

musik.woche

The 29th International Live Music Conference saw a range of new initiatives, arguably making it the most distinctive (and youthful) since Greg Parmley took over the event from founder Martin Hopewell in 2014.

Among the most talked about changes was a move away from the traditional Thursday to Sunday schedule, in favour of running Wednesday (8 March) and ending on Friday (10 March). Other new features included two “summits” themed respectively around venues and festivals, a presentation on mental health and continuing efforts to give more women a voice on panels.

“We polled the members [past attendees] last year and 86% responded that they wanted it midweek or didn’t mind either way,” commented Parmley on the new time slot. While opinion seemed more mixed among delegates, with UK-based participants complaining about the change during the event “autopsy,” EPS Holdings online content manager Ivana Dragila, articulated the pros and cons.

“It was good to move because the event finished with a normal working week,” she said. “The downside is that you still have your daily work to do, so you are switching between that and the conference. However, you do end up meeting a lot of the people you would have emailed.”

Parmley has pledged to survey attendees before deciding on the dates for 2018, which reflects a wider commitment to consulting “members” on different aspects of the event. In advance of this year, 50 of ILMC’s key female attendees were asked how their perspectives could be better reflected.

“They wanted a fair amount of inclusion [on panels], so we aimed to make sure we had more equal representation,” said Parmley.

Of some 110 speakers and moderators, more than 30 were women, and while this still falls short of a gender balance, it is a considerable increase on the days when the majority of panellists used to be men aged over 50.

Members also played an advisory role in planning the new “summit” strands, which took place on Wednesday for festivals and Thursday for venues. During a discussion entitled Streaming & Artist Engagement on day one, the subject of broadcast rights proved particularly thorny.

“A lot more offers [for festivals] are dependent on broadcast rights,” explained Ruth Barlow, head of live at the Beggar’s Group. “It’s slightly worrying as promoters are holding the offer to ransom with something vague. We can’t stand in the way of a live stream, but if there is a

sponsor or brand around it, then I can object. I wouldn't give Audi a free song, so if there is a brand wraparound, that is a brand getting sound for free."

András Berta, international relations manager for Hungary's Sziget Cultural Management Ltd called for a dialogue about standardised deals to include minimum promotional requirements from an act booked to play at a festival.

"The marketing has not been articulated in the past," he said. "We want to put questions on the table so we can understand the answers. For example, if it is a money question or a legal question."

These issues were further discussed in the Contracts Workshop, where delegates were invited to raise contractual questions with lawyer Nick Berry from the UK's Coda Agency and Danish promoter, Mads Sørensen (Beatbox Entertainment).

Thursday's Venue Summit included a focus on efforts to protect grassroots clubs, with London's recently appointed night czar, Amy Lamé, among the speakers.

"For too long the conversation has been about the costs of the night-time economy not the benefits," she explained, citing research that put the value of music tourism for the UK capital at £967million.

At the other end of the scale, the Venue's Venue: Big Rooms and Big Data gave some interesting insights into challenges and developments among the arenas. There was widespread agreement that customer service was a crucial consideration from the booking stage right through to leaving an event.

"I want to make their experience better, if they already have a ticket I don't need to sell them another one, but if they are coming from two hours away they might need a hotel," said Brandon Lucas from AEG-owned Carbonhouse, which builds websites for many of the world's key venues including Glasgow's SSE Hydro and London's O2. "From 2018 the website will have a different look and feel to what the person next to you sees."

During the session, Kai Müller, senior event manager/program coordinator at Hamburg's Barclaycard Arena, also described the challenges posed by last year's loss of handball team HSV Hamburg and the Hamburg Freezers ice hockey club last year.

"We had a strategy meeting and called all the promoters who had [previously] asked us for weekend slots," he explained, describing how the booking calendar was refilled. Audiences were also generated by content programmed in-house, e-gaming extravaganzas and charity events.

Moreover, Müller pointed to some positives brought about by the loss of the teams. Unique visitors to the arena rose, widening the reach for sponsors, more premium/VIP packages could be offered by the venue (rather than the sports clubs), not having to make ice for the hockey knocked €60,000 off the annual electricity bill and €100,000 was saved by no longer having to switch uses between sports and other activities.

Overall, this year's ILMC saw a higher attendance of the panels and workshops, with presentations on Instagram and Snapchat proving particularly popular, as did the discussion Direct Licensing: Rates, Right and Wrongs.

"The theme of direct licensing was very interesting," says Jan Quiel, from SST Seaside Touring and ICS Festival Service. "We will follow what happens."

Underlining a more modern sensibility towards the programming, was a panel on mental health. This was hosted by Matt Thomas and Andy Franks, founders of UK charity Music Support, which provides help for those suffering from addiction and mental/emotional issue, along with Christophe Sauerwein from International Conferences on Addiction and Associated Disorders.

For Hilde Spille, a partner in the Netherland's-based Paperclip Agency, it was among the highlights of the event.

"Although it focused on addiction, which is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to mental health, it highlighted that this is not only a problem for musicians but people working in the music business in general," she said. "Music Support is a great initiative and the UK is far ahead of the rest of Europe in terms of bringing the issue out into the public." Among the more than 200 first time delegates was Vienna-based Isabelle Pfeifer, managing director of Bella Concerts.

"I like to see the big names in the music industry and to hear their stories was really interesting," she said.

Her wish came true with the keynote which saw Ed Bicknell interview fellow manager, Paul McGuinness. After giving a fascinating insight into a career spanning five decades, the man who navigated U2 to world stardom was surrounded by younger delegates asking for selfies. Proof that ILMC's can attract the heavyweight veterans, but also appeal to the new wave of industry professionals.

[ends]