

# LECTURE NOTES FROM 'GET PLUGGED IN' A 15 HOUR COURSE ON THE LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY FOR MUSIC TANK AT WESTMINSTER UNIVERSITY

5 MARCH 2012: MARKETING AND PROMOTION

## Promoters

- Live Nation are the world's biggest. They own or manage some festivals you may have heard of. Download, Wireless, Hyde Park Calling, they have a 50.1% stake in Festival Republic so own Reading, Leeds, Latitude, The Bill Chase and Hove in Norway. They're the majority shareholder of the Academy Music Group so own Brixton Academy, Shepherd's Bush Empire and others in that estate. They manage Wembley Arena, Motorpoint Arena Cardiff and Motorpoint Sheffield, O2 Apollo Manchester, plus Metaldome and Way Out West festivals in Sweden, and they promote in many smaller venues UK, since 2007, encroaching on the traditional territory of independent promoters. They don't replicate this behaviour in every territory though. For example, I can only find activity in larger venues in Belgium
- Next are AEG, the world's largest owner of sports teams and sports events and the owner of the world's most profitable sports and entertainment venues, including the O2 in London (the most successful music venue in the world). It owns LA Galaxy, David Beckham's team, and the promoter Goldenvoice, who take care of the Coachella Festival in California.
- And then there's House of Blues, who own thirteen venues in America and who are, in turn, owned by... Live Nation
- Below these three giants we have, in the UK, the national promoters: KiliLive (set up by Stuart Galbraith, who used to run Live Nation in the UK). They have the touring Sonisphere Festival, operating in eleven European cities. The 'Big Four' played last year: Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth, Anthrax
- Then we have SJM and Metropolis, who promote their events together on the gigsandtours website. Metropolis are based in London, SJM (stands for Simon J. Moran, the founder) in Manchester
- Mean Fiddler are owned by the MAMA Group, who in turn are owned by the high street music/games retailer HMV. Under (or partially under) the MAMA umbrella are Nettwerk Records (US label who MAMA bought a piece of), The Fly Magazine, Lovebox Weekend Festival, Wilderness Festival, the Student Broadcast Network (radio) and a venue estate comprising Hammersmith Apollo, Kentish Town Forum, Jazz Cafe in Camden, Barfly, Borderline, Garage, Heaven, Picture House in Edinburgh among others. HMV are in financial difficulty and are looking to sell off their venue arm
- There are two large regional promoters: DHP in Nottingham, who own six venues around Nottingham, and promote outside the city, around the country sometimes, and DF Concerts in Glasgow, who operate the famous King Tuts Wah Wah Hut venue and T-In The Park festival (one of the UK's biggest). Guess who now has a controlling share? Live Nation
- If you pick up Time Out magazine, for example, you'll see adverts showing some of the national promoters booking small rooms like The Lexington, all the way up to Wembley Stadium, and some are in bed with major festivals. This is attractive for some artists and their agents, who hope that they can be taken from small rooms all the way up to stadiums by the same promoter, if all goes well
- London has very few large independent promoters: All Tomorrow's Parties (ATP) and Eat Your Own Ears (EYOE, though it's widely thought that they now have some kind of financial link with a larger, national promoter) being the exceptions in the 'contemporary music' world, and perhaps Serious in the jazz world. ATP are famous for their weekends in UK 'holiday camps', often curated by artists such as Mogwai, Portishead, Nick Cave, The National, Shellac, Sonic Youth, Nick Cave, or respected media partners such as Pitchfork. These are also held at venues like Kentish Town Forum. They will also, on occasion, book small shows. EYOE have built a formidable reputation in 'leftfield/alternative' genres, building from small rooms up to Shepherd's Bush Empire, 2000 capacity (I don't think they've booked Brixton Academy yet, 5000 cap.), plus their now-established one day festival Field Day in London, and newcomer The Apple Cart, aimed at families
- Next in line are Bird on The Wire, who are now booking into Shepherd's Bush Empire and on their way to establishing themselves as a major independent, which is good, since they're good people with good ears and ethics, and well-respected
- Underneath there are countless small promoters, perhaps from 1-4 people working together and while it may or may not be their fulltime job, they take it seriously. They have a brand, promote multiple shows and follow professional standards, to varying degrees
- And finally, we have the bands themselves, who'll book the venue and do what they can do get their mates down

## How do bands get paid in the UK?

1. They don't
  2. They 'pay-to-play'
  3. They don't + beer
  4. They get £1 for every person they bring, over X number of people + beer
  5. Guarantee vs %NBOR + beer
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1. Many bands will agree / accept to play for nothing, either in a pub or small venue, in order to get a foothold with a venue or promoter, or to use the show as a showcase. The pub or small venue may make some money at the bar because of the band's fans, but the band will be paid nothing
  2. Pay-to-play. A promoter will sell a band tickets for the show and when (if?) the band sells those tickets to their friends and fanbase, it will make its money back. If it does not sell the tickets, it will have lost the money. Also, a promoter may just tell the band that it will cost them £X to play
  3. The band will play for free for the reasons mentioned in '1', but they will get a few beers for their trouble. Some venues or promoters will blacklist them if they do not meet the target. These venues and promoters need to be taken outside and talked to most severely
  4. The band will get £50 and some beers. The standard fee for a support band has been £50 for decades. £50 used to be worth something
  5. If a band gets an agent they will soon enter the exciting world of guarantees, where the agent will make sure the band is paid for the show no matter what happens. Or they will get a percentage of the net box office receipts, that is; what is left of the profits after the promoter has paid his or her costs. Whichever is the greater. UK booking agents tend to start at 80%. Mainland European agents tend to start at 75%. The higher the percentage, the more the artist and agent will make, the less the promoter will make. I have seen deals where an agent has asked for 100% of the gross receipts. All the money. Every penny. Outrageous

## Marketing and branding

We're not so good in this business at thinking about marketing. So before we go any further, before we put a ticket on sale, let's stop and have a think about things:

- Do you have a product that someone wants? If you weren't trying to sell gig tickets, but some other commodity instead, would you just jump in?
- Japan is the world's largest automobile manufacturer and exporter, and has six of the world's ten largest automobile manufacturers. If you want to sell a car to the Japanese it had better be a pretty good car and you better have done your research. Music is no different. It's a commodity whether we like it or not
- Björk is from Iceland. When Björk launched in the UK, the UK had no-one like her, and arguably still doesn't, unless we are counting the likes of Joan as Policewoman, or Bat For Lashes, and while these are interesting artists, they are not Björk. This is partly why Björk was so successful in the UK
- Look at your market and see if it needs what you are selling. The UK has plenty of skinny-jeaned indie rock bands and Sweden has plenty of '80s-influenced synth-pop bands, so while you may still be able to find success for your skinny-jeaned indie rock band in the UK, or your '80s-influenced synth-pop band in Sweden, it's fair to say that you may not find it easy
- Think this way on a local level too. If a town only has the capacity for one small music venue, think very carefully before opening another, or about booking a very similar artist to the one that's on sale across town, if the market for that genre is very limited. And think very carefully about whether or not anyone will be interested in the show you're promoting, in the face of all the other shows that are being promoted on the same night
- As with any market, you need to find the thirsty man and sell him a bottle of water
- Branding. You don't need to be a multi-national company to consider it. If you want your audience to grow to trust your shows as a promoter, it'll be helpful to have a memorable and striking identity. It doesn't need to be overbearing; subtlety goes a long way and, once the artists you book become the draw (as opposed to shows which people attend because they like what you book), they'll not be wanting your logo to be bigger than their name on the poster

## Choosing a venue / tech specs / hospitality rider

Shall we get the show on sale yet?

Nope.

We're not ready.

You need to find the right venue.

- You'll want to check out the venue you want to use to make sure it's suitable technically (promoters rarely think about it). If they've got a 16-channel mixing desk you're not going to be able to book a band that needs 24 channels, without bringing a new desk in, and that's maybe more hassle than you want, and the venue may not let you do it anyway. So, before you confirm the band, ask to see their tech spec/rider. It will either be a stage plot/plan, or a channel/input list
- While we're on the subject of tech. riders, think carefully if you're making one for your artist. It should be clear, and it should not be demanding. It doesn't need capital letters, or red ink, or anything underlined. It just needs to be clear. It also doesn't have to have impossible demands such as naming the specific crossover or desk you need, or how many watts per audience member the PA needs to be able to deliver. The venue isn't about to buy or hire a new PA for your show. It's your responsibility to check whether or not the venue's production is suitable for you. And it doesn't need to use 'legalese' like "the promoter agrees to undertake the following". Plain English is good

Time to put the tickets on sale?

Nope.

We're not ready yet.

- You also need to see the artist's hospitality rider and make sure you can afford what they need, because it's going to come out of your pocket. If you're making one of these for your artists, again, think carefully about what you ask for, and how you ask for it. There's no need to shout, and there's no need to ask for a stack of food that no-one's going to eat. The first thing you need to do as an artist - or artist's representative - is find out exactly what the artist actually needs. If the artist needs 'cheese' then write down what kind of cheese. They like cheddar? Say so. Else you might get goats cheese and if you don't like goats cheese then it may go to waste. Don't ask for 'a selection of snacks'. Name the snacks. Don't ask for 'good quality' anything. It's subjective. Specify, specify, specify. But don't be greedy. Every cost you add to the show (assuming you're being paid a guarantee vs a percentage of the net ticket sales) means that it'll take you longer to reach that % mark, and therefore start to make more money. And if you're not on a guarantee vs a %, then it's just going to cost the promoter money. Don't waste food. And don't feel you necessarily need to clear the fridge out every time you play. Maybe the staff are hungry. Artists: tell your agent what should go on your rider. Agents: ask your artist what the need. Venues/promoters: ask the agent or artist if they really need everything listed. And again, no capital letters, nothing underlined, nothing in red ink

## Location and other considerations

- Think about where the venue is in whichever town you're in. If it's a showcase for your artist, make sure it's in a venue that the media/industry are used to going to. They don't want to have to get a map and a compass out to find it. Does it have good transport links? And in some cases, think about the demographic of the area. If you've a Jewish Klezmer band, you might want to consider Golders Green. You might not want to necessarily consider Peckham
- How big is the stage? If you have an 18-piece orchestra you'll need some space. Is the venue known for certain genres? If you're booking a quiet acoustic act then you'll not want to book them into Camden Underworld. It's primarily a metal / rock venue. If you've got a quiet act that needs a quiet room, consider what's around the room you want to use. Is there a noisy bar upstairs and will your audience hear it every time someone opens the door between the two rooms (Slaughtered Lamb). Is there just one door separating the venue and the bar, and are the staff alert to the problems this can cause (Wilmington Arms). Do the bar staff understand that throwing empty bottles into bins already full of bottles is going to make a racket in a quiet room? What are the staff like? Is the manager all over the place and always drinking? Is the sound engineer rude / any good? It's likely that you'll not be the first promoter to use the room so ask around, see what others think (both bands and promoters)
- Once you've chosen your venue, you'll need some practical information from them. Here are some suggestions:
  - Location
  - Parking
  - Load in time
  - Soundcheck time
  - Doors
  - Curfew
  - Load out restrictions
  - Clubnight afterwards which will affect your end-time
  - What does hire fee include and exclude
  - Backline in-house
  - Can you sell your own tickets
  - Dressing room
  - Space for merchandise, and is there a venue commission
  - Local accommodation and restaurant recommendations

Wi-fi

Local music shops for spares

Age restrictions

Noise restrictions

How many artists can you book on one night

What promotion does the venue do and how can you benefit from it

Can you bring your own alcohol for the bands, or do you have to buy it from venue

Time to put the tickets on sale?

Aye, okay.

Go on then.

### **Promotion and ticketing**

- How much should you charge? Have the band played near you before? How much was it then? Did the show sell well? Are the band more popular now? Consider increasing the price. Are we in a terrible recession? Consider leaving the price as it is. What is the average price for the venue? Look around and see what other similar bands are charging for their tickets
- So now you need to find the band's audience to tell them about the show. If it's possible (and it'll rarely happen), knock up some flyers and stand outside that band's next show, and announce yours. Mostly though, you'll be guessing where the band's audience are. Welcoming to promoting as gambling
- With flyering you can either do it yourself, or pay someone to do it. There are companies (such as The Entertainist and Don't Panic) who will do this for you. You will either be put into a flyering 'pack' with other flyers, or you can ask for your flyer to be handed out individually. It'll cost you more that way. Don't Panic have a set route of venues, bars, shops that they leave their packs in while The Entertainist choose a certain number of London events each week and stand outside them with their packs as audiences leave and arrive
- If your show is newsworthy in some way, consider writing a press release and hit up the newsdesks of online and print media, websites and blogs and such
- Posters: put some in the venue you're holding the gig in (the artist will be pleased to see it) and around the local area (shops and cafes, in record shops). If you can afford it and - if it's legal in the venue's area - do a street campaign. If you can't afford it and it's legal then do it yourself with water, flour and a paint brush. No-one said this was going to be easy. On the subject of record shops, they might agree to run a competition on their website or to their email database. Whatever you do, make sure the venue has posters up. There's nothing more likely to cause a band to give you a hard time if things don't go well than for them to see no promotion in the venue. Make sure you're allowed to design your own poster. The band may have artwork they insist on using. The agent may also have a tour poster he or she can send you, to save you money
- Press ads. Think very carefully about them. They can be expensive and difficult to target toward an audience, who has to buy the magazine, open it, get to the page your ad is on and actually notice the ad. It relies too much on hope and supposition for my liking. The bigger the ad, the more impact it may have. Can you share it with other shows you're booking? Can you share it with another company? Ads do have the benefit of showing the agent/artist you're 'serious', and can give a boost to your profile, as well as the show. They can keep your shows in the public eye, as flyers, without necessarily being beneficial to a specific show
- If your show is part of a tour you may be asked by an agent - or by a promoter they've nominated - to contribute toward a national ad, which is one that will be placed to advertise the tour in national publications such as NME, Mojo, Uncut, Q etc. It's usually £50, though I've been asked for £100. I say "asked" but I've never been asked by an agent. I've only ever been told to do it and it has caused arguments when and if I have declined, my logic being that I can think of better ways to spend £50 or £100 which is, after all, my money, and since I'm the promoter, I'm taking all the risk. You have no control as a promoter as to where the advert is placed, and you have no idea how much the ad is costing. It has been said that any money left over is then given to the artist (via the agent) but until I see some hard evidence of this, you will forgive me for being sceptical
- Digital marketing has become more and more important since the advent of high-speed broadband and is now an arguably crucial part of the marketing mix. My apologies for saying "marketing mix" there. There are companies such as MusicAlly who specialise in it, and offer online courses where you can learn about the myriad platforms you can utilise to plug your shows/artists/social life/chance of renting your spare room out
- Listings cross the print and digital divide, since some publications (Time Out, Guardian) have both print and digital versions. If you want your gig listed in a newspaper or magazine, look at it and find out how they like them submitted and in which format. Some use a company to collate listings for them (such as PA Listings). Online listings are a little different, and you can make it easy for yourself just by putting a ticket on sale on one of the main ticketing outlets (WeGotTickets, TicketWeb, Ticketmaster, SeeTickets etc.). Many online listings sites take an XML feed from the ticketing sites and post all of their shows without you having to list a finger; the listings companies make a small amount of money from the ticketing companies every time they sell a ticket, in a 'referral' arrangement. And now that there are many more free shows popping up, those won't appear online unless the promoter manually inputs them.

WeGotTickets (and perhaps others) do allow regular promoters to add free shows which will then appear on the listings sites, but if the listing site's coding means that all shows have a 'buy tickets' button next to them, then the promoter may not necessarily like that, for fear that it puts the audience off. You may find it more practical (but more time-consuming) to go around the various listings sites and manually submit them

- Companies like w00t and Sonic specialise in marrying advertisers (like you, potentially), with websites such as TheLineofBestFit, DrownedinSound, TheFly, and any one of a number of music sites that you might decide would be a good place for you to push your show. They offer breakdowns of a site's readership demographic and gender split, plus how often they're visited to help you target your advert better. A simple trick to use to decide where to advertise online would be to Google your artist's name and the word "review" and see which sites favour the artist, perhaps considering asking if they want to co-promote the show with you if they're very big fans
- Some sites will charge per number of page views, some will charge a flat fee per month, and ads will vary on price depending on where on the site they appear
- Ticketing agencies will have their own mailing lists. Use them. Ask them to mention your show in their mailouts, maybe run a competition to raise the show's profile. As well as meaning your show will definitely appear on listings sites, putting advance tickets on sale also gives you an idea of how popular the show is going to be, and the ticketing company might also advance you some money from the sales to bankroll the event, useful if you need to pay the artist a pile of cash on the night
- Try and find out where the artist's fans are online and tell them about the show. You'll find them lurking on the artist's own Facebook page and following them on Twitter, for example. You'll also find them on sites like SongKick and LastFM
- But before we go any further, let's look at the golden rule of digital marketing. In fact, any marketing. In fact, any communication whatsoever: don't bore people. Be interesting. Ask questions, nod at the appropriate time, show concern and empathy. Exactly as you would in any other 'offline' relationship. Don't spend the whole time talking about yourself / your shows. We all have friends online who do that. We probably do it ourselves. Don't. It's a turn-off
- Target Facebook events. Don't just invite everyone in your list. I frequently get event invites to shows in countries that I don't live in. The result is that I pretty much ignore all event invites
- Facebook ads are cheap and easy to monitor. Try different designs (you can do multiple ones for the same show) and see what works for you
- I recently ran a Facebook ad which had 8,000+ page impressions though no-one clicked the ad to discover more about it. This either means that 8,000+ people saw it and weren't interested enough to find out more, or that some were interested but knew about it, or found out more about it via another method. It also doesn't mean that 8,000+ actually noticed the ad; just that it appeared on a page they were looking at. But it was free, since Facebook were only charging us for click-throughs (CPC)
- Let's compare that to flyering (using real figures from a previous campaign I ran, using The Entertainist to flyer), and let's assume that we can compare flyering and a Facebook ad, by saying that giving someone a flyer that they may not act upon, and an ad appearing on a page they're reading amount to the same thing: putting the show in their field of vision

8,000 flyers

Printing = £175

Distribution = £12 per hour + £5 booking fee per show

Each show = approx 2 hours of flyering

8,000 flyers would cover approx 16 shows

16 shows x 2 hours = 36 hours at £12 per hour = £432, + 16 x £5 booking fees = £512

= £0.064 per flyer

8,000 Facebook ads

Printing = £0

Design cost = £however much you want to spend, but shouldn't cost you anything

= £0.000 per ad (assuming no-one clicks it)

- Cost per click (CPC) advertising lets you specify how much you want to pay each time someone clicks on your ad. Cost per thousand impressions (CPM) advertising lets you specify how much you want to pay for each 1,000 impressions (views) of your ad
- Facebook's current minimum CPC is \$0.01, and the current minimum CPM is \$0.02, so you can see how you can easily control your spending. Facebook do advise that you might want to set your prices higher, since they might not be high enough to ensure that your ad will be shown. Though I suppose they would say that
- The figures aren't supposed to show that flyering is too expensive. Depending on the size of the show and how well you target your flyering, it could be very effective indeed. And Facebook ads could be either useless, or very effective, depending on how good you get at working with them

- 'Tagging' on Facebook and Twitter is a useful way to achieve further exposure and ensure that those you're working with (the band's label and the band themselves, for example) see that you are promoting the show. If you 'like' them (on Facebook) or 'follow' them on Twitter, then tag them in your post about the show, your post or tweet will appear on their Facebook page or Twitter feed, exposing the post or tweet to their fans or followers
- Applications like Tweetdeck are useful to help you manage multiple Twitter topics, for example if you work with multiple artists or shows and want to see how and how often they are being mentioned
- The people who know their fans better than anyone are the artists themselves so you'll do well to engage them and ensure they're pulling their weight with promotion. The bigger the band, the harder you'll find it to talk to them directly, and the more likely it will be that their manager/label/whoever will not want you to talk to them directly, so engage their team instead
- And give yourself some time to promote the show. I like eight weeks minimum. I like longer if I can get it