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# Ten Tips for Getting the Most out of Every Gig you Play

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Getting to play any gig is an achievement in itself these days. More and more bands are competing for headline shows or opening slots. You should feel proud of yourself any time you manage to get yourself a booking for yourself or your band.

Getting the gig is the beginning though. You then need to make sure you take advantage of each show you get. Turning up and performing is only a part of your night. Each show you play should achieve three goals:

- 1) **Impress the audience.**
- 2) **Get new fans.**
- 3) **Sell merchandise.**

I see constantly see bands, turntablists and singers waste the opportunity their live appearance presents by failing at step 1 - being un-professional and therefore not impressing the audience. If your audience is not impressed, you are not going to achieve steps 2 and 3.

Here is a list of actions you can take at every show to make sure you achieve all three goals.

## ***1. Does the audience know who are you are?***

This is a simple question and yet have I have stood in a crowd many times, seeing a great band on stage and not knowing who they were. I cannot buy your CD or join your Facebook

site if I don't know your name! Never assume the audience, club workers and other bands know who you are. Have your band name and webpage printed on your kick drum, back of your turntables, on your music stands or on a banner/back drop.

Announce the name of your act four times during your set. Which brings me onto....

## ***2. Speak slowly***

Don't mumble and rush your words. Speak slowly when announcing song titles or introducing yourself. Get close to the microphone but not too close. Dynamic microphones, the most common type used in live sound, produce 'proximity effect' when close to a sound source. This will result in an increase in low frequencies which will make your speech sound 'boomy' and muffled. Proximity effect makes it hard for the listener to make out what you are saying. This is not good if you are trying to tell them the name of your band and the website. Speak slowly with your mouth about 2 inches from the microphone.

## ***3. Throw stuff into the crowd***

Not any old stuff but cards or mailers with your bands name and details of your MySpace, Facebook and Twitter pages. These cards need not be big or colourful; they are just another way of making sure everyone in the room knows who you are.

Your cards could also have a tear off portion or a return mailing address that your new fans can fill in and send to you with their name and email address.

## ***4. Mailing list***

I know most bands have some way of collecting email addresses, usually on a piece of paper, located somewhere on your merch stand. Have you ever tried to transcribe this information into a spreadsheet or mailing list program? Then you will know how hard it is to read the scribbles of your potential fans and how time-consuming it is to enter all this information.

Consider instead giving out cards with a mail-in section to collect information (see 'Throw stuff into the crowd' above) or setting up a laptop open at a spreadsheet page. Your new

fans can simply enter their name and email address straight into the sheet. You can then copy and paste the night's new entries into your master list when you get back home.

If you still prefer a piece of paper then print out pages with guideline boxes for first name, last name, the first part of the email address and the second as shown here. Always fill in an example - you want to encourage your new fans to give their information accurately.

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	Email name	@	Domain
<i>Andy</i>	<i>Reynolds</i>	<i>andy</i>	@	<i>tourconcepts.com</i>
			@	

### **5. Are you lit?**

No, not drunk but lit as in visible. Can your audience see you? This again may sound like a silly question but I have seen more than one show where the drummer is bathed in stage lighting with the rest of the band standing in darkness. Not only does this make your playing difficult, it will shift the emphasis onto the wrong members of your band. No disrespect to drummers, it's just you really want the lead singer lit up!

Take a couple of minutes after your sound check to make sure any stage lighting is focused where it should be (that includes any banner or backdrop you have). Do not move anything without asking someone first though.

### **6. Spares, spares and spares for the spares.**

Nothing ruins a gig faster than a technical malfunction. Strings snapping, straps breaking, cables buzzing – they all make your job of impressing an audience that much harder. Avoid these potential mishaps by checking all your gear thoroughly before you leave your home or the hotel. Sound checks usually take place around 5pm – just as most stores are closing. You are not going to be able to do much if you only discover a problem after you have set up and started sound check.

Have a good collection of spare parts for all the stuff that goes wrong the most often – strings, fuses, power cords, straps, sticks, heads, felts, stands, needles, cartridges and bulbs. Make sure all your computer/sampler/sequencer data is backed up and the back-up

has a back-up. Have a good basic tool kit which stays with the gear on-stage at all times – it's no good to you if the tool kit is locked in your van which is parked four blocks away.

### ***7. Drum carpet***

Separate to your obsession with spares should be your obsession with drum carpets. Your show is not going to impress anyone if your drummer is constantly missing parts or stopping because her kit is sliding all over the floor. Drum carpets can prevent this from happening and yet they seem to be prone to being left behind.

So have plenty of spare drum carpets. Buy five pieces of cheap grey or black carpet with a foam backing. These should be 5' x 5' at the least. Put two of them in the van for every show and leave the remaining three in your lock-up or rehearsal room. Trust me, it won't be long before you have to use those spare ones.

### ***8. Check the local transport curfew.***

Picture the scene – you are onstage, having a great show. The crowd loves it and everything is going well. You are still playing when you see that the crowd is beginning to thin out, people heading to the exits. Why? What did you do wrong?

Well nothing except not pay attention to the time. Not all your audience members arrive by car; they may be reliant on public transport. The last train to home may be leaving half an hour before you finish your set, and unless you pay for their hotel for the night, your fans will have to leave your show early.

You should therefore always check with the club owner or promoter that there is a public transport 'curfew' in place, especially if the venue is a little out-of-the-way. Find out where the bus or train station is in relation to the venue and estimate how long it would take to get there. You can then plan to finish your set at least 10 minutes before the departure time, giving your new fans at least 10 minutes to sign your mailing list or buy a shirt.

Always aim to be off-stage well before the end of the clubs closing time anyway – some people have day jobs to go to!

## **9. Sharing gear**

You are playing out with 2 other bands in a small club. The stage is tiny and there is little space to store gear. There is an early curfew and every band wants to play a decent length set. It makes sense therefore to try to arrange to share equipment between the bands. This should help cut down on changeover time, giving everyone the chance to impress their audience.

I am a keen advocate of sharing gear; done right it can really save time and effort for everyone. In order to make gear sharing effective you should consider the following:

- Contact all the other bands well in advance. Make sure everyone is happy to either share their gear or play on someone else's gear.
- If you are 'donating' your gear, then have plenty of spares (see above). Mark all your instrument and control settings.
- If you are using someone else's equipment, then make sure it is compatible to your sound – no point trying to get your fave post-hardcore tones from a Fender Twin.
- Beware the left handed drummer! To swap out cymbals, snare drums, kick pedals and hardware between players is time-consuming enough – to change a kit from a right- to left-handed drummer is frankly more trouble than its worth. You may as well swap out the whole kit.
- Everyone should help pack everything away. All the bands used the equipment so make sure all the bands break it down and pack it away.

## **10. Pens and paper**

Playing live just eats pen and paper. I don't know why. Make sure you have ample supplies of both. Lots of letter-size paper, Sharpies for autographing CDs and writing pens for signing record contracts.