

# Using digital for audience engagement

## May Gurney and Norfolk & Norwich Festival

### Background

Arts & Business East Young People Award 2010 was awarded to May Gurney and Norfolk and Norwich Festival (NNF) in recognition of a partnership that harnessed the power of the arts to engage young people and demonstrated a dynamic connection with youth through the arts. The annual Norfolk & Norwich Festival began in 2006 with the aim of utilising the power of arts, culture and creativity to cultivate positive change for individuals, communities and the spaces they inhabit. Sponsorship by the infrastructure services company May Gurney (MG) began in 2007 and since then the company has remained a committed major named sponsor of the free outdoor events at the Festival. 2008 witnessed the development of a new media project: NNF Live, an aspect of the festival that became key to both parties in reaching young people.

### Aims & Objectives

The sponsorship of outdoor events, entitled MG Free, provided a platform on which May Gurney was able to enhance their profile and company image amongst potential clients and employees in addition to providing opportunities for corporate client hospitality. With the help of an Arts & Business' Investment programme contribution, May Gurney intended to build on its community engagement programme in the East of England, specifically to strengthen its ties with young people, through the NNF Live venture. This new media project aimed to engage young, diverse voices in the telling and retelling of the Festival story through various media. Equally, the importance of reaching out to younger audiences was a central objective for the NNF who, through this partnership, hoped to commission and present more daring, cutting-edge works that appealed to younger generations, thereby increasing attendance figures among this target audience.

### Partnership

Launched in 2008, both MG and the NNF aimed to reach a youth audience through the NNF Live project. The following year this was developed further to incorporate work and recordings from 15

“guerrilla” reporters on vocational work placements. City College media students recorded material from the Festival on their phones; this was uploaded and transferred to the social networking site and YouTube for wider dissemination. A final video was created in partnership with the BBC and displayed at Forum Fusion new media technology screen, with a weeklong viewing available to the public. The culmination of the project led to greater publicity for both the NNF event and MG as a sponsor through the very act of engaging with a common target audience.

## Impact & Outcome

MG Free has been hugely successful in attracting young people to the Festival; an estimated 22,100 11-25 year olds attended the Festival in 2009. Building upon this, NNF Live has developed into a cutting-edge, multi-media reviewing website, functioning as both a marketing and educational tool to engage young. In 2010 the Festival attracted almost 300,000 people; an increase of more than four-fold on the attendance figures from the previous year. The cumulative four-year funding from May Gurney has enabled the Festival to commission amazing free events, which successfully attracted a young audience and afforded the business considerable exposure and positive press coverage for its involvement in the local community. May Gurney was able to capitalise on its brand awareness, raising and widening their company profile to clients, key stakeholders and new audiences.

As younger audiences at the Festival have significantly increased MG events have become a central aspect of the Festival and facilitated the engagement with and investment in new younger audiences whilst staging some of the world’s most outstanding performances. The NNF Live project has proved popular, attracting new audiences, including first-time visitors.

*"The Norfolk & Norwich Festival was the perfect opportunity for May Gurney to reach substantial numbers of young people in vibrant and innovative ways. With everything from a magical mirrored Spiegel tent to students making guerrilla YouTube videos we restated our commitment to our local community through the arts while reaching a new and youthful audience."*

Ian Findlater, Group Business Development Director, May Gurney

## Future

The successful collaboration between MG and NNF is likely to lead to a renewal of sponsorship for the 2011 Festival. In addition to the NNF Live venture, May Gurney will also be developing its MG Young Promoter’s project; introduced in 2009 as a means of providing young people aged 16-25 with an insight and valuable experience in event marketing and promotion.