

## Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship - Onto It Media - Venue Online Services

File No: X026778

### Summary

Onto It Media is a local company providing technology services to the music and radio sectors. Their technology solutions aim to address barriers to the success and sustainability of musicians, venues and music businesses.

Onto It Media's Live Venue Toolkit was developed with the assistance of a City of Sydney Cultural Grant. The Toolkit ([www.livetoolkit.com.au](http://www.livetoolkit.com.au)) provides resources to venues including performance contract templates and in-house equipment lists, as well as guidance on setting up a new venue, programming and marketing.

Onto It Media has applied for a Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship for further development of this resource. Their new product, Venue Online Services (VOS), will turn a live performance venue's website into a portal for communications between artist and operator, executing performance agreements, coordinating staging logistics and marketing campaigns, and automating digital marketing materials.

Venue Online Services is a website for performance venues that allows artists to directly upload their own marketing content and to communicate with venue owners. Venue Online Services is built-to-purpose to provide a quality website template for a pub, bar or club, including food and beverage menus and deals, accommodation or function bookings, and events listings that integrate with ticketing platforms and social media. Importantly, artists have access to Venue Online Services to populate their own event listings and automated marketing campaigns without drawing upon the staffing resources of the venue.

The online platform responds to research undertaken by Onto It Media with 189 licensed venues that program live music in the local area. This research revealed 71 per cent of these venues do not have music listings on their website, and 50 per cent have no Facebook event listings for their gigs. Onto It Media suggests this is largely due to the limitations of off-the-shelf website templates often used by pubs and bars, as well as overstretched venues lacking the resources to market their performance programs in detail.

Onto It Media is the team behind the successful Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP - [www.airit.org.au](http://www.airit.org.au)), an online platform that connects independent Australian musicians and their recordings with community radio stations, dramatically increasing the airplay of local artists on Australian radio. Their technology solutions have a proven track record and the company has demonstrated support from the music industry.

Onto It Media has applied for a Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship to pilot Venue Online Services in six venues in the local area. The venues to be included in the pilot will be selected in consultation with City staff and will meet the following criteria:

- program Sydney-based performers of original music;
- program music at least two nights a week;
- pay performers and sound engineers;
- provide at least some free gigs; and
- have poorly performing websites or under-realised digital marketing reach.

The selected venues will agree to replace their website with Venue Online Services for the 12-month trial and provide feedback on the functionality and impact of the product. They will receive hands-on support in using the platform and at the end of the trial the venues can choose to have their former websites restored or continue with a subscription to the VOS product. Consultation with artists who use the Venue Online Services platform will also help evaluate and improve the product.

The Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship aims to both test and refine a Sydney-designed digital initiative to build the capacity and sustainability of local performance venues and the artists they work with. If successful, the product has potential for scaling and broad impact akin to other entrepreneurial initiatives the City of Sydney has seed-funded, such as Art Money and Playwave. Onto It Media will match the cash contribution of the sponsorship. The sponsorship benefits will include research outcomes for the City that will inform the evaluation of the Live Music and Performance Action Plan.

## **Recommendation**

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a cash sponsorship of \$30,000 (excluding GST) to Onto It Media Pty Ltd to pilot their Venue Online Services with six performance venues in the City of Sydney area; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer a sponsorship agreement in relation to the sponsorship described in (A) above.

## **Attachments**

Nil.

## Background

1. In 2014, Council unanimously adopted both the *Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014 - 2024* (the Policy) and the *Live Music and Performance Action Plan* (the Action Plan).
2. The third strategic priority of the Policy is 'Sector Sustainability' which commits the City to investing in initiatives that support the long-term sustainability of the creative sector, including seed-funding for innovative solutions to recognised local issues and needs.
3. The Action Plan outlines a need for Audience and Sector Development to build the resilience of the live music and performing arts sectors, including support for strategic digital marketing.
4. With a Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship, Onto It Media will provide its live music programming and promotion platform 'Venue Online Services' (VOS) to six Sydney venues, selected in consultation with City staff.
5. Venue Online Services is a subscription platform specifically designed to remedy challenges venues and musicians face in managing event logistics and digital marketing content. The platform assists with artist bookings, performance agreements and event planning, and allows artists to directly populate aspects of the venue's website, event listings and social media campaigns through easy-to-use templates. The venue, as website owner, has ultimate approval before any content is published.
6. Venue Online Services is designed to seamlessly integrate with most ticketing and social media platforms.
7. The Venue Online Services pilot project aims to test and improve the platform prior to a full product launch in December 2020. The project aims to gather best-practice approaches to managing live programs in licensed venues. This knowledge can be transferred to other Sydney venues to help improve their business practices and outcomes, and establish a more robust and resourced venue-based music scene for the artists who perform in Sydney.
8. The Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship program supports the exchange of ideas and knowledge, strategic research and the showcasing of local expertise, and encourages dialogue on local and global issues. Under the program, eligible projects can be supported to a maximum of \$40,000 cash and applications can be received throughout the year.
9. Under the Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship program, not-for-profit and for-profit organisations, as well as social enterprises, are eligible. Onto It Media Pty Ltd is a for-profit organisation.

## Key Implications

### Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

10. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This grant is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
  - (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City - Venue Online Services is a purpose-built solution for licensed venues that program performances, developed with reliable intelligence from the music and performance sectors. The online platform is potentially scalable to other cities and countries and, like Art Money, could represent a City of Sydney seeded business innovation for the cultural sector.
  - (b) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies - Venue Online Services is a tool to assist with the business practices of licensed venues and night time economy businesses to better resource digital marketing and to grow their audience base. Successful roll out of the platform in Sydney venues has the potential to enhance vibrant local economies at night.
  - (c) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City - Venue Online Services addresses barriers to performing artists reaching and establishing strong audiences by empowering them to create their own marketing campaigns through the online assets of the venues they perform in. The platform essentially "cuts out the middle man", simplifies and automates marketing activity that is currently not being undertaken by most venues.

### Organisational Impact

11. The Strategy Advisor - Live Music and Performance will work with Onto It Media as the relationship manager to help them meet their strategic goals and outcomes as part of this grant. Additional support may be provided by the Marketing team.

### Risks

12. There is a risk that venues that sign up for the trial might wish to discontinue their involvement prior to the end of the 12-month period. Should this happen, data associated with their use of the platform and feedback on why they have cancelled the product can still be utilised for evaluating and improving the product. As the grant mostly covers the costs of establishing the websites, new, replacement venues would not be able to be introduced mid-trial.

### Social / Cultural / Community

13. This sector-led initiative strongly aligns with the *Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan (2014 - 2024)* through investing in innovations for the sustainability of the cultural sector.
14. This project strongly aligns with the *Live Music and Performance Action Plan* through providing digital marketing platforms to assist with the development of audiences for live performances in businesses and venues in the local area.

**Economic**

15. This project aligns with the *OPEN Sydney strategy, Future directions for Sydney at night*, by supporting late trading businesses that offer more diverse entertainment choices at night and connecting residents and visitors with more information about Sydney's night time offer.

**Budget Implications**

16. This report recommends a total sponsorship amount of \$30,000 (excluding GST) cash.
17. The grant will consist of two payments, \$25,000 (excluding GST) in the 2019/2020 Financial Year; and \$5,000 (excluding GST) in the 2020/2021 Financial Year, upon receipt of an acquittal report and research outcomes.
18. There are sufficient funds within the 2019/20 Knowledge Exchange Grants and Sponsorship budget and the forward commitment of \$5,000 will be included in the next iteration of the City's Operating Budget.

**Relevant Legislation**

19. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 provides that a council may, in accordance with a resolution of the council, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to persons for exercising its functions.
20. Section 356(3)(a) - (d) is satisfied for the purpose of providing grant funding to for-profit organisations because:
  - (a) the funding is part of the Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship program;
  - (b) the details of this program have been included in Council's draft operational plan for financial year 2019/20;
  - (c) the program's proposed budget does not exceed five per cent of Council's proposed income from ordinary rates for financial year 2019/20; and
  - (d) this program applies to a significant group of persons within the local government area.

### **Critical Dates / Time Frames**

21. If approved, Onto It Media will be offered a 12-month sponsorship agreement due to commence in January 2020 and be evaluated by February 2021.

### **Public Consultation**

22. Public endorsement of the *Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan* and the *Live Music and Performance Action Plan* indicates widespread support for investment in initiatives that increase sector sustainability.
23. The City's ongoing engagement with the cultural and creative sector and the live music and performance sector provides insight into ongoing and emerging issues impacting the sector.

### **KIM WOODBURY**

Chief Operating Officer

Lex Davidson, Strategy Advisor - Live Music and Performance.