

SXSW Music Festival FAQs

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Updated 08/06/2010



Scottish Arts Council

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What is SXSW?

SXSW is one of the world's foremost music showcases and industry conferences. It takes place in Austin, Texas, in the middle of March each year. In 2010 there were nearly 37,000 delegates with just over 13,000 for the music events (there are also film and interactive conferences). 2,000 artists performed on 89 stages over five days. The event is mainly associated with indie, alternative and rock but it does feature all styles of music.

Why showcase at SXSW?

SXSW is a key event which the international music industry attends – this is your opportunity to play to these people and to do business with them. The event is also a key music media event with 4,500+ journalists, bloggers and writers, so it is also a chance to promote your music to them – but remember 2,000 other acts are all trying to do the same. It's important that you have a clear aim for what you want to achieve from SXSW – eg: secure a US licensing deal; find a European agent or set up the US release of your album. You need to have a good reason to be showcasing at the event and SXSW must be part of an overall strategy for developing your professional career(s).

When to showcase at SXSW?

Choosing the right time to showcase is important: you need to be able to work at an international level; your music must be very good; you need to have a good live show; and you should have already secured a significant buzz and have recognition (as well as an audience) in Scotland and in the UK; you need to have released material professionally, which is available for license and synchronisation (having an album or two will offer greater opportunities to be able to close deals); you have to be able to follow-up on leads and be able to accept offers to play live. It is best to showcase when there is a specific reason - eg: imminent US album launch or tour, new album available for license - and as there are so many acts playing at the event it helps if you have a story or an angle to hang your showcase around. If your focus is the US market you **must** already have some profile and presence there.

Which Scottish acts have showcased at SXSW?

In recent years bands and artists such as Franz Ferdinand, the Fratellis, the Proclaimers, Glasvegas, Paolo Nutini, Belle & Sebastian, Camera Obscura, Dananananaykroyd, the Twilight Sad, Frightened Rabbit, Errors, Unicorn Kid, FOUND, Sons & Daughters, We Were Promised Jetpacks, Hudson Mohawke, Tommy Reilly and Twin Atlantic have all showcased at SXSW.

How do I apply?

All artists have to apply to SXSW direct via Sonicbids (www.sonicbids.com)

Full details will be available by 1 August 2010 at www.sonicbids.com/SXSW/ or via www.SXSW.com/music

When do I need to apply?

The applications for showcases open in August each year and they close in early November.

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Applications for showcases at SXSW 2011 open on 1 August 2010 and must be received by 5 November 2010.

How many people apply?

In 2010 there were in excess of 10,600 applications for around 2,000 showcases (less than 1 in 5) – so the competition is fierce. It is an internationally recognised event: in 2010 there 548 showcases from international artists from 49 countries - you are not only competing with the best of America but with the best of the rest of the world.

How are artists selected?

Selection is done by the SXSW programming team. They will look closely at the information that you submit on sonicbids so you should pay attention to how you present yourself. They will also look you up on the internet so your sites need to be up-to-date, they may want to check out the context of that killer quotation you have on your biog... and they will generally want to find out a bit more about you: these kind of searches say a lot about you and the chances are they won't know who you are. Keep sites up-to-date and targeted – if things develop after application ensure you update you Sonicbids EPK. Maybe get someone outside of the band to have a look and let you know what they think?

SXSW select bands and artists on the quality and originality of their music. SXSW do not take issues of practicality, your business-readiness, your export-readiness and whether you can afford to showcase into account: it is important that **YOU** consider all of these and don't feel that you need to accept an invitation just because you receive one. It is important to choose the right time to showcase.

When will I know if I have been successful?

Invitations to international artists will be sent out from mid-November 2010 onwards. SXSW try to issue all invitations to international acts before Christmas but invitations can be sent after the holidays.

Will I get paid to play?

You will be offered a nominal fee (around \$250) or the option of a delegate registration. There may be opportunities to get paid work from the many companies and brands who hold parties in Austin during SXSW (but given the number of acts looking to play shows you shouldn't count on being paid).

How much will it cost to showcase at SXSW?

That depends on a number of things, however you will need to budget for flights, equipment, instrument transportation, money for food each day, ground transport and visas (see below). It costs the average 4 or 5 piece band in the region of £8,000 to £10,000, but you can easily spend more or less than this. If selected you can take advantage of the SXSW housing programme where they team up bands with local open-minded host families.

Where does this money come from?

Again, this depends but the most likely sources are your label, agent, a sponsor or other company who may pay you to play: often it is the bands that end up paying themselves from earnings, money raised and from their own money.

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Do I need a US visa to showcase at SXSW?

Yes, SXSW is a live music festival, they sell tickets and wristbands to local audiences, therefore you need a performer's visa to showcase. The total costs for visas for a four- or five-piece band (including costs in UK) can be as much as £3,000; and in many cases fast-track visa and visa agents may be required.

Is there financial support to showcase at SXSW?

The Scottish Arts Council will consider supporting those artists and groups who have been officially invited to play a SXSW showcase. We will normally only support those acts who are business- and export-ready and who would not otherwise be able to afford to go – ie do not have significant support from a label or other source. Acts that have enjoyed significant success already are unlikely to be supported.

How much support is available?

A standard rate of £750 per band member was the usual support available in 2010. If your manager and management company is based in Scotland an additional 'head' is available to support the manager to attend.

It is unlikely that you would be supported more than once by the Scottish Arts Council to showcase at SXSW so it is important that you choose the right time to make use of this support.

How do I apply for support?

Applications should be made to our International Showcasing Fund <http://bit.ly/ax2jKO> But you should contact the Music Department on 0131 226 6051 or showcase.scotland@scottisharts.org.uk prior to submitting your application.

Showcasing Scotland – how do I play the Scottish Showcases?

Since 2006 the Scottish Arts Council has produced *Showcasing Scotland* – afternoon showcase events and since 2009 we have added an annual official (evening) showcase. It is our intention to produce both events again at SXSW 2011. **To qualify for selection for these showcases you must be officially invited to showcase by the festival.**

Programming of *Showcasing Scotland* is by the Scottish Arts Council advised by our SXSW Steering Group which consists of DF Concerts, PCL Presents and Vic Galloway (BBC Radio 1, BBC Scotland). (All official SXSW showcases are produced in association with SXSW's programming team and are subject to their approval).

We endeavour to showcase as many Scottish artists as possible, however being selected to showcase by SXSW does **not** guarantee a slot at *Showcasing Scotland* events.

Help, I need more information about SXSW?

The internet is awash with information about SXSW – you have to invest some time in researching official and unofficial sites, look at videos and photos. Try and get a feel for the event.

Here are two places to start you off:

www.SXSW.com/music

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/music/SXSW/>

Speak to people who have been before: speak to as many musicians as possible, but also try and speak to their managers as well – they may know much more about the

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practicalities of showcasing at SXSW. If you don't know anyone yourself contact us at the email or telephone below and we will see if we can help by hooking you up with someone to talk to. Be careful to make sure you get good advice – if you wish to check anything you can contact us at the Scottish Arts Council.

The Scottish Arts Council, SXSW, United Kingdom Trade & Investment and the Cultural Enterprise Office will be running a SXSW and MIDEM **training event in August for bands, managers, labels etc thinking of applying to SXSW**– this will cover all the key areas you will need to know about and will feature artists, managers and labels who have taken acts to SXSW in the past, as well as representatives of the festival.

If you are considering applying (even in future years) you should try and attend these training events to get your questions answered. **Full details of these events will be announced in the coming weeks.**

Top hints and tips

1. **Research the event now** – the internet is full of information on SXSW, if you are considering investing thousands of pounds in going, invest the time to find out all you can about it.
2. **Find out from people who have been before** – the best way is to speak to people who have been and find out how they went about it
3. **Be realistic and pick the right time to go** – you are competing against artists from all over the world – are you really world-class or does it make sense to wait?
4. **Make sure you have a clear goal** of what you want to get out of the event **and a plan for how to achieve it.**
5. **Visa – find out what is required and when** - organising your visas is one the most costly and time-consuming elements: look into the process now and you will save yourself both time and money.
6. **Take advantage of SXSW delegate pass and database** – if you are selected you will receive one delegate pass, this will give you a log-in to the delegate database. Search through for key people, contact them in advance and try to schedule meetings during the event. This also means you can attend the seminars, trade-fair, etc.
7. **Register for the artists housing programme** – SXSW Housing can find you accommodation with host families in Austin, this is a great way to both save money and to connect with the amazingly friendly people from Austin.