

LiveMusicBusiness

How YOU can get Bigger and Better Shows

**Strategies to understand and compete in the
modern live music business**

By Andy Reynolds, founder & publisher.

www.LiveMusicBusiness.com

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- **Do you want to play bigger and better shows?**
- **Do you need to know how to get the best booking agent, artist manager or promoter to book your tour?**
- **Does your band deserve to open up on a major support tour?**
- **Are you frustrated that you cannot get the help or information you need to be successful in the live music industry?**

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions above then please keep reading – I can help you!

My name is Andy Reynolds and I am a Concert Tour Manager.

I have been touring successfully now for nearly 20 years. During that time I have worked for some of the top bands and musicians of our time, including All American Rejects, Arckid, Autechre, Brazilian Girls, Coil, Cop Shoot Cop, Curve, Dead Prez, Delinquent Habits, Foetus, Gigolo Aunts, Hal, House of Pain, Jazz Jamaica All Stars, Jimi Tenor, Machine Head, Madrugada, Neurosis, Nightmares On Wax, Pavement, Roots Manuva, Redd Kross, Super Furry Animals, Skunk Anansie, Sneaker Pimps, Squarepusher, Swans, Unsane and Utah Saints.

I have also worked on tours with Foo Fighters, Manic Street Preachers, The Wonder Stuff, Whitney Houston and U2.

I work on an average of 200 shows every year as a Tour Manager, audio engineer or as a combination of both.

I personally know a vast amount of amazing musicians, bands, solo artist, session musicians, turntablists, MCs, road crew, artist managers, promoters, booking agents and record label people.

I have seen hundreds of bands, musicians and artists perform live.

Working for these acts has given me a unique insight into how bands get big shows, raise their profile and make money from playing shows and touring.

Let face it, with the decline in recorded music sales and the assumption amongst today's music fans that 'all music is free', your only option for artistic and commercial success is to get out there and play live. As well as being a lucrative, (in 2009, worldwide concert ticket sales totalled \$4.4 billion), playing live is the foundation of your successful career in the live music industry.

Oh, and it is great fun!

Don't just take my word for it – see what these people have to say about the importance of laying live:

“In the current climate of limited radio and TV opportunities (playing live) is a vital tool in building a profile around an artist.”

Mike Greek, CAA. Booking agent for Arcade Fire, Black Angels, Jamie Cullen, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah Alicia Keys, Franz Ferdinand, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Nine Inch Nails, the Dandy Warhols and David Grey

“I wouldn't touch a band until I'd been blown away by their live show, If the act can't impress at their shows, a crucial aspect of the whole strategy to build a fan base and sell records is lost.”

Jamie Graham, A&R, One Little Indian

“Bon Jovi had played 500 shows before they broke (into the big time)”

Doc McGee. Manager for Kiss, Bon Jovi and Motley Crue

You can see how playing live is now extremely important for any band or artistes career. If you are serious about your career as an artist you need to get out there and play some shows!

Or do you?

The Problem

Playing in front of a paying audience is vital for your career. Wait a minute before you get all excited and rush out to book yourself shows left, right, and centre though. Think about what exactly you are trying to achieve.

Ask yourself two questions:

1. Why do you want the gig?
2. Do you have an audience?

You may think there are simple answers to these questions. You may also be thinking why I am asking you those questions.

Well, to help explain the reasoning behind these questions, I want you to read an example of one of the hundreds of e-mails I receive every week, this one from a guy who we'll call "Brad":

"Hi, my name is Brad. I am in the bass player in my band. Basically, my band is trying to get support slots on tours with more established bands—not massively successful artists, but bands that were recently in the same situation we are and are now attracting attention.

We have no manager and we are releasing our CD with our own money. I have been checking into the possibility of touring through Europe. We have done some research and think Europe may be a good idea for us. Can you please send information that can help us to calculate our costs for a tour that consists of 40 shows in 60 days? How much do we get paid and how is that calculated? What about promotions and advertising? Will the music press do articles on us to help in the promotion? Basically, how much is it going to cost us out of pocket to come and tour Europe?

We as a band don't want to worry about anything except playing, so most likely we would want someone to set up and take care of everything for us, so all we have to do is get up there and play. This tour would be the debut CD release tour and would continue on into Asia, Australia, and back to the US.

Thanks for your time and have a great day."

Thank you, Brad. Now, let us have a good look at what you are proposing....

Why Do You Want the Gig?

Ask yourself this question: Why do I want to play this particular show or tour?

My experience (and in the opinions of my industry colleagues), too many bands go out and play live at too high a level too soon in their career.

By gigging before you are ready, you and your band risk exposing your lack of development and your weaknesses to potential audiences and industry taste-makers.

It is great to get out there and play live. As an artist you should be playing live to perfect your craft. However you must take time to hone your craft – for your audience as much as to attract the interest from the industry.

Remember: Your audience members are the people that will buy your music, t-shirts, downloads and concert tickets.

I see too many emails from too many bands thinking asking me to help them hook up a coast-to-coast tour or open up for a national touring act.

You may be thinking about contacting me to ask me the same question.

Do you think it is that simple?

Read Brad' email above.

This guy wants a 40 -60 date tour with no audience, promotion, or even a CD release.

Do you still think it is that simple?

Well, let me ask you a question:

Do you know how the live music industry works?

“Live sets are the best indication of the quality of an artist and their music. To really understand an artist and this music, a live set is the way to go!”

Eleanor McGuinness, promoter, POD Concerts

If you think you do know how the live music industry works then consider this. Do you still say to yourself:

“We are really good. If we play out people will love us.”

Or *“How else are we going to get an audience?”*

Or *“We are sick of playing home town shows. We want to play bigger shows.”*

Or *“We want to tour!”*

Let me tell you now: if you say those things to yourself you have absolutely no idea how the live music industry works.

Don't take it personally though; I get hundreds of emails and a couple of phone calls from artists and bands telling me the same thing *every month*.

To know how to get better and bigger shows you must understand how the modern live music industry works. For instance, to get on a big show or tour you have to connect with a whole load of people. There will be the booking agent, the promoter, the other acts on the bill and their managers.

You have to reach and connect with these people and then impress them—before you even get the chance to ask for a show or tour.

Back to Brad's email. He is asking me for help to get his band slots on the 'big' shows. (You know, those fantastic big club/theatre type shows with 1000 + audience members).

Remember though, by his own admission, Brad's band has no audience and no CD/MP3 release.

Perhaps Brad should think again and ask himself why exactly he wants to tour or to perform opening slots for national touring bands. He does not mention wanting to 'thrill audiences' or 'giving the crowds what they want'.

Brad's motivation is not based on entertaining anyone - his idea of playing shows is purely to advance his career. This is pretty silly when he has never even played outside his own state before.

Read Brad's email again.

Does your situation and attitude similar to Brad's?

If the answer is 'yes' then maybe you also need to spend to time examining why you want a gig. Playing live may get you noticed by an A&R scout or artist manager and, if you play the larger shows that Brad is so keen about, you may get to reach 200 - 500 or so people in one night.

The reality is that you are an unknown band playing first on the bill. By the end of the night the audience will have seen another 2 bands and will have probably forgotten about you.

Your hard work will have gone to waste if you cannot impress and connect with your audience.

On a more positive note, playing live will improve your ability as a musician, singer, turntablist or band and will build your audience. The more shows you do the better, especially if you play lots of shows around a more important showcase or opening slot.

With this in mind, perhaps approach your initial shows as a way of testing the water of your music/musicianship and also as a way of having a good time.

Play shows to entertain people, not to get signed.

If you get offered a show at whatever level, think about the offer in context, beyond the initial excitement of having a show. As Sam Heineman (former director of international touring/international marketing for Sony Music Entertainment) says, "If [a show] doesn't make sense, don't do it."

Examine the potential of each show you book or get offered:

- What potential is there to build an audience?
- How much money will you spend on transport, rehearsing, flyers and equipment for the show?
- How much time will you all need to take off your day job?
- Which taste-makers may be there at the show?
- How much you are going to enjoy the show?

In our previous example, Brad wants to play 40 shows in 60 days. Why would you want to do that? It would be a hell of a schedule (even if he could afford sleeper buses and a full crew, which he patently can't). 40 shows in 60 days is a pretty tough schedule.

Worse still, his band has no audience and no CD to promote. Therefore he has no fans. He will therefore waste his time and his money, sitting on top of his own equipment in a rental van, slowly grinding his way along to the next completely empty and non-paying show.

Playing a one-off show *maybe* expensive.

And

Touring is *always* incredibly expensive.

To give you an idea of how much it costs to tour consider this; a two week club tour of the mid-west for a 4 piece band with two crew members, a van and a trailer will cost \$8,000 - \$12,000. That money is just for basic wages, transport, gas and hotels. No frills and a lot of miles. (See fig

	Price per day/unit	Days/multiplier	Multiplier	Amount	Notes
WAGES					
Tour Manager/FOH engineer	\$120.00	14	1	\$1,680.00	Tour Manager gets paid for each day of the tour
Backline crew person	\$80.00	12	1	\$960.00	Backline person only gets paid for show days
Crew day off	\$10.00	2	1	\$20.00	Backline person gets \$10 a day on days off
ACCOMMODATION					
Band	\$50.00	13	3	\$1,950.00	3 twin rooms at \$50 a night
TRANSPORT					
15 Seat Passenger van	\$150.00	15	1	\$2,250.00	Total includes pick up and drop off days
Fuel		15000	miles	\$1,205.67	
Trailer	\$25.00	15	1	\$375.00	
Parking	\$5.00	14	1	\$70.00	Just in case!
BACKLINE					
Equipment consumables	\$200.00	1	1	\$200.00	Spare strings and replacement, batteries, sticks etc
GRAND TOTAL:				\$8,710.67	

1.01).

Fig 1.01

The cost of 14 days touring in a van and trailer around the mid-west. Scary isn't it?

At the other end of the scale I recently managed a full-production tour of theatres and arenas. The band I was working for have been going for nearly 15 years and have sold a bucket load of records all around the world. The tour's basic production equipment comprised of two 40 foot trucks packed with PA, lights, video and set as well as two sleeper buses for the band and crew, a

total of 29 people. There were only 5 band members but we also had 4 session musicians and 20 touring crew. That tour cost an average of \$15,000 (£7700) a day.

Can you imagine paying \$15,000 to play *one* rock show?

That is the reality of modern touring. And that total cost per show is assuming you are capable of playing headline shows in big theatres and stadiums.

Think again about Brad's email.

I asked you previously if you have the same attitude as Brad. Now, after seeing how much it costs to tour, you should really be asking yourself "Why do I want this particular show?"

Why on earth would you want to spend a huge amount of money and X number of days of your life touring around and playing to no one?

"Playing live is absolutely the best way to hone your craft, confidence, and ability."

Adam Saunders, Helter Skelter. Booking agent for the Darkness, Squarepusher, Belle and Sebastian, Capdown, and many more.

The Answer

You want to play big shows with lots of paying customers. You need to reach the industry taste makers. You also want to avoid wasting your money and playing to no one.

How do you do this?

First of all you need to understand how the modern concert industry works.

How the industry works – who does what

The Agent

The booking agent (or talent agent) books the concerts/shows/gigs for the act. The booking agent does not actually put on shows. An agent presents the artist to promoters who may want to put on a show featuring that artist.

There are two main types of agents:

1) *Concert agents*. Concert agents are usually part of larger agencies comprising comprised of a number of agents. The agents are responsible for their own revenues and use the agencies agency's infrastructure (including i.e. telephone, ISP, legal and accountancy services) to help run their own "micro--business" within the overall framework of the agency. The agency then takes a cut of the agent's revenue to pay for these services and to (hopefully) generate a profit.

This type of agent represents professional acts that usually have a recording contract. This agent works closely with the manager and also the record labels to co-ordinate a promotional schedule based on concert touring. Major agencies include Creative Artists Agency, William Morris, Little Big Man Booking, The Agency Group, and Helter Skelter.

2) *Talent agents*. Talent agents usually run a stable of similar acts, such as DJs, tribute bands, presenters, or blues acts for instance. They provide a service to these acts by supplying them to venues and markets demanding that type of act. In general, they represent less semi-professional or niche artists.

In this report, I will mostly be referring to concert agents.

In either case the agent works along similar principles. Having worked with the act or manager, the agent has a rough idea of the logistical and financial expectations his or her artists will have for performing live. This information can then be summarised in the contract and contract rider information that will legally bind any booking made by the agent.

An agent makes money by charging a percentage of the artist's gross income for the performance. (Figures vary, but 10 percent% of the gross seems to be the norm.).

Having agreed upon a period of touring or concert activity with the artist's manager, the agent will approach promoters and offer the artists services. It is the agent's job to negotiate the deals with the promoter based on what he or she knows of the act's status, the city or venue she is pitching into, and the relationship with the promoter. It is no good trying to get \$1,000 for a newly signed act in a pub on a Sunday night in Des Moines, regardless of how much 'record-company backing' and rock magazine covers you are getting.

All good agents will have developed working relationships with the promoters to the extent that most of the negotiating is unsaid; each knows each the other's business so well.

This relationship also means that managers can rely on 'superstar' agents to help break their acts. Agents such as Marty Diamond (the US agent for Coldplay, Snow Patrol, KT Tunstall, and Arctic Monkeys) would obviously be more able to persuade a promoter to take on a small, unknown act; the understanding being if the promoter works with this act now, then the agent will offer the promoter the chance to book a bigger act in the future.

When the agent has provisionally booked the act into various cities, he or she will inform the artist manager of the dates on offer and the fees expected. If the manager and label (as discussed above earlier) approve the tour, the agent will issue contracts to the promoters. The agent will then be available to answer any further questions or concerns the manager or promoters may have before the tour and will act as a go-between should any disagreements arise during the tour itself.

OK, so how does an agent help you? Certainly, as a performer, having a good and successful agent will enable you to get more shows and, more importantly, bigger shows opening up for larger acts.

However, getting a good agent will be just as hard as getting a record deal.

Geoff Meall (the UK agent for Nickelback, Muse, My Chemical Romance, and Super Furry Animals) says that any band he considers for representation should be "Either signed or close to being signed because [he is] not going to waste [his] time on touring something that has nothing outside of just being a live band." Most of Geoff's acts come to him through direct recommendation or request from artist managers and labels he has had a successful relationships with in the past. Ed Stringfellow, also of the Agency Group, agrees. "There are not enough agents out there to deal the number of good emerging bands," he says.

It may therefore be a distraction to spend time and money trying to secure an agent at the start of your career. Although an agent can get you shows, and a good agent can get you really good shows, you have to remember that superstar agents such as Geoff Meall have a reputation, and his involvement with an act really only starts when the act has some success.

"We are approached daily by bands that have no record deal, basically have a Myspace MySpace page, have done some recording, and want to release some demos. Obviously I could go and take this band and book it 20 shows around the country, but, in reality, what would be the point of

that? They wouldn't enjoy it because there wouldn't be any marketing behind them. Very few booking agents will get involved with a band from day one," Geoff says.

Bob Gold, the managing director of booking agents GAA, admits, "We rarely deal with unsigned bands unless something comes up that's really exciting." Bob looks after such acts as REM, Annie Lennox, and Maroon 5 and adds, " If [the band] have has got good management, we may take them forward."

It does seem like a catch catch-22 situation: you need gigs to build your potential career, and you need a successful career to get the shows!

Do not despair; you just need to build your fan base by playing more shows. To do this you will need to approach the promoters.

"If you can't hack it live, then you are not really going anywhere. People connect to live music in a different way [to than] to records, so you need to be able to do both well."

Kevin Doran, A&R Manager, EMI Records

The Promoter

In the UK and Europe, these people are known as ‘promoters’; in the US they are often known as ‘talent buyers.’ Whatever the terminology may be, these are the brave souls who decide they can make money out of putting on a show or event.

The promoter's remit goal is simple: “put bums/asses on seats”.

This means the promoter takes an event, puts it into a suitable venue, and sells tickets to the public. Some venues manage their promotions (‘in-house’), but usually venues are hired by the promotions team to stage the show.

There is an enormous risk involved with promotion, but a good promoter will look at turning a profit over the long term by developing good relationships with the booking agents. A good relationship with the agents means direct access to the agent’s roster and his or her more successful acts.

Most promoting today is done by companies that (like booking agencies) consist of a number of individual promoters. The last 20 years have seen the creation of several huge concert concert-promoting companies. The major players in the US are Live Nation and AEG, with a host of smaller companies such as Outback Concerts and Paragon doing well. In the UK, Live Nation is again are very strong, along with MFMG (Mean Fiddler Music Group), SJM, and Metropolis Music Group.

So how does it all work? Well, promoters are either approached by an agent, manager, or artist to stage a show, or (very importantly) they scout around for good money making opportunities. The recent success of re-formed bands from the 1970s and 1980s is due in no small part to promoters seeing the financial potential; Mags Revell, a promoter at Metropolis Music Group, worked hard to persuade the original members of Motley Crüe to re-form for a concert tour. After a gap of nearly 7 seven years and with no record to promote, the band hit the road in 2005, playing in 60 cities and grossing \$40 million in North America alone!

Whether the attraction is a super-star act, such as Motley Crüe, or an unknown and un-proven act, the principle is the same; the promoter will examine the costs involved in staging the event and the profit potential to him self and to the act. He will then propose a financial offer to the act that will incorporate what he knows about the act’s technical production requirements.

The promoter is then responsible for advertising the show and selling the tickets. If he doesn’t advertise and sell tickets, he isn’t going to make any money! He will work with the act’s record company, PR, and plugging firms to ensure maximum publicity for the event.

As I mentioned, promoting can be an enormously risky venture and possibly the most risky role out of the management /agent /promoter relationship. The fickleness of the concert- going public should never be under estimated. This uncertainty is the reason that why specialist specialized promotion companies, employing many individual promoters, handle most of the concert

touring promotion these days. As the production demands from the artists and tickets prices both increase, the potentially huge financial losses are too great for a one-man-band or a small company. Recent years have therefore seen consolidation, buyouts, and mergers of talent buyers to create larger, more powerful promotions companies.

At this point I can hear you all saying, “Well thanks for the business lesson, Andy, but what does that have to do with me?” I know you are impatient to get your show on the road. However, I did say you need to learn all the components to avoid making mistakes. A common mistake is to assume that the person who promotes the show is the same person who you deal with over the phone and on the day of the show. Let me explain.

All promoting companies, whether large or small, rely on new talent to create continual cash. Live Nation, SJM, or DEAG, and so on etc all need input from agents and the acts themselves as to what’s hot and what’s not. Promotion companies will employ two or three people who are actually constantly on the lookout for new talent, fielding calls from booking agents and working on the deals. These are the big guys (and girls) who make the calls, do the math, and sign the deal. Wham, deal is done, and then onto the next one.

These promoters do not have time to sort out sound and light equipments, print up dressing room signs, or arrange parking for 16 tour buses. That job will be done by the promoters ‘production’ people.

On arriving at a venue to play a show booked by a regional or national promoter, you will see neither the promoter nor the production people. The promoter is in their office doing deals, and the production person is also in the office supplying advance information for the future shows. Besides, a large promoter will have an average of 10 to 20 shows per night happening. The promoters are not leaving you fend for yourself though; they will send down a representative.

The Promoter’s Representative.

The promoter’s representative (or ‘rep’) is your point of contact for the promoter.

Regardless of whether you are a performer, a Tour Manager, backline crew, or someone just handing out flyers, if you want to speak to ‘the promoter’ at a show, you will actually need to speak with the rep. The actual promoter will not be around until a much later, if at all.

OK, so the promoter is not at the show, and you have to deal with this ‘rep’. What can the rep do for you?

Well, the rep’s job is to be a liaison between the venue and the artist and to look out for the interests of the promoter. The rep will arrive at the same time as the main load-in starts and is basically in charge of the show until the end of the night. The rep is there to ensure that the show goes smoothly, that the band is paid correctly, the law is observed, and everything else in between goes well.

Please do not assume I am talking about huge shows in theatres or arenas here.

Remember, a successful promotions company may have 10- to 20 shows going on each night and whether you are opening up in a 250 250-capacity bar or as a support DJ at a festival, you are going to be dealing with reps; , not necessarily the person who has booked you for your show.

How the industry works – how you can get the shows

Hopefully, by now you have thought about why you want to play shows and what audience draw you may have. It is time to approach the promoter and get yourself some gigs!

The Booking Process

You are probably finding it hard to get you or your band gigs – that is why you are reading this report. Now you know who does what in the live music industry, I am going to guide you on how to approach those people.

Researching and Targeting Venues

Do some research into the different types of venues in your town or state. Think about how your band is going to fit into that environment. Some venues are known to audiences as having a certain genre of music or audience type. For instance, an alternative rock band based in New York should not try to get a gig at Birdland (famous jazz club) but would probably approach Arlene's Grocery (small alternative rock venue).

Your town may have a bar that books deep house DJs and targets a young 'club' type crowd. There might also be a local House Of Blues type venue that books blues -based rock as well as alternative bands. Both venues are considered to be cool places to go and check out music – which one is right for you? Each venue's music booking policy attracts a certain audience type- will your band's music really fit in a particular venue?

You will probably be familiar with the venues in your home town from attending shows there yourself, but it may be harder to judge your appeal to audiences at out-of-town venues. In the case of an out-of-town venue you should look at that venue's website or local newspaper ads. Check out what other acts are playing and what kinds of bands are being billed together.

Ask your friends, your fans, and other bands about their experiences performing at or attending a particular venue. Venues can get terrible reputation for a variety of reasons. The only effect of these reputations, as far as you're concerned, is that audiences may tend to stay away from shows booked there.

The other factor to bear in mind is the size of the venue.

It would be great for you to play in a nice 2,000-seat theatre, especially if you are opening up for a national touring act. Remember, though, that it takes quite a long time for 2,000 audience members to get into venue. By the time they all decide to enter the gig, you may have already played and be out in the street, packing your van.

Be realistic and keep it small. Work out how many paying customers are likely to come to the show, halve that figure, and book a gig to hold that number of people.

I am serious!

You are better off with people standing in line to get in and the people inside being packed like sardines than you are having your audience saying to their friends, “It was great, but there was nobody there,” because you were persuaded to play in a venue too big for your draw.

You have to make your audience perceive that you are incredibly successful, and playing half-empty rooms is not the way to do that.

Always think of your audience. This is probably the only time in your career when you will be able to think directly of the people paying to see you. Thinking about your audience is an investment for the future.

You need your audience so take care of them.

You should ask yourself whether your audience can get to the show. More importantly, can they get home again? What kind of public transport is there? Does the venue have lots of car parking? Is the venue in a relatively safe part of town? Is the beer cheap? Does the venue charge for tap water?

Who Books the Shows?

I have already explained promoters and promoting; I also explained to you the differences between in-house and outside promoters. Be aware of the difference; it can have an impact on your ability to secure a show.

Research the promoters before you start firing off demo CDs to the venue. Does the venue have an in-house promoter/booker? Or do they rely on outside promoters?

The venue will probably fall into one of these categories:

- A small bar, pub, or club will usually have an in-house promotion team, often the owner or a long-term employee. You should be able to find out who these people are through telephone research and then approach them directly.
- A larger venue may attract outside promoters who merely hire the venue and its facilities for each show. You will be able to tell by looking at the show posters and website of the venue. Look for “Somebody presents...,” where somebody is a big local or national promoter, such as Live Nation. There may still be a local intermediary based at the venue, but the contract will be issued by the national promoter. You will therefore need to have a huge audience draw or a booking agent in order to get a show at one of these venues.
- Chain venues, such as House of Blues and Barfly, may have a national promotions team that works with other independent promoters to book the shows. This way the chain can book a successful act into each one of its regional venues as a full tour or as part of a larger tour. Again, you will probably need to have a huge audience draw or a booking agent in

order to get a show. It is always worth trying the actual venue manager, though—he or she will be able to tell you where all booking inquiries should be made.

- I get lots of emails and phone calls from bands starting out who want to get on a large festival bill. Again, do your research. Go to any festival and observe the acts on the bill. You may look at these bands and say you have never heard of them, and that you and your band could/should be up there instead. That may be a fair point, but let me tell you something now: Even the bands at the bottom of a main stage running order will have a label deal, a major booking agent, or a substantial audience draw—or all three. Do not waste your time trying to pitch yourself to festival organizers...yet!

The Approach

Pitching your music/band to venues and promoters in order to get shows is exactly the same as pitching your music to a record company, a publishing company, or an artist manager. There are rules and conventions, and your career will be affected by the mistakes you make by not following these rules and conventions. Pitching your music to industry professionals is fraught with the potential to make mistakes, so the next few sections will cover a few guidelines in case you do not know how to approach people with your music. These guidelines also include information specific to the live music industry.

Identify the Key Contact

Salesmen and saleswomen talk about key contacts within a company or organization. These key contacts are the people with the job titles and responsibilities who will be more useful to you when trying to sell goods or services to that company. When trying to sell your band to a promoter, you need to identify the key contact.

Remember what I said in earlier about promoters, the promotion company staff, and promoters' reps? Many, many people work in a club or a national promoter's office, but only one or two people can actually place you on a bill for a show. Your job is to identify the decision-maker within the organization—that is, the person at the local bar, out-of-town club, or national promotion company who actually decides what bands are going to play and how much they should be paid.

The best tool you can use to identify key contacts is still the phone. Yes, you will be able to establish broad contact details using the phone book, music business directories, and the Internet, but you have to ensure this information is up to date and relevant to you.

Get the number of the bar, club, or office and call them up!

Physical versus Electronic—How to Send Your Music

Many music industry professionals (me included) have gone off receiving CDs and now prefer to listen to music online, through a link to a dedicated website or via a MySpace, Facebook, or even YouTube page.

Tom Hopwell, booking agent for Primary Talent International, says, "I'd really advise all bands to get a website. Not having a site can be a real downer as [we] cannot access information."

Put the relevant URL for your website or MySpace page (such as www.YourPageAtYourSite.com) on all the e-mails and letters you send out.

Keep the music file sizes available on your site as small as possible, but not so small that the audio quality suffers.

Never, ever send MP3s or WAV files as e-mail attachments! As well as running the risk of having your email rejected by spam filters attaching any kind of large file, such as an MP3, should only be done after asking the recipient for permission.

The Pitch

You now have the key contact at the venue that is responsible for booking the shows. You need to send your contact the music and the information about your band that will persuade him to book you.

As I keep mentioning, any promoter you approach will want to know that you can sell tickets and that your audience is going to buy lots of drinks, food, or coat-check tickets while in the venue. The type of music you play may leave the contact cold personally, but if you can sell out the venue or add 250 ticket sales to a show, then they will book you...period.

You may not be in the position to sell that many tickets now, but your blurb (the content of your e-mail or letter) still needs to make a serious impression on your potential promoter or booking agent. This applies to your webpage or MySpace site as well. The following two sections provide my top tips for pitching you and your music more effectively.

The Musical Content

1. Do not include any more than three tracks. This applies to both CDs and websites, but it is especially true for a CD. Your listener will be hooked after listening to three tracks or they are going to pass on your material. Either way the decision will be made before reaching the end of the third track. You putting 12 tracks on a demo or website a waste of your resources (upload time, bandwidth, copying time, label printing etc) and the listeners time. Think about it - if you hear a song you do not like by a new band do you immediately ask to hear another song by that band? Of course not.

2. Put your best song first. Do not save the best until last. Even if your listener does like the first track, she may not have the time or inclination to check out the last track. Open up with your killer tune - if it really is your best song then you are going to have to stand or fall by that track.
3. Never submit a cover or tribute song—unless you are a cover or tribute band! Presenting someone else's song in a demo is a massive waste of time and opportunity; it tells the listener absolutely nothing about you or your music. Don't do it!

The Blurb

Your music is your most important offering to the prospective promoter, booking agent or A&R person. It is very rare thought for any industry professional to take the music in isolation. They will want to know about you, your history, your current status and your future plans. You need to convey your situation and your plans in words.

The temptation is to write your life story in order to convey how passionate you are about your art. This degree of details is not necessary and in fact is a complete waste of your time. Instead you should introduce yourself and music in the most concise way possible.

The information you present is known as 'the blurb' (like the description of a book on its back cover) and should follow these guidelines:

1. Keep it brief. The key contact needs to know a bit about you, and that's all. She does not need to know where you and your fellow band members met, how long you have been together, where you went to school, or that your mom thinks you are going to be the next Dave Matthews Band/My Chemical Romance/Beyonce.
2. Never apologize for the quality of the recordings. If you are ashamed of them, don't play them for anyone. How can you motivate someone to see you as a serious artist when you start defending your own material?
3. Give stats. How many shows have you played? How many people do you usually draw? How many CDs or tracks have you sold? How many people are on your MySpace site? How many forum members? What radio play do you have?
4. Name drop. What other bands or acts have you played with or opened for?
5. Provide testimonials. Do you have a glowing review or e-mail from a music industry professional or a well-established band? I am not talking about press reviews here. I mean a short quote from someone with authority in the industry—maybe a reply from a record company to you, praising your music.
7. Be honest. Tell the contact you are not ready to headline large shows, but you can bring a crowd for a support slot.

8. Give a timeframe. Are you available for shows now? Or are you looking to play as part of a tour in a couple of months?
9. Finally, make sure your contact information (e-mail address and home or mobile phone number) are on every item you send out or list online.

List all this information as concisely as possible. Ideally, you want to get it onto one side of a legal/A4 page with another page for press clippings.

Do not worry about flashy colour photographs or expensive CD covers. Photos and videos can be hosted online—just provide links to these in your e-mail or relevant URLs in your letter.

Have one photograph somewhere in the literature, though. You cannot assume that everyone has the time to go on the web, or even access to it.

Do spend money on good-quality photocopies for the letters and CD cover/inlays. The copies do not need to be in colour, but make sure the text is legible, especially for contact information. The CD should be in a plastic or paper wallet. These are less bulky, cost less to buy and post, and are less likely to get damaged in transit.

If you do send CDs in the full jewel case, then heed the words of George Howard of Rykodisc:

“Take the damn shrink-wrap off the CDs before you submit them!”

George Howard, A&R Manager, Rykodisc

Always target your key contacts before sending out or e-mailing the letters.

Any band with an eye to a career wants those big opening slots on shows with national touring artists. I get many e-mails every month from bands asking how they can get on shows or tours with major artists.

I'll say it again: Unless you know the headline act, their management, or their booking agent, you are going to have to appeal to the promoter, and the promoter will not be interested unless you can pull in enough people to help sell out his or her show. Unless you have a fanatical (and very large) following, you do not stand a chance of getting one of those national shows. Assuming that you can will mark you as naive and unrealistic.

The Follow-Up

Do not just e-mail off your message or letter, sit back, and expect the key contact to ring you immediately. In fact, be very suspicious if a promoter does contact you right away. Either he is not very busy (which means he is not very good at promoting) or he is going to offer you some kind of pay-to-play deal.

Your e-mail or letter should be followed up by a phone call. Wait about a week, and then call up your key contact.

You: Hello Mr. Romoter. This is Andy from a band called Millions of Americans. I sent you some of our material last week. I'm calling to make sure you received it.

P. Romoter: Oh yes, I remember the CD. It's not really what I'm looking for right now, and I do not have any slots free for a couple of months.

You: Okay. Well, would it be okay if I call you back in two or three weeks, and we can discuss a suitable show for Millions of Americans then?

P. Romoter: Sure.

You: We have some other shows coming up soon. Do you mind if I send you the details of these shows? Perhaps you would like to come and check us out for yourself?

P. Romoter: "Ok. Please email me the details and I will see if I can send someone along to one of your other shows."

Your final remark indicates to the key contact that you are capable of getting other shows elsewhere. Maybe this promoter is missing out on something?

Another approach might be like this:

You: Hello Mr. Romoter. This is Andy from a band called Millions of Americans. I sent you some of our material last week. I'm calling to make sure you received it.

P. Romoter: Uh, I'm not sure. I get hundreds of CDs every week.

You: I appreciate that, Mr. Romoter. Well, obviously I sent you some material in order for my band to get a show at the venue xxx/opening up for xxx. Can I send you a quick online link by e-mail right now, and then call you back in 30 minutes or so?

This approach will have a yes or no response. You just have to make sure you have your webpage or MySpace site up and working properly and that you can send that e-mail link immediately if the promoter says yes.

If you get a yes response, then make sure you do call back when you are supposed to. Be brief, do not waffle, and be honest!

You: Hello, Mr. Romoter. This Andy from Millions of Americans calling you back as arranged. Did you get a chance to listen to the songs from the link I sent you?

P. Romoter: Yes, I did. They're okay, but not really my cup of tea.

You: Okay, I understand. Well, obviously I am still looking to book a show for my band, Millions of Americans, at your club. We are not capable of headlining our own show at the moment, but we would love the chance to open up for another band sometime. Shall I drop you a line again in a month and see what might be available?

P. Romoter: Sure.

You: Great. We are also playing a couple of shows next week/month, and I'll send you the details of those. Thanks for your time.

In this case you have come away without a show, but you have not been refused outright.

Building a relationship is the important issue here. Even the smallest of promoters will have contacts or will be contacted by label scouts, booking agents, and other promoters, all of whom will be looking for new talent and the next big thing. By being upfront, honest, and businesslike with the promoter, you are not only trying to get shows for your band, but you are also creating a network, without even really trying.

Remember me telling you about all the bands who contact me saying, "We want to get to the next level. We have played all these small-town shows, and we want national touring shows?"

You probably feel the same way.

Imagine though, just for a moment, that you are the promoter who has been working with you and who has booked you into his venue. How would you feel, after taking a chance and booking a band into a venue, if they turned around and said, "You're too small for us now; we want something better?"

Would you be inclined to book that band again? Or would you think, "Well, best of luck. There are plenty of bands around here who do want a show in my bar. Just don't come grovelling to me when you can't get your big out-of-town shows?"

I know that's what plenty of promoters go through, and it just goes to show how short-sighted musicians can be. Someone takes a chance on promoting you and your music, and you turn around and say, "No thanks, it's not good enough for us?"

Build those relationships—don't knock them down!

“It is pretty hard, really, for a band to get those big opening slots—this comes when you get signed or get a good agent. It is best to just build a good local following, but be careful not to overkill. If you are good enough, the fans will come. It should snowball from there.”

George Akins, promoter, Rock City, Nottingham

About the author

Andy Reynolds has worked as an international concert tour manager and audio engineer for more than 20 years. He has toured permanently during this time, working on an average of 200 shows a year. Andy has worked for such bands as All American Rejects, House of Pain, Machine Head, Nightmares On Wax, Pavement, Roots Manuva, Super Furry Animals, Skunk Anansie, Squarepusher and The White Stripes and has worked with bands on tours by such acts as U2, Whitney Houston, Manic Street Preachers and the Foo Fighters.

His touring experience encompasses stadiums, arenas, theatres, pubs, bars, clubs, outdoor festivals, rooftops, subway stations, cruise ships, mountain sides and very, very muddy fields.

Andy has taught sound engineering and modern tour management at Red Tape Studios in Sheffield, and appeared as guest lecturer at Liverpool University and City College Manchester. He is now Senior Lecturer, Live Sound Production at Buckinghamshire New University in England.

Learn more about Andy at www.livemusicbusiness.com