



TIP SHEET

title : Promoting your own gig

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author : MIDAS

synopsis : Have you ever considered putting on a gig yourself?

There's more to the music industry than the bands.

Produced with assistance from some of the Highlands

most successful promoters this tip-sheet contains an

array of information that will help you put on a well

organised show.

TIP SHEET

MIDAS music industry development and support

TIP#MTS-003

TITLE

This tip-sheet has been produced to help those who are interested in promotion and would like to have a go at promoting a gig. In consultation with a number of promoters MIDAS has put together a step by step guide on how to promote a gig. With tips on the organisation of your gig along with information on the marketing and promotion of the event itself the following tip-sheet should make the prospect of putting on your own gig an exciting and enjoyable one.

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INTRO

There are numerous reasons why you might decide to put on your own gig. Perhaps as a fundraiser for charity or to give you a means of promoting your act. Whatever the reason, putting on a successful show involves a lot of work and preparation. Making a lot of effort with the organisation of the gig will help things run as smoothly as possible. The more work you have done in advance the better equipped you will be to deal with any unexpected problems that you might encounter on the day.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

When you first consider putting on your own gig there are two main things to take care of, a) the venue and b) the bands. Both of these should be dealt with before making any other plans.

In a lot of cases people put on gigs to showcase their own band or perhaps one that they like. If this is the case the choice of bands doesn't really take much thought as this is the motivation behind the gig. What is helpful in these cases is to think about getting another band who are more established in your area to play as well. People are more likely to come if there is a popular act on the bill. Try and find a group that complements the style of music that you play and have a good reputation in the area. If you are putting on a gig for other reasons and won't be playing yourself then try and find bands that people will want to see. A local support act is usually a good idea in this case, again, to get the heads through the door to see the lesser known acts.

Once you have made a decision on the bands that you would like to book have a think about possible venues. What kind of audience do you expect to get at your gig? Is it for children, adults, all ages? This plays an important part in your choice of venue. If you are putting on a gig for under eighteens then it is important to find somewhere that allows this age group. The majority of licensed venues do not allow those who are under-age through their doors so think about alternatives. Perhaps you could approach your local community centre or village hall with the idea? If the gig is aimed at regular gig going adults then you need to find a different type of venue. Is there an established live music venue in the area? If so, this is a good place to try. You should try and put on a show in a place that people already associate with live music. If the venue is a popular one then people are more likely to come and check out the bands that are playing. Think about the number of people you hope to get out (be realistic) and use this when deciding on a venue. Anything between 50-100 people is a good start so look around for venues of this size. Remember it is better to have a small place packed out then a large one sparsely populated.

In terms of hiring costs etc. each venue is different. You should find out what they expect for letting people put on gigs. In some cases it is a percentage of the door takings whilst in others it is a pre-determined fee. In many cases you can get the venue for free and if there is a bar they make their money at the bar. In any case make sure you check out what your commitments are before booking.

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ORGANISATION

Once you have your venue and bands booked you need to start thinking about the general organisation of the show. There is a lot of work to be done if you want to be fully prepared. It is often better to share the responsibilities amongst a number of people so that you do not take too much on yourself. If you are organising the gig on behalf of your own band why not share the organisation between each member. There is plenty of work to go round and sharing responsibilities will prevent any individual from having more work than they can cope with.

*note

Although this tends to be a good approach there are advantages to being the sole organiser of the event. You will know exactly what is happening at all times and will be aware of everything as it happens. If you do choose to assume all the responsibility be prepared for a lot of work and a lot of stress. It takes a special kind of person to take on a task like this but it is up to the individual/s how they deal with this

Once you have established who exactly will be involved in the organisation you need to start! Make sure that you have booked your venue and bands a number of weeks in advance to allow yourself enough time for the organisation. It may seem like a long time but 4-6 weeks in advance is the best time to get things booked up. This leaves you with enough time to organise and promote the gig. Every show is different from the next and the tasks to be completed often vary. However, there are a number of things that need to be taken care of for any gig that you put on:

PA System

The sound at a gig plays an important role in the overall quality of the night. If the sound from the stage is not audible or poorly balanced (ie. The drums are louder than everything else) then the audience will have difficulty understanding what the music is all about and find it difficult to get into.

Do you have a PA available to you or will you need to hire one in? Think about the size and nature of your gig as this will determine the type of PA that you will require. Make sure you get a system that is big enough to handle the bands and venue that you have booked. If the venue is reasonably small then a simple vocal PA may suffice whereas if your venue is large then you are best to get a full PA capable of amplifying the whole band.

If you are borrowing the sound system from a friend or another source that you don't have to pay for then make contact with them and make sure that it is OK for you to have the PA on the date of the gig. Check if there are any costs to be paid (insurance etc.) and when it can be collected and returned. Once you have everything sorted out, get the owner/s to confirm all of the details by letter or email. What is important is that you have something in writing in case they forget about it and you need to remind them of your booking. Another thing to consider is having someone at the gig who knows how to set up and use the PA and deal with any problems that may be encountered on the night.

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ORGANISATION cont.

If you need to hire in a PA from a professional sound company make sure you try and find out all of the companies that provide this service in your area. Make up a list of potential companies and get in contact with them explaining what it is you need their services for. Things you should tell them when you first make contact include, the size of the venue, the date of the gig and the number and type of bands playing. From this they should be able to advise you on what kind of system you will require and how much this will cost you. If you are hiring a professional rig you will need someone to set-up, operate and dismantle things on the day of the gig. Make sure that you let them know this when you make contact. If you have a number of potential companies, it is a good idea to shop around and find the best quote for the job. Saying this, it is wise to remember that the cheapest may not be the best. Try and find out about each company and see what work they have done in the past. Perhaps speak to friends/ people you know who have hired out PA's and see what they thought of the service provided. The PA plays a big part in the success of a gig so make sure that you get the best option available to you within your price range. Once you have made a booking be sure and get written or email confirmation of all the details for the day of the gig.

*note

It is a good idea to keep all documentation connected to the gig in one place so that if required you know where everything is.

Backline

When you get in contact with your bands, find out what equipment they all need. Ask them to send you a description of their set up on stage and any technical requirements (known as a 'tech-spec and stage plan'). You can pass this onto the PA company nearer the time to give them an idea of what to expect. You need to establish who is going to be supplying what gear for the evening. This can get messy so your best bet is to email all of the bands in the same email to let them know what the backline situation is. Tell each band who is responsible for bringing each bit of equipment so that there are no mix ups. This part of the organisation is sometime best left for the bands to sort out between themselves. Remember to keep an eye on this just to make sure that there is no confusion which could cause problems on the day of the gig.

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ORGANISATION cont.

Security

Depending on your venue, the age of your audience and whether or not the event is licensed you may have to provide security on the night. When you make the booking with the venue, check if it will be necessary to provide any form of security. They may ask you to provide somebody on the door to collect tickets/money or they may ask you to provide number of security guards to look after the whole venue. If there are no specific requests made by the venue for stewards then it is up to you to make the decision. If you feel it is necessary then you have two options in addressing the matter:

- i. Put together your own stewarding team. If you opt for this make sure they are responsible people whom you can trust to cope with any situation that may arise without making it any worse.
- ii. Hire in a certified security company. There are numerous security companies on a small and large scale that will provide security at your event. Try and find out as much info as you can on a firm before you make a definitive booking with them.

So, now you have your venue booked, bands confirmed, all the technical and security issues taken care of so it is time to think about promoting. It is best to have all of the above dealt with before you start to spend time and money on promotion. This means you can concentrate your efforts without concerning yourself about arranging any of the above.

PROMOTION

Promotion can be carried out in various ways both conventional and imaginative. Think about the people who are most likely to come to your gig and about the different ways of creating awareness. Below are a few of the more common promotional approaches which you should endeavour to cover. In addition, feel free to come up with your own ideas that you think will be effective. The best promotional methods are those which surprise people and stick in their heads so doing something a little different can make a big difference.

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PROMOTION cont.

Postering/Flyering

Perhaps the most common way of advertising your gig. Try and make your posters/flyers eye-catching. The most important thing of all is to make sure that you have all of the information necessary on the poster. You should include the following details:

- i. Names of the bands playing
- ii. Venue name and address
(this does not need to be full address, perhaps just a street name)
- iii. The date of the gig. It is often helpful to write the date including the day of the week i.e. Tue 15th April or Tue 15/04 – this avoids confusion.
- iv. Time of the gig. Include the time that the doors open and perhaps when the first band is on.
- v. Door price.
- vi. Contact details for more info. This could be an email address or telephone number. It allows people who are interested in the gig to find out a bit more about it.
- vii. A bit of information on how to get tickets
(if they are available before the night)

Once you have designed your poster you need to get it printed up. If you have access to a photocopier you could do this yourself. Try and make it more eye catching by printing on brightly coloured paper as opposed to white. Black print on a deep, bright colour like gold/yellow can be seen very clearly.

The other option is to have your poster printed by a professional. Make sure you shop around before you decide who to go with. The differences in price between printers for the exact same job can be amazing.

In terms of quantity, try and estimate how many you will need. You don't want to get too many if you are paying a lot of money for them, however, it is worth bearing in mind the difference in price between your desired quantity and a larger one may be a lot less than you think. For example, the price of 500 posters will not be much more than that for 300. The more you get the cheaper each individual poster costs so it is a good idea to check out the pricing options for various quantities.

Once you have got your posters think about where you can put them up. Examples include, at the venue, in local shop windows, schools, colleges/universities, other venues around town and anywhere else that will take them. Try and get your posters up everywhere that you can so as to let as many people as possible know about your gig. You should aim to have your posters up at least 2-3 weeks in advance. This will give people more time to think about going and be sure of the details. Also, if you are selling tickets in advance then it gives you time to do this.

*note

Caution! If you are fly-posting in public areas be sure and gain permission before you begin. In a lot of areas this is illegal and could land you in trouble so be sure you are allowed before you begin.

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Postering/Flyering cont.

For flyers, include the same information as you do on your poster and again you can print them yourself or go to a professional to do it. Flyers can be left in shops for people to pick up, handed out at the end of gigs etc. and distributed at every opportunity. As with postering there are some places where it is illegal to flyer so be careful and make sure that you are allowed to hand them out where ever you are. The advantage of flyering is that they are a bit more personal. Each individual gets one which they can keep. This gives them more time to digest the info and decide whether or not they want to go. An alternative means of flyering which is becoming more common at the moment is to give out free CDR's of the bands playing at the gig. This is a great way of letting people know what will be in store for them at the gig and will allow them to make an informed decision about whether or not to go to the gig. Obviously, to do this you need access to a cd writer and permission from the bands to distribute their material for free. If you can arrange this, writable CDs are cheap and a very effective means of promotion. Be sure and write the gig details on the CD itself and the cover if you make one. You don't want people to like what they hear and have no idea what it is or how to hear more!!

Media / Newspapers.

The press can provide you with free promotion to a large amount of people if you can get them to feature your event. Think about your gig. Is there a story to tell? If it is a fundraising event or perhaps the first time a certain band has played in the area then there is potential to make a story out of your gig. Think about what the selling point is and use that to create interest. Find out the best person to contact at each newspaper, most likely this will be the arts/entertainment editor. Once you have done this put together a small passage outlining your gig and any selling points you think it has and send/email this to the appropriate person at each newspaper. This is known as a press release and can help you get a feature or some kind of advertising in the press.

The above approach can be applied to radio stations as well. If any of the bands that you have booked have a recording send this to the radio station with a copy of your press release. They may play the CD or give your event a mention on one of their shows which will be of a great help to you in promotion.

*note

An important thing in promotion is tying things together. You want people to be exposed to your information as much, as often and from as many different sources as possible in the run up to your gig. For example, if somebody reads about your event in the paper and then sees your poster when walking down the street they will link the poster to the newspaper article and it will keep refreshing them about the gig. The more you can make people think about your gig the better the chances you have of getting them to attend.

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PROMOTION cont.

Media / Newspapers. cont.

Press and postering/flyering are two of the most effective methods of promotion but there are others that are worth a mention. If you know of any music websites run locally try and post your gig details on these. In fact, any website that receives a lot of traffic from your local area is a good place to post the details. Don't be afraid to shamelessly plug your gig - if it gets people to come along then it has worked!

Remember to ask (hassle!) all of your friends (and their friends) to come along to the gig. You should hopefully be able to rely on your friends to come and support what you are doing. When you are first starting out they will play an important part in giving you an audience and being there when nobody else wants to listen. Get them to come and bring their friends and so on. If you have a good show then word will spread between these people and you will find that next time you put on a show the crowd will have grown a bit and there will be new faces there.

The above points are to get you started on promotion but remember you can employ any of your own methods instead of or in addition to those above. Whatever you do, make sure that you work and work at it right up until the gig. Keep hassling the papers, the radio and anybody you can think of to get as many folk out as possible and get as much coverage as you can. If you work at it will pay off!!

FINAL CHECKS

A couple of days before your show make sure that you check with everybody that they are still OK for the gig. Phone the venue, the bands, the PA and security if necessary and make sure that all arrangements are still fine and that there are no problems. Confirm all times and information with everybody again just in case there may have been a mix up. Performing these checks will give you a bit of time to fix any problems (if there are any) and will give you peace of mind in the couple of days running up to the gig. Once you have done this you are almost ready for the gig.

ON THE DAY

You should endeavour to be at the venue before anybody else arrives. This is to be sure that you will be on hand to deal with any questions or problems which may arise. Make sure that you have a list of contact details for everyone involved i.e. PA, bands etc. so that if you need to get in touch with anybody you have their details close to hand. Hopefully you shouldn't have too much to do and everything will run smoothly. If there are a number of bands sound-checking make sure that everybody knows when they are required and that everything runs on time. It is a good idea to have at least half an hour between your last sound-check and opening the doors. This gives the crew and the bands time to relax before the start of the gig. Make up a few copies of the stage times for the bands and distribute them to everybody who needs them perhaps even sticking a couple up around the venue so that the crowd know who is on when.

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ON THE DAY cont.

If you have to be on the door make sure that you have a float for giving change to people and also that they are aware of the number of people in the venue. Every venue has an official capacity, this is the max number of people than can be safely allowed in. If this number is exceeded and you have a problem i.e. someone is hurt or there is a fire and people have problems leaving the building you could be held responsible. If in doubt about the capacity, the people in charge of the venue will be able to tell you. One way of keeping track of the no of people and if they have paid is to stamp everybody's hand when they come in the door and note each entry on a sheet of paper. This means that they can leave the venue and come back and you will know not to charge them and know not to add them to you to your people count again.

Remember to keep an eye on the bands and make sure that everything is running on time. If things are behind schedule you may have to ask the bands to perform shorter sets so that the gig will be finished in time for the curfew. This should be avoided as it tends to upset a lot of bands.

Having taken care of all of the above now is the time to sit back and enjoy the gig. If you are going to be playing with your band then all the hard work you have put in over the past few weeks is finally going to pay off.

END OF THE NIGHT

You have made it! Hopefully everything went to plan and you enjoyed your gig. There are just a few more things to take care of before you can switch off.

If there are people to be paid get all the money together and make payment. Most bands, PA companies etc. expect payment on the night so make sure you have it ready. Remember and get receipts from everybody you pay. Even if it is just their signature on a bit of paper it is a good thing to have. Keep these somewhere safe in case you ever need to produce them.

Make sure that if anybody is leaving gear in the venue that this is OK. If everybody is packing up and loading out on the night make a final check yourself once everybody is finished and make sure that there is nothing left behind.

Make sure that you haven't left any unnecessary mess for the venue to clean up and help out if there is anything to be done. If you received a float from the venue make sure that you return it to them and sort out any hiring costs with them at this time.

SUMMARY

That's it. Having sorted out everything at the end of the gig it is all over. If things went well then all of your hard work will have seemed more than worth it. If not, don't be put off. It sometimes takes time to establish an attendance at gigs but perseverance will pay off so stick at it.

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