

The Bonnaroo organization is dedicated to producing a festival that is as environmentally friendly as possible while raising awareness among patrons about green products, technologies and issues.

In light of this, organizers are taking significant steps toward reducing or eliminating the environmental impact of major facets of the event. A full list of environmental accomplishments follows.

Bonnaroo's uses of a full line of organic cotton t-shirts, biodegradable concession service items, revolutionary waste management strategies, and cleaner fuel options. In partnership with Tennessee-based company WastAway, Bonnaroo will participate in a revolutionary recycling process that will turn 250 tons of festival garbage into construction material and park benches to be used at future events. The festival will also continue its own extensive recycling and composting program in partnership with Clean Vibes, an organization that has diverted approximately 10 percent of the event's total waste since its inception. This year, Bonnaroo organizers expect to divert over 60 percent of the event's waste from landfills.

Bonnaroo has also implemented plans to mitigate its predicted impact on global warming. All of the festival's non-music stage generators will utilize a biodiesel fuel, and one such stage (the Solar Stage) will run on solar power alone. In addition, in partnership with CLIFBar, the festival will purchase renewable energy credits from the Bonnaville Foundation, offsetting all carbon dioxide emissions created by the festival and the bands completely negating Bonnaroo's contribution to global warming. Attendees will also be encouraged to purchase wind energy credits called 'Clif Cool Tags' to make up for emissions produced by their travel. To further involve attendees in greening efforts, the festival will run a contest for "Best Campsite" with one major category of judgment based on recycling/greening.

In addition, Bonnaroo will continue the use of non-VOC paints, and include electric golf carts into the fleet of production vehicles. This year's festival program will again be printed on 100% recycled paper.

Bonnaroo 2008 brings back the popular Planet Roo village within Centeroo, an area dedicated to preserving the environment and promoting healthy living. Non-profit organizations, eco-friendly vendors, and Solar Stage performers will gather to educate patrons about what they can do to protect their own health as well as the planet's. Fans who stop by Planet Roo will have the chance to learn about alternative fuels and energy sources, eat organic food at a waste free restaurant, and hear festival artists discuss topics related to the theme "Social Change through Music." Representatives from organizations such as Rock the Earth, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), StopGlobalWarming.org, and Big Frog Mountain Solar, will interact with fans and artists to raise awareness about ways to fight global warming in everyday life.

Recognizing that green issues are of paramount importance to the organization, its patrons, and the world at large, Bonnaroo is proud to present an event that is not only a great entertainment experience, but also an example of an environmentally sound gathering that helps our planet remain hospitable to life.

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In 2007 Bonnaroo was awarded A Greener Festival's International Greening Award.

Bonnaroo Greening Accomplishments:

- Over 30,000 gallons of biodiesel fuel (B99) to replace diesel for non-music stage generators
- WastAway refuse to handle process of recycling over 250 tons of garbage
- Concession food served with biodegradable wraps, plates, cups and cutlery manufactured from a renewable resource
- Festival-wide recycling and composting program implemented
- Implemented methods to offset all festival and band emissions
- Allow attendees to purchase energy credits to offset their own emissions for travel to the festival
- Solar stage and sound system run by solar power
- Presenting a full line of organic cotton t-shirts
- Using tree-free posters
- Using post-consumer recycled toilet paper for portolets
- Using 100% recycled paper (30% post-consumer) for all of the program and administrative needs
- Use of VOC-free paint will eliminate 1,260 lbs of Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) emissions from this year's footprint
- Expansion of Planet Roo to focus on exposing festival attendees to organic lifestyles, renewable energies, and environmental and social issues

