

BACKSTAGE

Feat.

THE FAIR
PLAY
GUIDE

LIVE

Stage No.

①

Musicians'
Union

~~Guest / Crew / Band~~

~~Photographer / Film Crew~~

MM



The MU has been categorically against 'pay-to-play' gigs since their emergence many years ago. These deals typically involved musicians being forced to buy large quantities of tickets for their own gig, which they would then have to try and sell to punters. The role of promotion was, in effect, transferred to the musicians, often leaving them out-of-pocket, playing to empty venues, and struggling to use gigs as a way to expand their fanbase and profile.

However, in more recent years, social media platforms have completely altered the landscape for promotion. Musicians now have easy access to an environment that encourages the growth of online communities, and the interaction between artists and music consumers. For emerging and unsigned artists, promotion is therefore now very much part-and-parcel of the musician's role.

With this in mind, co-promotion deals, whereby artists assist in the promotion of their shows, are, for some, the most effective and viable way of gigging, so long as they involve appropriate remuneration, and don't resemble pay-to-play deals. The MU's stance in relation to what constitutes an unfair or bad co-promotion deal is:

An arrangement whereby artists agree to play a part in the promotion or financing of a gig, but aren't appropriately or proportionately rewarded for their efforts.

There's no reason why all co-promotion deals should be the same, as there are so many variables, including: venue capacity, location, other acts on the bill, and ticket price etc. It is therefore most effective to treat each gig as an individual negotiation. Many artists reach a level whereby they can command their desired fee and conditions without compromise, sometimes through an agent, but most gigging musicians have to negotiate on each and every show.

Most co-promotion deals require artists to sell tickets for their show. To avoid unfair deals, consider the following:

- Payment – ensure that you receive a fair cut of the price of each ticket, starting with the first one sold.
- As well as the high-profile social media platforms, there are several other sites that can assist musicians. See ArtistTicket, MusicGlue and TicketSense for sales of tickets, music and merchandise, and for marketing opportunities.
- Guest list – In addition to using guest lists for friends and family, they can also be used to attract your fanbase. Look into the possibility of offering a cheap guestlist to your fans, and use it in addition to selling tickets. Don't rely on guest lists too heavily, as they don't require punters to commit financially to the gig in advance, and therefore don't always encourage the best turn-out.

Other factors to consider, when negotiating and arranging co-promotion gigs are:

- You can say “no” to a gig. It's always worth trying to negotiate, but if there's no flexibility on the promoter's behalf, and the deal isn't right for you, don't do it – you're not losing anything, but you are applying quality control.
- Promotion – work with the promoter and other artists on the bill – share physical and digital promotions, in order to reach all fanbases and mailing lists.
- Press – ask the promoter for a copy of their press contact list, with a view to securing features/interviews.
- Check out radio opportunities, as many local and regional BBC programmes feature live music and interviews with artists.
- Create a show advance sheet, and send it to promoters when you agree a gig, in order that they can complete the required information and return it to you. This can include: load-in details, time of sound-check, stage times, guestlist policy, dressing room info, details for promotion, and many other factors relevant not just to the show itself, but to logistics surrounding the gig. The information returned can give you an idea of what the quality of the show itself will be.

ACCESS

THINGS TO AVOID

DATE

VENUE

Avoid:

- Taking sole responsibility for promoting a show – the venue / promoter should play an equal part.
- Last minute promotion: if you give yourself enough time, you'll cover more ground, and attract a larger audience.
- Deals that require you to sell a minimum quantity of tickets.
- Selling tickets without receiving a fair share of the ticket price.
- Lying about your pulling power – if a promoter asks you about the size of audience that you typically attract, be honest.

COMPETITIONS:

Competitions:

There has been an increase in showcase-style competitions whereby bands compete against one another, with the winning bands going through to the next stage, which sometimes involves another gig in a bigger venue. Whilst these competitions are sometimes judged by industry personnel and high-profile musicians, and can therefore offer expertise and valuable opportunities, they can be very expensive to take part in. Bands are often expected to buy a large quantity of tickets (often 30+) at each stage of the competition, which can become expensive if artists are successful in winning their heats, as the price of ticket, or the quantity purchased by bands, generally increases at each stage.

Whilst some competitions have proved effective for the winning artists, many competitions are seemingly based not so much on the music, but on the amount of tickets bought, or votes registered, by bands and their supporters. In this scenario, the kudos of 'winning' is dubious.

Before committing to competitions, consider what you can gain from them:

- Is the prize of any real value? Is there anything on offer that can't easily be bought?
- Does the competition essentially involve a sequence of gigs to the same audience? How many times will your fanbase be prepared to come and see you on such a regular basis?
- Is it a good use of your time, or would regular gigs offer a better return?

SHOWCASE EVENTS:

VENUE

AUTHORISED

Showcase events:

International showcase conferences and festivals e.g., SXSW and Midem, can offer artists a valuable gig – an audience of industry professionals, often including labels looking for new acts to sign. However, a lot of the delegates may have an idea of who they want to watch, based on recommendations, and so these shows are generally more useful to artists that have already caused a buzz, even if it's only locally or on a relatively small scale. Showcases can be invaluable to acts who consider their music to be popular on an international level, or part of a genre or scene that has a hub or strong market somewhere other than the UK. Although potentially career-breaking, international events can be extremely expensive, and require a great deal of organisation.

- Have an idea of what it is that you are looking for. Without this, you're potentially playing a very expensive overseas gig.
- Plan early, in order to apply for any available funding opportunities.
- Be aware of visa requirements and work permits.
- Make the most of your time at the event. In the months leading up to it, research delegates, and contact people that you feel may be good to meet.

UK-based events e.g., Sound City (Liverpool), The Great Escape (Brighton) and Go North (Inverness), are generally more accessible and affordable for emerging acts that don't have the support of a label and/or manager. As with international showcases, there are far more artists performing than there are delegates in a position to offer recording/management/publishing deals, but the conferences operate on a level whereby artists can easily network with relevant industry bodies.

ARTIST SUBMISSIONS:

Artist submissions:

Sites such as Sonic Bids and Get Me On Stage have become a contentious issue amongst musicians. Whilst some artists feel aggrieved that a cost is attached to a gig/festival application, others have benefitted from the process, by receiving gig offers for events that they have previously struggled to secure. To avoid wasting your time and money, consider the following:

- Some events use artist application sites, but still accept submissions through other, more traditional means. Check your options before applying.
- Ensure that you're a suitable act for the event, and that you're available to play, if invited. Check dates, entry requirements and the nature and profile of the event.
- Submit only what is required – some events use these sites in order to control and filter the large influx of applications – additional material may therefore be unhelpful.

Other factors that can help to deliver a better return from gigs:

- If a gig goes well, speak to the promoter straight after your set, with regards to another booking – it's a good time to negotiate a higher fee/better deal. The same goes for the other bands on the bill – if you're from different towns, there may be an opportunity to arrange gig swaps.
- Merchandise – Most small venues will allow artists to sell merchandise without paying a commission, and often provide a designated space to do so. Although many artists now release only within the digital domain, gigs offer a good opportunity to sell directly to fans, and to expand the brand of the artist. Merchandise can also be used to encourage fans to invest in a band, and can make them aware of products also available through an online store. If you have more upcoming gigs locally, have tickets available to sell.
- Data capture – Many of your fans may exist within your online communities, but it's still relevant to collate contact details, in order that you can keep them updated via e-mail and SMS, and also include those that don't participate in your online activity. Take a clipboard with a mailing list to gigs, and get people to give you their details when they're buying merchandise, and ask someone to walk round with it whilst you're playing.

- Royalties - Live events generate song-writing royalties, which are collected and distributed through PRS for Music. When artists register their songs with PRS for Music, they can then collect the royalties generated when the material is performed at gigs. Set lists should be submitted to PRS, regardless of whether artists are performing original material, or covering other artists' songs.

To find out more visit:

www.themu.org

or email:

gig@themu.org

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WWW.THEMU.ORG
GIG@THEMU.ORG

AUTHORISATION

These days, promoting yourself is an integral part of becoming a successful, performing musician.

The Fair Play Guide is the definitive companion for anyone involved in their own promotion. It fits easily in your pocket and means that when it comes to the ins and outs of filling a venue, you'll never be caught out again.

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VEHICLE