Artist Management and Booking

The artist’s team
A relatively well-established artist traditionally has four different entities working in the artist team: a manager, a record label, a publicist and an agent. Each handles a separate aspect of the artist’s business. However, with the advance of technology and changes in how people operate globally, including the music sector, there has been a major shift towards roles and functions overlapping, with some businesses offering 360-degree services.

Record label
A record label signs on artists to release their music and promote and distribute their records, both physically and digitally. A ‘major’ record label refers to a larger international company, usually one that owns several smaller record labels, such as Warner or Universal. An ‘indie’ or ‘minor’ label refers to a smaller, independent business that often specialises in a specific music genre or niche.

Agent
An agent is an integral part of an established artist’s team, and is responsible for everything related to the artist’s touring, from single shows to long international tours, support acts, etc. Agents work with their network of promoters and venues in order to secure the best opportunities and terms for the artist. They offer full touring administration and handle all details related to a live show on behalf of the artist, such as touring calendars, logistics, contracts and invoices.

Publicist
A publicist is the artist’s public relations (PR) and branding expert. They have a keen knowledge of the media outlets and key personalities in their territory, and help guide an artist to get the best and most suitable exposure possible. They pitch and negotiate TV performances, send news and press releases about the artist to their mailing lists, handle interview requests and ensure the artist is visible and present at important events where media is present. If a promoter wants to get a quote or a video shout-out from the artist, this will often have to go through a publicist.

Manager
The manager has the closest relationship with the artist. The array of tasks a manager handles can vary, but, in general, is responsible for the overall development of the artist’s career. They are responsible for negotiating the terms of all agreements with the rest of the team, as well as the communication between all entities. On behalf of the artist, they work closely with the record company regarding the artist’s recorded music, with the agent for touring, and with the publicist for promoting the artist.

Booking

The booker
The challenge of being a booker
The booker is the most sought-after position of a festival or concert organisation. You get a chance to show your insight to who the next big talent is, develop the festival’s or venue’s profile, and negotiate the best deals with agents.
However, as well as being a craft, the position also carries an administrative and financial responsibility. Because bookers are often dependent on an artist/agent in order to develop their programme and profile in the direction they want, they sometimes agree to terms that are not affordable or impede the venue or festival in other ways. In these cases, it is important to remember that a venue/festival and an artist/agent are always mutually reliant upon each other. Without the venue/festival, there will be no show and vice versa; without the artist, there will be no show. Most artists rely on income from touring, as record sales alone are not enough to sustain an artist’s career. Less established artists also rely on the exposure and experience they get from playing shows, in order to build their fan base, potentially attract new entities to their team, and develop artistically.

So, the booker has a central, but complex role in a concert organisation. They must work closely with the person in charge of finances, the technical staff and the marketing team. Everyone needs to communicate with each other to make the organisation run smoothly.

Understanding an artist’s strategy
The following points are important to understand an artist’s strategy and to be able to plan ahead. An established artist will have an agent handling all enquiries about touring and live performances. The agent will work closely with the manager about every decision made on behalf of the artist. The manager will have developed the overall strategy for the artist, and playing live is usually a big part of any artist’s business. A strategic timeline may be laid out well in advance – often several years – and usually binds together the release of new music with live activity. A tour will be set to a specific period in order to maximise momentum for the artist. Decisions about which festivals to play will be part of the overall strategy. For these reasons, the artist may not be available to a booker in the preferred time, and alternatives may need to be sought.

The booker and the agent
An agent will have a set of expectations of any booker, even if you are doing it unpaid and are new to the industry. The first one is trust. Most artist bookings are based on trust and the expectation that you are honest about what you are offering.
A second expectation is communication, and the ability to stay in touch and give answers within an expected timeframe. If a booker takes too long to respond, the agent’s trust can easily be lost. Decisions are often made quickly, so you have to be prepared to respond quickly.
The booker needs to have a clear overview of all local conditions, and should be able to create an accurate budget for the show. If you are talking to an agent, but are unsure of what you can deliver in terms of technical equipment or what the costs are, you should always ask for extra time to clarify the details. Most agents will understand and respect this. An agent will always prefer to have all terms and details in order, before confirming any agreement. Reach out to other bookers you trust and use the internet for guidance. Certainly, do not pretend to know!
If you are a new booker at a venue, a valuable tip is to set up meeting with all the agencies you will be working with and tell them about your plans. This will help them understand your ambition and put a face to your name. Get in touch with the agents of artists you are interested in as early as you can. However, some artists will not be able to give you a clear answer sooner than 3–4 months before the proposed date, and some even later than that.

The booking process
The process of booking an artist has multiple phases, and, while the agent will expect rapid decisions, it's wise to find your balance and take the time needed to make sure everything is in order. Know the finances of your venue, which economic factors will contribute to your budget, and keep your budget at hand and updated.
The process can look something like this:
Artist Selection and Planning
This is the creative process of booking your line up. You should be thinking about your line-up’s profile, using music outlets and networks available to get ideas. Listen to demos, read blogs, search YouTube, monitor streaming numbers, read printed magazines and start to evaluate what would be realistic in your market and meet the audience’s expectations.

Incoming pitches
If you already have a network of agents you have worked with or who know your venue, they will most likely make you offers based on what the market has been paying for their artist so far. If you are an active part of your local music community, you will also constantly be receiving offers from local bands and musicians.

Research
Trust your own evaluation, but make sure to get a second opinion from experienced contacts about your plans. Seek to find specialists on the genre and actively use data from record labels. Find out how sales were the last time the band played, how long ago it was, what the streaming numbers are, whether they will be releasing new music, whether the band has been in the media lately or won an award, etc.

Risk analysis/budgeting
Go through all the aspects of the show: the time of year; a reasonable ticket price; the age limit/fan base; competition with other shows; potential partners. Get an overview of all details and put together an accurate budget. When you are negotiating, make sure to update your budget with the artist’s rider and negotiate its terms (hospitality and technical) and not just the fee of the show.

The show budget
A show budget should only contain expenses directly related to the specific show at hand, and no operational costs. The budget will generally be made up of two types of cost: the fixed local costs, such as venue rental, PA (public address) system, lights and electricity, security, marketing, etc.; and the costs of the artist, such as fees, travel costs, hotels, catering, backline rental, ground transport, etc.

Operational costs, such as office rental, electricity, cleaning and staff are usually financed through external income sources not related to the concert programme, such as members’ fees, public grants or food and beverage sales.

Once you have added all expenses to your budget, you will know how much income you need in order to break even. The breakeven point will be where a percentage split with the artist will kick in. If you are worried your budget is not realistic, try using budgets from other similar shows as a starting point.

Deals
When you have decided to enter into negotiations to book an artist, there are different ways of approaching fees. Remember that the price for a band is twofold: the fee and any variable costs you may need to cover. Below are examples of deals that differ from each other by the amount of risk the promoter takes. Depending on how certain you are of the outcome, you should consider every model before making a final offer.

Flat/Fixed fee
For a deal involving a flat/fixed fee, the promoter and agent agree on a flat fee and negotiated rider for the show. This way, the expenses will be clear, but not the income. In this deal, 100% of the risk is carried by the promoter. Although, with good ticket sales, the potential profit can be good, but the potential losses can also be high.

Fixed fees are uncommon deals, except for at festivals, as splitting both income and expenses of an entire festival between promoter and a number of artists would be very hard to do.
Pricing a spot for an artist at a festival will also differ from pricing a standard headline show. If there are many festivals in a particular area, deals will often have exclusivity clauses, stopping an artist from playing at festivals that compete in the same market. If an artist plays at only one show, the price of the show will go up as travel costs to get to the area will be set off against the one show. These factors contribute to the asking price from agents for a festival generally being higher than for a club show. However, some festivals pride themselves on attracting media and industry attention, which can make bands and artists want to play there and thus allow the booker to negotiate more favourable deals.

It is important to approve the applicable riders before signing the contract and to make sure these are an integral part of the agreement. This will help to avoid unpleasant surprise expenses for extra backline rental or supplying hotels for a bigger travel party than estimated.

**Split deal with guarantee**

A split deal with a guarantee offers the artist a fee plus a percentage of ticket sales after breakeven, which is the financial point where the promoter has recouped all of his/her expenses (including the artist’s fee). This guarantees the artist a minimum fee, and the risk is split between the promoter and artist. The split is commonly 70% or higher in favour of the artist. Negotiate the balance between fee and percentage of ticket sales; the more established the artist is, the bigger the guaranteed fee. This is a common model for clubs and smaller venues.

**Split deal only**

A split deal only means that the artist, who relies entirely on ticket sales to make money, carries most of the risk. If a guarantee is not offered, the artist or agent will ask for a relatively high percentage of sales. Remember, however, that costs must be covered. Therefore, it is important to clarify whether the artist’s percentage is of the nett (after breakeven) or gross (all sold tickets) ticket sale.

For all deals where the breakeven point is calculated, and the profit is split with the artist, both the artist and the promoter are affected by the costs of the artist’s requirements and riders. This should motivate an agent to keep rider costs down.

**Riders**

An artist’s rider is a list of requirements, and contains details about everything that is needed, both on and off the stage, for the artist to perform the show. It is a document describing everything worth knowing about the artist and the production. Riders are an integral part of the agreement for the show, and if you have signed one without being able to deliver everything in it, the artist may have grounds to cancel the entire performance without further explanation.

There are two types of rider: technical and hospitality. A technical rider is often put together by an engineer or the production manager for the tour. It will detail all technical requirements about the PA system, lights, stage, backline, etc. A hospitality rider contains all non-technical requirements, such as catering, accommodation, travels, guest lists, etc.

Riders are negotiated at the same time as fees, as riders can entail large additional expenditures. Examine all costs related to riders, and negotiate what you cannot deliver or find unreasonable. Negotiable points that can save you a lot of expenses:

- Does the travelling party need to have single hotel rooms?
- Can they arrange private accommodation?
- Can they eat home-cooked meals?
- Are they travelling with the cheapest alternative?
- Is there a genuine need for the rental of extra equipment?
- What can the artist bring of their own backline?

If an artist is paying for parts of the rider that would otherwise be offered by the promoter, for example by sleeping in the tour bus instead of in the offered hotel, you can discuss if they should get the price of the hotel as a buy-out to cover these costs.
Make sure that both parties agree on the amendments made to a rider. However, a promoter should not take pride in making big cuts to the rider. The priority is to hold the concert under decent conditions for the artist.

Rider demands, such as cigarettes or lottery tickets are regarded as private matters and should not be a promoter cost. Excessive amounts of alcohol can also be viewed as unreasonable, as the artist is primarily there to work.

A rider is often excessive and overly specific, but remember that the content is negotiable. There are countless stories about outrageous riders from artists who have requested helicopters; that only yellow M&Ms are provided in a bowl backstage; that the wardrobe must be of a certain size to be able to fit their soul into it, etc. However, good communication almost always results in reasonable alternatives that everyone is happy with.

**Dressing Room**

The artist will always need a dressing room to change, keep their personal belongings and relax, both before and after the show. Dressing rooms should have locks, and the audience should not have access to the area. The artist should not have to walk through the audience areas in order to get to the stage. Think about how to furnish the dressing room. Common requirements are a large mirror, enough seating for the artist and their entire crew as well as a private bathroom and shower. Make sure these are cleaned before the artist arrives.

**Offers**

If you are putting in an offer for an artist, make sure to always include the budget and to do it in writing per email. Be open and honest about any considerations related to the offer you are making. Make sure the offer clearly states who is covering what costs. Add a deadline for when the offer expires. Also check with the agent if the artist has confirmed other shows in your area, as this could affect your ticket sales. If not, consider asking for an exclusive appearance in your city or country, for a given period of time.

An offer should contain the following three sections/documents:

- a fee, attached with a budget
- an overview of the technical facilities
- a list of standard terms related to the venue or festival.

You should prepare templates that will cover all these details.

**Standard terms and final offer**

The standard terms of an offer are rooted in the local conditions and can include any details a promoter wishes to add.

A good foundation from which to build your offer is to establish for how long it will be valid, and what dates you have available for the artist. The amount of time you allow until the offer expires will depend on how much time you can wait. A deadline shorter than a week is very uncommon.

If you are sending offers to international acts, make sure to include details about taxes and fees that would apply to them in your country. If you are booking an international artist directly or through an agent not based in South Africa, it is your responsibility to ensure taxes are paid to the relevant government authority (SARS). If booking through a local agent, it is the agent’s responsibility to handle this.

If there are any specific requirements or limitations that will affect the artist on the day of the show, such as when they have to do a sound check, include these in the offer, or as soon as you can. Local transport is often covered by a promoter, but make sure to detail what is included to avoid expensive taxi bills afterwards. If you have a range of ticket prices, or want to put on a local support band, this should all be included in the offer.

After having carefully negotiated the terms with the agent you will hopefully end up with a final offer that you are comfortable with and confident of being able to deliver.
Contracts
No matter how big or small the artist, always make sure you have a written agreement with the artist or agent. As with an offer, the agreement will also consist of three main documents:

- **Contract document:** includes details about the date, fee, venue, time slot, other artists, promotions, marketing and general terms agreed on by both the artist and promoter.
- **Hospitality rider:** includes all practical details about the artist, such as travel party, hotel preferences, catering and diet information, transport details, dressing room requirements, etc.
- **Technical rider:** includes all technical specifications about the show, such as PA system, lights, stage size, electricity, etc. It should include details about the equipment the artist is bringing and what they will need to have delivered locally, as well as contact details of the artist's technical staff. Remember that everything is negotiable.

Payments
It is normal to pay an international act 50% of the agreed fee in advance and the balance after the show. Especially if you are working with an agent for the first time, paying the full fee in advance can be risky. Make sure to cover yourself in the event that the artist cancels the show. Most agents will invoice you the fee; be wary of paying artists in cash.

Checklist

- Be honest! Always consider what you can afford to offer and do not agree to unreasonable demands.
- Do a detailed risk analysis of your market, the artist's fanbase, the genre, new releases and possible media attention.
- Produce an offer detailing all general and specific terms to do with your venue/event and the artist.
- Submit a detailed budget!
- Every part of an offer can be re-negotiated and is not final until both parties have agreed.
- Write a contract and make sure you read the small print of an agent’s standard terms.
- If you agree on terms in a telephone conversation, make sure you follow up in writing via email to summarise what you have agreed upon.
- Do not pretend to know something you do not. If you are stuck and need to check something, be honest and ask for time to clarify the details.
- Keep your promises!
- Remember that your expenses go beyond just the artist's fee. Maintain communications with your marketing, technical and finance staff in order to see the full picture – and everyone will be happy with you!

International artists and agents
Some local agents will tell you that you should not talk directly to international agents. If the international agent has a partner in your country, the local agent will be your contact point, anyway. While the local agent representing the international agent may charge a fee, thus increasing the costs, dealing with someone who understands your position in the market will give you an added sense of security. However, within genres where local agents may have a smaller network, you will need to contact the international agent directly. Start with smaller acts while you get to know the agent, and build their trust in you over time.
Collaborative booking
While it is common to collaborate with other promoters and venues in order to offer discount packages on a larger series of shows, it demands great organisational skills. Smaller, regional collaborative networks are easier to manage. By offering a string of shows to an agent, you will be saving the artist travel costs, and the agent will be happy that you have routed the tour for him/her.
However, collaborative booking between venues or festivals that are far from each other, both geographically and in terms of scale, will probably demand more work than it is worth. Some will also be wary of vouching for promoters they don’t know well, which, in turn, can weaken their trust with the agent.
Even if you are not collaborating with others to submit offers, it is important to keep in touch, share experiences and ensure that you are not outbidding each other in your region. Planning line-ups together will give the best results for artists and fans.

Merchandise
Merchandise is a good source of income for both artists and promoters, and a good marketing tool. There are numerous producers of merchandise, including everything from t-shirts to bags and posters. Consider the options and how you want your brand to stand out before deciding what merchandise to order and who to get it from. Check for quality before placing an order with a supplier.

Artist merchandise sales
Many promoters offer to sell an artist’s merchandise against a cut of the total sales. In this case, agree on a percentage as part of the contract. Make sure you know exactly what you are stocking of the artist’s merchandise, and make an inventory together with a representative for the artist, both before you start selling and afterwards.

For more information
- AIRCO. www.airco.org.za
- Artist-Agent Agreement. www.biztree.com/doc/artist-agent-agreement-D146
- Legal Aid. www.legal-aid.co.za
- RISA. www.risa.org.za