

THE BUSINESS OF PERFORMANCE

Financial arrangements for acts that play live are many and varied, ranging from “pay to play” in small venues up to large “stadium” shows. Much will depend on the type of act and more importantly their status. The most obvious distinction is whether or not they have a recording contract or not and if so, how popular they are!

A band performing cover versions in pubs, clubs or at functions will expect to be paid a fee, as financial reward is the main aim when they play gigs. Once an act wants to become successful through performing their own material, then the circumstances and the purpose for gigging alters, a fact that some promoters take advantage of.



HOW GIGS WORK

SMALL SIZE GIGS

Unsigned nights are a good way to start out. These usually involve the acts (often 3 or 4) taking responsibility for a good turnout by entering into an agreement with the promoter to ensure the sales of a minimum number of tickets. The details of this vary, from the band buying a specified number of tickets from the promoter, to a flyer or ticket system where fans are identified by which flyer/ticket they present at the door, and an amount of each ticket money going to the band they have come to see.

By these methods the promoter thus minimises his own risk, by sharing the responsibility for promoting the event, and spreading the financial risk between himself and the bands.

He still has to hire the venue and equipment, but he doesn't have to pay any guaranteed fees to the bands, or provide any catering.

The artist’s objective behind this is to eventually impress a record company A&R man in order to secure a recording contract. A singer / songwriter might also put on a gig with the objective of impressing a music publisher and securing a publishing contract. Building a mailing list and selling CDs and merchandise will all help to achieve this. Making lots of money at gigs should not be a priority.

If you want to set up your own event, you have to start thinking like a promoter, hiring the venue and equipment, and taking responsibility for the advertising. All the risk will be yours. So you will of course work really hard to try and get as many paying customers into the show as possible!

A step up from these kind of unsigned band nights can be to play at the events organised by small promoters who deal with smaller touring bands, the kinds of acts you might read about in NME who are touring their first small single or album release.

These acts will be getting a small guarantee from the promoter, and often this will have been organised via an agent. The promoter will be looking to put one or two local bands on as support acts, hoping that they will bring their fans along to fill out the venue. The local bands might get a small fee, or have an arrangement where they sell a certain amount of tickets and get a share of the ticket money, similar to the unsigned nights mentioned above. Supporting a 'name' band can do your reputation a lot of good, so in many cases you're not so bothered about the money as you are about building up your credibility and 'profile'.

“ Pay to Play ”

For many unknown acts wishing to get their first gig, “pay to play” is a well known option. A venue or promoter will give you tickets to sell, but there will be a minimum number you MUST sell in order to play, above that number you receive a share of the profits. The problems arise if you don’t manage to sell enough tickets, the promoter often asks you to pay the shortfall. You should try and avoid having to end up paying a promoter to put you on.



Universities pay well and provide enthusiastic audiences. Approach the Events committee with a demo. Once you have played at one it is easier to get bookings at another.



MEDIUM SIZED GIGS

Objective – to extend the fan base and use the tour to promote and sell a new album. Will often combine gigs with regional radio and press interviews.

Once your act is established, you will be in a position to take offers from promoters who think they can make a success, and profit, from booking you for a show. The promoter will work out how many tickets he thinks he can sell, and this will be based on your market value, or how popular you are. The promoter needs to be sure that he has correctly anticipated this, so that the event makes money.

Bad situations arise when a promoter thinks he can sell 500 tickets at £10 each (worth £5000), lays out costs of £4000, expects to make £1000 profit, but only sells 300 tickets, thus losing £1000. The promoter will generally expect you to have a current record release around the time of the event, so that advertising by the record company, along with reviews which a new release generates, will complement the promoter's own advertising for that particular show.

Shows like this are nearly always part of a tour. This will have been coordinated by the agent who will have a booked a number of shows with different promoters around the country. It's important to understand that this level of show has often been booked many months in advance, and the agent will have explained to the promoter about the expected timings of the new release, and guaranteed that there will be a focused promotional effort by the record company. This gives the promoter the confidence to agree to taking the risk on a particular act, and this is where trust enters into the relationship.

Acts at this level will have a booking agent who will be in charge of putting the tour together by liaising with local promoters. The promoters will estimate how many tickets they can sell, armed with knowledge of how heavily the act will be advertised in magazines and "plugged" on radio. They will then negotiate a fee with the agent. Occasionally a percentage of takings, once an agreed attendance figure is met, can also be arranged. This means someone with a counting machine stood by the entrance all night. In this situation a promoter can easily lose money if they over estimate the act's pulling power.

This sort of tour may lose money; the aim is to sell albums. The act will travel on a "sleeper coach" or use a splitter van and hotels. They will have a small road crew with a tour manager to look after them. They will certainly have their own sound engineer and may even bring some lights and a technician. The crew will be paid a fee for each day on the road, including travel days, and be given "PDs". Short for "per diems", these are an amount of money per day for food. Session musicians will be paid in the same way as crew, important staff are given retainers to keep them on call at all times.

The "rider" will be an important aspect of life on the road for this act. This is not just a list of strange requests from temperamental musicians, it is essential to be given good meals every night. Also in the rider is the "tech spec or technical rider", this lets the promoter know how many channels the desk should have and what equipment they must provide.

Sound Engineers

To spend a lot of money putting on a show, only to have it ruined by a poor mix is bad planning. It is a false economy not to spend extra money on an engineer who knows your sound and will make the performance a success

If you are a signed artist, the record company, by means of an additional advance called "tour support", may, meet the cost of this whole operation. This will be recoupable against album sales in the usual way.



Managers should not take commission on tour support, only profit from the tour after expenses.



STADIUM ACT

Objective – to sell more albums, build on the already huge fan base, as well as make money from merchandise and ticket sales.

The amounts of money and organisation involved are immense. The act will have their own PA, lights and stage show. They will travel with coaches for crew and articulated lorries full of equipment, even bringing a catering company along with them! Setting up the show will start early in the morning and last all day. Local "humpers" will be drafted in to help with the load in and load out. A production manager will oversee the logistics and liaise with venues, tour manager and stage manager.

Some record companies now take a cut of "live" revenues, including merchandise, when they sign megastars e.g. Robbie Williams.

Support acts at these large events must pay for the privilege of playing in front of so many potential new fans. This is called a "buy on". The support must still pay for its own engineer, crew, transport and sometimes a separate mixing desk. Not surprising then, that smaller acts with record contracts get these slots.

MERCHANDISE

Selling T-shirts and CDs can make the difference between breaking even and losing money. The value of merchandise should not be underestimated at any level of gig.

- ☐ Giving the sales person a share is a good motivator.
- ☐ T-shirts – a simple logo, slogan or design with few colours will be much cheaper and more effective.
- ☐ Large / Extra-Large / “Girls” tight fit are the most popular sizes.
- ☐ Some venues charge you to sell merchandise.
- ☐ Some door staff help themselves to t-shirts, even some takings.
- ☐ Use the sales area to add to your mailing list – A&R are often excited by large mailing lists.
- ☐ Have a demo or a business card ready just in case.
- ☐ Big names licence their merchandising rights to a manufacturer in return for an advance and then royalties – just like a recording deal.

CLUB NIGHTS

DJs will often have to play for free to get a "foot in the door" at a venue. Try offering your services where there is no DJ at present.

If you are a DJ and you fancy becoming a club promoter, then a lot of the information for unsigned acts will also apply to your circumstances. The big difference is that instead of concentrating on one show, you intend to BUILD a night. This means you must budget for a month or more, not just one event.

Do some market research, find a scene not catered for in a particular place or on a particular day of the week. Try to corner a niche market.

Pick a venue that isn’t too big, doesn’t have very expensive drinks, is easily accessible at all times of the night and doesn’t have a big competitor too nearby. When you hire the venue make sure you know what is included and what isn’t, watch out for guaranteed bar spends. This is equivalent of pay to play, in that the venue wants to achieve a certain amount of expenditure at the bar and will ask you for the difference if it is not met!

Work hard at your promotion, make sure you are in all the magazine listings and go for originality with your fliers.

PRS

The PRS will pay its members for songs they have written that are performed live. As of January 2004 they have run the Gigs and Clubs Scheme, for songwriters registering 10 or more UK shows via e-mail. Check their web site for details.



VUZ
concert promoter 'Vman events'

I promote concerts for bands. We are currently promoting approximately 20 nights a month covering all types of modern guitar based music.

We hire out the venues, take the risk on the night, promote the event, pay the bands accordingly, and hopefully come out with a profit after this.

How did you get started?

I started by putting on local bands, and more specifically organising a 4 day battle of the bands style event. I worked hard on each small event I was putting on, which meant I had more and more bands contacting me.

Some of the typical things you have to do in a day

Answer phone calls from bands wanting to play at various venues in Manchester.

Answering emails from agents: placing offers for their bands, or booking them into venues.

Speak to my gig rep, making sure everything is ok with the gigs they are running.

Sending details of flyers to designers or printers.

Meeting bands at my gigs, making sure important ones are treated well.

Any hints or tips at all

Look at what is going on around you, and think of small but important ways you can improve on what other people are doing.

When you're starting out, you need to do every job as well as you can. Don't take on too much, and risk harming your reputation

Don't get upset when problems arise. This is inevitable, but just think once you've dealt with the problem once, when it arises again, you'll easily be able to find the solution.