

Audiences  
What Keeps Them Away

---

META AUDIENCE RESEARCH

by Dave Cross

---

Generator commissioned an extensive research programme to find out what prevented people from attending gigs.

REPORT TO GENERATOR NORTH EAST LIMITED  
**AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**  
**RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUPS**  
PREPARED BY: SCOTINFORM LTD  
JANUARY 2000

**CONTENTS**

- 1 Introduction
- RESEARCH FINDINGS:
- 2 - Profile of Sample
- 3 - How Leisure Time is Spent
- 4 - Likelihood of Travelling to Pubs/Clubs
- 5 - Importance of Music In Lifestyle
- 6 - Perceptions of Popular Music Events
- 7 - Reasons for Not Attending Live Popular Music Events
- 8 - What Makes a Good Event
- 9 - Factors Which Would Encourage Attendance
- 10- Marketing
- 11- CONCLUSIONS
- APPENDIX ONE: Topic Guide

---

**INTRODUCTION**

This report details the main findings from three focus groups held in Newcastle Upon Tyne with young people who do not currently attend live popular music events. The research study was commissioned by Generator North-East, the popular music development agency for the North of England and conducted by Scotinform Ltd, an independent market research company. The main role of Generator is to raise the profile of the music industry by promoting large-scale festivals and events, through the distribution of Generator Newsletter, by providing a one stop advice and information service, training events, schools programmes, lobbying, sponsorship and close media links. In order to develop the popular music industry in the North of England, Generator wished to explore the reasons for non-attendance at live popular music events and to identify key participating beneficiaries of the study as well as ascertain current policies towards live music, audiences and facilities amongst participating venues.

The overall study consists of Three Phases.

This report details the findings from Phase Two of the research study - qualitative research

amongst non-attenders of live popular music events. The topic guide used in the survey is shown in Appendix One of the report.

---

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Profile of Sample

A total of three focus groups were held in December 1999. Each group consisted of eight people with a good mix of men and women and those in employment, unemployed and students. Attendees were aged between 17 years old and 34 years old and lived either in Newcastle City or within a 30-mile radius of the City Centre. All participants listened to popular music at home but had not attended a live performance within the last year.

### How Leisure Time Spent

Participants were first asked how they spend their leisure time. Most participants visit the cinema, theatre or city centre or local bars and clubs.

*"I go to the pictures and the pub."*

*"Most of my money is spent going out at weekends, it is quite expensive to drink in the town"*

*"Chase, Cameo, like the newer bars, at the moment we are into the Ba Ha Beach Club if you can get in."*

One participant spent her leisure time surfing the Internet finding out about bands that she liked and looking for CDs at a cheaper price than in the high street stores.

*"I just go on-line and find out if any particular band that I like has got a new CD out, how much it is and where I can get it cheaper."*

A significant proportion of participants purchase CDs to listen to at home or whilst driving in the car. A large proportion tended to buy dance or compilations CDs, which are advertised on radio or television.

*"They advertise Greatest Hits Compilations on the television, by playing the good songs and then you buy the CD and the rest are rubbish."*

The general consensus of opinion was that CDs were very expensive and that people do not buy as many as they used to. Women tend to spend a large part of their leisure time shopping for clothes and other household products whereas men tend to visit pubs with friends and attend local football matches.

*"It varies for me, I am out two or three times a week playing football and sometimes I have a pint after and then sometimes at the weekend."*

For the younger participants in the groups (those aged 17-28 years old) their ideal Friday and Saturday night out was going to the Quayside in Newcastle and visiting the pubs and clubs. Very few participants ventured into the City Centre mid-week, however, men were more likely than women to visit pubs in the City Centre on a Monday night. Monday night was considered "student night" with pub promotions offering cheaper drink and live bands.

*"You spend about ten minutes in each bar, you want to do as many bars as you can, that is the whole idea of going down to the Quayside."*

*"Monday night is classed as a student night."*

For men aged over 28 years old a good night out was to spend time with friends having a quiet drink in a local pub.

*"Going to a pub, you are going to talk to your mates or whatever company you have gone out with. I would like to think I would give a live band a try, but you can't hear yourself think. I go to a pub to sit and have a bit of a chat, you want to be able to have a conversation and certainly if there is live music in a pub I would think twice about it."*

### Likelihood of Travelling to Pubs/Clubs

A small number of participants, again mainly young men aged between 19-22 years old, travelled to other cities to visit clubs. The club scene tended to centre on Manchester, Blackpool, Liverpool and London.

*"Last year I went down to see New Order in Manchester."*

Participants living outside of Newcastle City were quite prepared to travel into the City Centre for entertainment at weekends. Pubs and clubs were the main draw for younger participants

and only a few participants had mentioned that they had visited the City Centre to see a live band performing. Most of those who had seen a live band performing in a City Centre bar had come upon the band by chance and through the offer of cheaper drink at promotional nights in pubs advertised using flyers distributed to the general public. The availability of late night transportation and the cost of taxi fares tended to prohibit many people from staying in the City Centre later than the last bus home, which was normally around 23.00 hours.

*"The last bus is about 11 o'clock which is quite restricting."*

Younger participants who visited clubs in the City Centre were prepared to pay between £5-£10 admission fee.

However, there was the perception that some pubs and clubs in the City Centre were over priced.

*"Price puts me off, there is a bar on the Quayside, it is like a modern trendy type bar and you pay a fortune for a pint and it is rubbish."*

Participants who tended to socialise locally were much more likely than those who visit the City Centre for entertainment to have seen a live performing band in a pub. Of those who had visited a pub or club where a band was performing live, the majority were pleasantly surprised and felt that the band had added to the atmosphere in the place.

*"There is nothing better than a live band."*

Most participants stated that they did not seek out places where live bands were performing but enjoyed listening to bands if they happened to be performing in the pub or club which they had chosen to visit.

*"There was a band at my local pub, it was purely by fluke I went in for a drink and there was a live band on, it was great, I didn't know them."*

### **Importance of Music in Daily Lives**

Music was considered to be a very important element in people's lives and most participants tended to hear about new bands through the local and national radio stations such as *Galaxy Radio*, *Century Radio*, *Metro FM* and *Radio One*. Younger participants liked to listen to dance music on the radio prior to going out as this set the mood for the evening. Participants agreed that music had a strong influence on changing their particular mood and men in particular liked to listen to music whilst they worked.

Participants were interested in finding out about new bands or music, but were reluctant to seek out venues where new bands were performing. Younger participants preferred to spend their money at clubs listening to DJ mixes of dance music whereas older participants (28 years old and over) enjoyed listening to live bands, particularly if they were playing songs with which they were familiar.

All of the participants had their own preference for the type of music that they enjoyed and were unlikely to watch a band that was not performing their type of music.

Participants, who did not work within the City Centre, felt that apart from the radio stations there was little advertising elsewhere about live performing bands.

*"There is not much information about the club scene, apart from if you listen to Century Radio or Metro FM regularly, where you will hear about concert information, it is rare to see on a bill board or some other form of media."*

*"There is an advert once a week in the Chronicle, in entertainment, for the City Hall and the Arena."*

*"Record shops do advertise now and again."*

### **Perceptions of Popular Music Events**

Nearly all participants had attended a live popular music event, mostly when they were students.

Participants who had attended events at Newcastle *Arena* were disappointed with the venue and the cost of tickets.

The main venue in Newcastle for big named bands is the Newcastle *Arena*.

Most participants had seen a band performing live at the *Arena*. However, nearly all had poor perceptions of this venue. The *Arena* was considered to be too big and most of the seating at the back of the hall had poor visibility. Participants said that as the distance between the audience and the stage was so great most people had to rely on large TV screens situated around the *Arena* to see what was happening on stage. Participants felt that this defeated the purpose of attending a live performance.

*"When we went to the Arena we were on the balcony and we couldn't see, it was terrible."* Ticket prices ranged from £25 to £40 depending on the band and participants considered prices as too expensive.

*"To go to the Arena it is £25 a head, so if you are going with your partner that is £50, to stand in a big aircraft hanger and listen to an hour and a half of music, then go home. I have been once and I swore I wouldn't go again."*

### **Reasons for Not Attending Live Popular Music Events**

Younger participants said that the reason that they did not attend live performances was that few good bands come to the North East of England.

*"It all depends if you are prepared to travel down to see a band, because not many good bands come up here, I think."*

Also participants agreed that there were few good venues where live bands could perform in the North East. The *City Hall* was considered to be more compact than the *Arena* but too small to attract large bands. Other local venues including pubs and clubs were perceived as more suitable venues for live performing bands, particularly new up and coming bands.

*"Not the Arena. I prefer smaller places, with people who appreciate the music better, I also like the music festivals as well."*

*"I have been to the Leisure Centre, it is just a leisure complex, it is quite small. It was packed but it was a good atmosphere, I can't remember how much it was."*

Some of the club venues have live bands performing but to a limited amount of people.

Participants felt that more club venues should promote live bands as they have the space and capacity, particularly mid week, to attract bands and therefore more people to the venue.

*"Oasis have live bands, but they don't announce it till about two days before something like that and it is only about a couple of hundred people."*

*"You would think that pubs would have more live bands mid-week, maybe on a Wednesday or a Thursday."*

A small minority of participants, mainly men, preferred to visit pubs which did not have live music in order to have a conversation as most live bands were considered too loud and inhibited conversation. Credit card ticket booking systems were considered by a small proportion of participants to be a barrier to attending live music performances. Younger participants who did not have a credit card felt that they did not have the same opportunity to purchase tickets, as those who did have access to a credit card, therefore they had to queue outside the *City Hall* for tickets.

*"It is just laziness that I don't attend events, I don't think tickets are readily available, I know you can phone, but if you don't have a credit card, you can only get them from the box office at the City Hall or HMV sometimes."*

Transportation was clearly a problem for people living outside the City Centre. Most of the women in the groups did not like travelling on the last bus home. Others female participants did not find the walk from the Quayside to the nearest Metro, safe.

*"To get from the Quayside to Haymarket, it is a taxi ride."*

*"I would carry on getting a taxi home and a taxi in, but I am sure a lot more people would go out if there was better transportation, because a lot of my friends do go for the last bus because they can't afford to pay for a taxi."*

*"I think the last bus used to have a reputation for fights, years ago."*

*"If it is the last bus, everyone is drunk."*

Participants were concerned with the lack of transportation particularly late at night. They were most concerned that there was no transport link between the parts of the City Centre where all the entertainment is focused and the nearest hub for public transport to and from the City Centre.

*"It is getting to Haymarket for the last bus, walking up those streets if you are on your own."*

*"Where I live I can't get a bus after 6 o'clock at night, so I have to get the metro and then wait."*

Admission costs were not considered to be a major barrier to attendance, whereas cost of drinks and queuing were. Safety at the venue was paramount and was not considered important as it was expected that all venues adhered to safety regulations. The type of performance and the atmosphere in the venue were more important than the reputation of the venue.

## **What Makes A Good Event**

Participants stated that the size of the venue and the type of music performed were the two most important factors when choosing to attend an event. Followed by price and a good atmosphere. The reputation of the venue was not considered as important as the bands that they attract.

*"The Broken Doll in Newcastle, that used to have a horrible reputation, but they had some brilliant bands on, it has gone now."*

*"It is more cutting edge at the Riverside, up and coming bands, once they actually hit top of fame, they probably wouldn't bother, only because of the money."*

*"I went to see them at the Arena, they were great, but the atmosphere in that place is stone dead, it is just a big empty building."*

Participants felt that local bands now found it harder to get gigs, as people were not prepared to take the opportunity to go and see an unknown band.

*"There is a pub down the road and you could have live bands on every week and you would still have the same people every night, you wouldn't attract people from outside I don't think."*

Participants who lived outside the City boundary and tended to visit their local pub for entertainment, were more likely to have seen a live band performing than those participants who socialised in the City Centre.

*"If I had more time on my hands, I would go and see local bands performing, as I like live music."*

*"I go to The Crown at the village, sometimes they have a live group on every other week."*

*"Unless you knew it was going to be a band that you liked or you had heard them before, you might go, but to travel along to somewhere out of the way to see a band that could be absolutely rubbish, you might as well go to your local pub and have a few drinks."*

Participants who had visited South Shields and Whitley Bay stated that they had enjoyed the atmosphere in the pubs and clubs in both of these areas. The pubs were busy and lively and the local bands performed well know songs. Participants stated that their ideal night out was "plenty of drink", "good music" and "having a laugh with your friends". The pub or club needed to be busy and attract a large number of people. Factors which made an evening poor were venues with high ticket prices, restricted viewing either by pillars or due to the fact that the stage was too far away from the audience, venues which lack atmosphere, expensive drink and having to queue to get in.

## **Factors Which Would Encourage Attendance**

Participants were asked what would encourage them to attend live popular music performances. The type of band and music performed were the two key determining factors followed by the venue.

*"I haven't seen the St.Trillions and I wouldn't go, it is more heavy metal, not that I have anything against them, it is just not my scene."*

*"You assume that because a band is playing in a certain pub they will be playing a certain type of music."* Participants would like to see more bands performing at local venues. There was the view that in the past more bands played at local venues, however most of the suitable local venues were now Bingo Halls.

Special offers and promotional nights clearly attracted more people to events mid week. Monday night was considered a good night to visit the City Centre as a lot of the bars had promotional evenings. If a band were also playing in the bar then this would add to the atmosphere. However, participants agreed that they were more likely to be attracted to an event by the offer of free/cheaper drinks rather than the chance to see a band performing live. Participants would pay up to £10 admission fee to a club for a specific DJ, but would be reluctant to pay to watch a live band performing in a pub.

*"There is a place we go occasionally, I can't remember the name and there is usually a band on and we do stay, so it is different, but I wouldn't pay to get in though that is the difference."*

*"I would only pay to see somebody that I wanted to go and see, I must be honest, I wouldn't pay to go and see somebody I don't know."*

A high proportion of participants had visited music Festivals held in Newcastle and Sunderland. Participants enjoyed the fact that the Festivals were held outside and that they had the opportunity to wander around the events and were not restricted to one particular event.

## Marketing

In order to look at awareness of live performing bands all participants were shown promotional material including posters, flyers and postcards for bands and venues.

The leaflets, flyers and postcards were of different styles and included glossy and photocopied material. Very few participants were aware of the posters and flyers promoting venues and bands. Only one participant mentioned seeing the postcard promoting *Legends* night-club and another participant recalled being handed a flyer for *Shindig* at the *Riverside* and another mentioned the Dance Arena.

*"I have seen that one for Legends."*

*"I have seen the one for the 'Dance Arena'."*

All participants had been handed leaflets and flyers for pubs and clubs at some point during their time in the City Centre. Most participants looked at the leaflets or flyers as many offered cheaper drink as well as entertainment.

*"I look at them sometimes, you can get cheaper drinks, that is why you look at them really."*

*"Newcastle is so expensive for drink, you go into a club and you are paying £3 a bottle, so if you get a place where it is cheaper to drink, buy one and get one free, it is bound to fill it no problem at all."*

Participants stated that they were more likely to go and see a popular music event advertised on a flyer or leaflet if it included the offer of cheaper drink. When shown the leaflets/flyers, *Shindig* was the club which participants would be most aware of and most likely to have attended.

*"The Shindig was a bit different, the atmosphere was good, because it wasn't all clean and nice, it was quite dark and mysterious."*

*"Shindigs is quite small, it is not flash and it is quite dark and dingy really, but it is the crowd that get in, the music and atmosphere. Planet Earth is the same."*

Participants felt that promotional material for clubs should be glossy otherwise it would look cheap whereas a photocopied leaflet was acceptable for promoting an event at a local pub or to promote a local band.

*"It has to smack somebody straight away, a picture and key words, that is what gets the attention."*

Participants felt that they did not necessarily need to see promotional material in order to attend new clubs.

*"In Newcastle it does not matter about the leaflet presentation because when a new club opens you go, don't you, so you either like it or you don't so you know where you want to go or where you don't want to go."*

However, participants felt that leaflets/flyers were a good way of informing the general public about new bands and where bands were performing. They felt that they should be clear and easy to understand and should describe the type of music being played, for example, funk, jazz, and heavy metal as many of the leaflets/flyers shown were for unknown bands.

*"If they had funk music, I would be interested, the type of music described if important, because you don't know the band do you, they could be anyone."*

Endorsements from *Radio One* and other regional radio stations were most likely to influence attendance at venues where live bands were performing. There was the perception that endorsements by radio stations meant that the bands were good and up and coming, therefore worth seeing.

*"If the leaflet compared the band to other bands, like they are the hottest thing since Oasis, unless you know the band it would not do anything for me, but if it was a quote from like Radio One, then it would be fairly high profile so it would get my attention."*

*"It's a quality station (Galaxy), it's a brand name."*

Participants were largely unaware of companies, which promote bands and only one participant was aware of *'Nice Productions'*. Participants agreed that there was not enough advertising about live performing bands and that much of the publicity is not presented far enough in advance, therefore by the time participants were aware of the band, they had been and gone.

*"I agree there is not enough advertising, even for the big bands, often they have been and gone, even through it can be quite expensive."*

Students were more likely to be aware of promotional material for live performing bands than those in employment. Participants felt that there was little advertising in the newspapers or on radio about local bands and big bands.

"I work in the city centre, but I have never had any leaflets pushed in my hand."

Although, only a small proportion of participants were aware of listings magazines such as 'The Crack' and 'Get Rhythm', none had read them. "They are free, they put batches in clubs, pubs and venues."

Participants agreed that they did not really look at posters and were more likely to read a leaflets than look closely at a poster. They felt that the range of posters shown in the focus groups (Sunderland Shining and tgg Taste Middlesborough) were not appealing and did not fully explain any background information about the bands and the type of music performed.

"The places like in the Quayside, don't have posters up, because they are newly decorated, trendy and shiny, so you wouldn't find anything like that in those type of pubs".

---

## CONCLUSIONS

All participants enjoyed listening to music on the radio whilst at home or at work. Music was considered to be a very important element in people's lives. Women tended to spend their money on clothes and visiting pubs and clubs, mostly at weekends whereas men preferred to spend their leisure time at the football or visiting a pub with their friends. A high proportion of participants purchase CDs, particularly dance or compilation CDs which are advertised on television. The consensus of opinion across the groups was that CDs were very expensive. Younger participants were more likely to visit a club than visit a pub where a live band was performing. Attending a club where a particular DJ was performing such as *Fat Boy Slim* was important to young participants. The two clubs which participants were most likely to have attended recently were *Shindigs* and the *Beach Club*.

Older participants, 28 years old and over were quite likely to visit a pub where a live band was performing but mainly if they were familiar with the type of music performed. Nearly all participants agreed that they did not seek out venues where bands were performing live. However, those who had seen a live performance were pleasantly surprised. Style of music is an important factor in encouraging young people to attend popular music events. Participants were quite prepared to travel to Manchester or London to see a big named band but were unlikely to visit their local venues to see an unknown band. The main barriers to attendance at popular music events were: cost of drinks, admission costs, credit card ticket booking systems, transportation and queues at venues.

Factors that would encourage attendance at events were: a good atmosphere, cheaper drink, improved late night transportation, events at more local venues or at small venues such as clubs and special offer/promotional evenings. Participants living outside the City boundary would be more likely to visit the City Centre in the evening if they had better transportation links.

Participants preferred to attend popular music events that were held in smaller venues as this created a better atmosphere. Participants who had attended an event held at the Newcastle *Arena* felt that the occasion had not lived up to their expectations as viewing was restricted and the venue was so large that it lacked atmosphere. At £25 a ticket per person they did consider the venue as value for money.

Participants could not recall any posters promoting live popular music events. When shown leaflets/flyers and postcards promoting events, awareness was low. Participants did not feel that the posters shown gave them enough information about the bands. Posters and leaflets should be clear and easy to understand. They should give the venue, date of the event and a brief description of the type of band or music being played, especially if the band is unknown.

Participants were influenced by posters, leaflets or flyers that were endorsed by a well-known radio station. The general view across the groups was that people only pay attention to leaflets and flyers if they are linked to a special offer or promotional night for cheap drink. Participants were largely unaware of popular music events, which were happening in the North of England.

Participants felt that marketing of events was not far enough in advance and that by the time they started to find out about an event, it was over.

Participants mostly heard about music events in the North of England from *Radio One* or though their local radio station, *Metro FM* or *Galaxy Radio*. Awareness of the listings magazines was low and none of the participants had read these magazines. Participants agreed that leaflets/flyers for clubs should be glossy and look expensive whereas a photocopy of a leaflet was sufficient to promote live popular music performed in a pub.

Participants attending the focus groups felt that the role of local authorities in promoting popular music was to provide better transportation and more suitable venues.

---

## Appendix One Topic Guide

### NON-ATTENDEES AT LIVE POPULAR MUSIC EVENTS

**Background** (Objective: to establish the importance of popular music in participant's lives and links between enthusiasm for popular music and other aspects of lifestyle, leisure pursuits)

gender, age, marital status, area of residence, no. of children, occupation, education etc)

how leisure time is spent

Probe for: shopping, pubs, clubs, cinema, TV/satellite, surfing Internet, hobbies etc.

what do you spend your money on

Probe for: CDs, other music related products, pubs/clubs, cinema, clothes, household, computers etc

what is your ideal Friday/Saturday night out/midweek night out

do you watch bands performing on satellite TV or internet at home

do you travel to pubs and clubs and why

how far are you willing to travel for entertainment

how likely are you to visit the city centre for entertainment

PROBE FOR those living in out lying areas average spend on leisure pursuits (including travel, admission fees, drink)

(Objective: to establish level of interest in and barriers to attendance at popular music events)

How would you describe your attitude towards popular music?

I listen to it at home but do not attend live performances

I used to attend live performances but now don't

I listen to popular music at home but prefer to visit the cinema, pubs/clubs for a night out rock, pop, indie, dance etc why do

you not currently/no longer attend popular music events

what do you now prefer to spend your money on

which event/s have you attended in the past

how far did you travel to attend a popular music event

how event compared with other events attended

what do you consider to be the main barriers to attendance at popular music events

PROBE FOR: admission cost, cost of drinks, transportation, quality of event, safety at event and on route to event, competing events, cleanliness of venues, accessibility of venues, queues at venues, weather, childcare, style of music etc.

(Objective: to assist in determining the factors that would encourage attendance at popular music events)

what factors are important in determining attendance at popular music events

type of venues preferred

describe a typical attendee at popular music events

who is your favourite DJ/performer?

which is your favourite venue and why?

any problems attending events/leisure pursuits eg. door staff, queuing etc

what would encourage attendance at events

(Probe for: small local events/ large-scale events) eg. better transportation, late alcohol license, better safety at event/environment, better venues, events at more local venues, lower admission costs and drinks, special offers/promotions etc

which events have you attended which you enjoyed the most, reason why

which events did you enjoy the least, reasons why

what makes a good/bad venue or event eg. venue reputation, value for money, type of music etc.

(Objective: to look at the best method of informing the general public about popular music events)

how find out about popular music events

PROBE FOR: local newspaper, magazines, posters, radio, listing, at venue, word of mouth etc

what are your views on how events are promoted

how far in advance of performances do you need information

what are the key messages when promoting a event eg. the cost, the venue, the band, image of venue, visibility etc

how could events be better promoted

(Objective: to look at perceptions of the local environment and support of local authorities)

what is your perception of local authorities attitudes towards live music performances

how supportive do you feel local authorities are in improving entertainment facilities

what do you feel could be done to improve the attendance at events by the local authorities

SCOTINFORM LTD 28th November 1999



