



For NEON

Link: <http://blog.neon.live/agents-what-theyre-really-thinking?>

What Agents Are Thinking...

They're not all scumbags. Well, OK, some of them are a lot of the time, but they usually have their reasons.

So you're a promoter, working on a club night or two and trying to get a few decent band gigs going. Your venue is popular with the local kids, and is around 250 capacity. At any given time, there are always a bunch of cool, up-and-coming bands that are starting to get their first radio plays. You chose one your friends like too. They would be up for a gig, surely?

First step - you hit up the band on Instagram or Facebook. They answer straight back. They're nice, but come out with the line that makes your heart sink: 'You need to speak to our agent.'

Oh brother. So now you have to try dealing with some faceless scumbag who just wants to take all your money. Well, OK, maybe it won't be that bad. You bite the bullet and give it a shot.

You try email, but they don't reply. You try calling the agent. They're 'away from their desk', or 'not in today'. You try another email, but still no luck. This goes on for a while, maybe with a few different bands and agents.

Then one day, you email an agent that gets back to you. He or she is either a naturally nice person, or likes to respond to nip enquiries like this in the bud and avoid getting more emails or calls, or you caught them at a good time and they were feeling charitable.

But the response isn't what you want. It's the other kind of brush off. They say: "Oh, they're not doing any regional at the moment", or "They're only doing major tour support." Thanks anyway, but no gig.

What's going on here?

Straight up, and it's not something anyone likes to hear, but your potential gig is just not that important to the band. Not just their agent, but the band, the manager and their record label. To play your show will cost them more than the money you could pay them, and they just don't need the show that badly.

That's harsh, sorry. But it's driven by economics, and giving you, the proactive local promoter, the brush off instead of entertaining a conversation, they are saving everyone time and hassle.

When it's early days for a band and money is tight, they need to spend their resources wisely. So they have to prioritise shows that will give them some benefit, if not cash. Examples are:

- Supporting a bigger band. The hopes when doing this are threefold:
 - Media types will notice them and give them more coverage;
 - The main band's fans might like them, and so they'll pick up a few new fans themselves;
 - The band will get more respect and kudos in general because of the above and word will spread. Maybe a 'buzz' will start.
- Playing at a festival. See reasons as above.

- Playing an industry showcase event like The Great Escape, Live At Leeds or Dot To Dot. Similar to 'Playing at a festival'.
- Playing a tour of their own, but only a handful of shows in high-population centres, like big cities. Again, for media reasons, but also because if only 0.02% of the town's population might come to the gig, then it's better if the population is larger.

Yes, we know that if a band getting a few radio plays comes to play in a small-town venue, then it's more likely that a decent crowd will show up because those kinds of bands hardly ever play there. But... a press release featuring a tour of small towns just doesn't cut it with the media the way that one with Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle, Birmingham, Bristol and London does. It's about perception.

Getting around the brush-off

BUT... there might be times where they do want to play a gig with you in your venue. When positioning doesn't matter so much to the band and their management, and they simply need the show. The trick is to do your pitch when that time is right. The stars can align when...

- They actually want to play a long tour, visiting all kinds of towns. This is usually when the band have a new release, so they want to develop their fanbase and make a statement, and the label will chip in to make the tour possible.
- They need a warm-up show for a festival or support slot.
- Or... they might have heard that your club night or venue is cool from another band, and actually want to play there! This is very rare, but does happen.

If any of these circumstances happens, and you contact the agent (who will know you a bit better by now, since you've been so persistent with your calls and emails) then you could be in with a decent chance.

(Note - there is one other way of getting around the brush-off. That is to simply offer a large amount of money in the first place. No agent will ignore an offer that will allow the band to cover all their costs and leave a wedge for the band's pocket, as long as the band are available and not holed up in the studio or something. How you raise that money is up to you, but cold hard cash usually does the trick.)

If the band are up for a show, then you had better be ready to make an offer.

What you need to know about the whole 'offer' process.

It's very rare to meet an agent who'll just say what fee they want for a band. It's because if they name a fee it could mean one of two things:

1. The promoter will assume they're asking for over the odds, and so will offer less than the asking price.
2. The fee they ask for might actually be lower than you were budgeting, so they won't have got the most possible money for the band. Bands really hate finding out they could have got more money for a show.

So, the agent will always ask the promoter to make an offer. In the end, they see it as the promoter's job to know their market and their costs, and to present to the band an offer of what they can pay.

Most agents will ask you for an offer and insist on you naming the proposed fee, no matter how much back-and-forth you do on it. Some more experienced agents might make it a bit easier by giving a rough ball-park figure they might expect, to save time.

Either way, both agents will genuinely want to see a properly-costed offer on a certain ticket price. You'll have to draft up an Excel spreadsheet showing all the costs on the show and potential revenue from ticket sales. You will definitely have to show a percentage split of the profits after costs in favour of the band.

Quite often, the agent will tell you what the ticket price should be, so it's in line with other dates on a tour. They'll also tell you what they need for catering and a contribution to national or online ads. You'll then enter these figures into your spreadsheet.

Beware the guest list requests

They might also tell you how many guest tickets they'll need. If they don't then it's wise to ask rather than wait for it to be dumped on you in the contract.

It can be a bugbear when a band/artist asks you to hold 10-20 tickets for their guests/media, but at the same time gets shirty about you or the venue having any guests when that's tickets you could sell. This is because of a fundamental difference in how a gig is perceived by promoter and band.

The band's team see the gig as their show, the ticket revenue as their money and the promoter as simply a facilitator who takes a cut. In effect they see the costing as their costs, and want to control what is spent as much as possible.

Obviously the promoter/venue see the gig as their show. The costs are the risk they are taking in the hope of seeing profit at the end of it. They are responsible on a local level for the promotion of the show and getting tickets sold. They have a deal with the band to turn up and deliver a performance.

A good agent will recognise that the reality is that the gig is a combination of the two. Both parties have to work together to make shows happen. In the end, either will have to go with what makes financial sense.

This doesn't really solve the guest list question, but what you should know is that it's always worth trying to negotiate or compromise.

Making that offer realistic, but also generous

Once you've seen how your budget works out, then you'll be in a position to see what fee you can realistically offer.

Do you know your market? How many tickets do you think you will sell? If it's a sure sell-out, then your sums will be easy. If not, then think about it. Perhaps allow for selling 65% of tickets and offer an extra 80% of the surplus revenue after costs on top of the guaranteed fee to the band.

Don't try to load your costs with things that are too expensive or with extras that shouldn't be there. An experienced agent or tour manager will spot this and question it.

Remember that the band are likely to be VAT-registered, and also to allow for VAT and PRS deductions on the gross revenue.

Are those guest tickets we mentioned earlier having too much of an impact on the potential sales and revenue? If so, point out that you will have to raise the ticket price to accommodate it. This might make the band/agent reconsider their options.

In the end, it's going to depend on how much you really want the band to play, versus how much money you're willing to risk. The only rule of thumb in these circumstances is don't do something that you're not comfortable with and feel you'll be unhappy about later.

Cold offers to bands

As mentioned, there are optimum times when you can send an offer to a band's agent. However, if you will insist on trying to get a band to play outside of those times, then you'll improve your chances if you stick to a simple formula in your approach.

First, a few things to avoid:

Don't send a long email to the agent about how much you love the band and have followed them since they were 15 or something.

Don't go on about how you can guarantee they'll have the best night of their lives. How would you know what kind of nights they've already had, or might have?

Don't call the agent 'mate' or 'pal' or anything like that which looks like you're trying to be too familiar. They don't know you and do not want to be your new best friend.

Don't try to leverage local press coverage. They don't care about it, and it doesn't pay bills. Besides, they'll want to save press coverage for when they really need it around a release, and they'll have their own press person taking care of it, who won't need local promoters sticking their oar in.

Don't send too short an email, just asking if the band are looking for shows and giving a link to your website. You're expecting the agent to do the work of researching you. Won't happen.

Don't repeatedly ask what fee the band need. It's your business to look at the finances around the gig and make an appropriate offer. It's much cleverer to ask what the ticket price usually is on tour dates, and work your budget around that. Better still, research that yourself online and leave the agent alone.

Don't point out that you know what the ticket price was on the last tour. This makes you look like a smart-arse rather than someone who's made an effort, and could appear like you're trying to score points over the agent.

Don't try to pull any emotional blackmail tactics. If your venue is smaller than the venues the band usually play on tours, don't make an offer. Don't try to make out it's a unique, intimate experience they will love. It isn't.

Here's what you do:

Be professional. Act like you know what you're doing and know what the agent wants to hear. Your email should go something like this:

Subject: [band name] / [your venue]

"Hi [agent],

We'd love to have [band name] play at [venue name] if they are available during the next few months.

We're 250 capacity, and bands we've had play before are [known band 1], [known band 2] and [known band 3]. They've all said what a great experience they had here. We like to look after people.

We could offer £XXX + 80% after costs - here attached a costing based on a £10 ticket.
(don't forget to attach the costing)

Here's our website for reference: www.yourvenue.com/bands

Coming up we've got [whatever are the top 2 or 3 most interesting things]

Our DJs play [band's popular single] all the time and it goes down a storm with our crowd.

Could it work for you and the band?

Thanks in advance,
[your name].

[your phone number]
[your website]"

That's about it. Oh, and make sure you don't send from a hotmail, yahoo or Gmail account. Agents view that as a sure sign of an amateur promoter.

One last thing to bear in mind. You might think agents are the scum of the earth trying to take all your money while the bands are the nice guys who are 'doing it for the music.' Wrong. 100% of the time, the agent is doing the band's dirty work for them, for one of three reasons:

1. The band are actually nice guys, but they know they need money to exist and grow. They like to avoid confrontation, and so they are relieved that their agent can help them out with this.
2. The band are just as money-grabbing as the agent, and in fact give the agent just as hard a time as he or she is giving you.
3. Similar to 1., the band are nice guys, but need the money. So they have a hard-headed manager to take care of things. This person will be on the agent's case, as in 2.

To bands, this is their career, and they are risking a lot of time and money in the search of success. For many, for whatever reasons (usually because they don't inspire enough people), it doesn't work out. But that doesn't mean you can't take it any less seriously.

Much in the same way, good agents and bands will recognise that promoting is your career too, and that you are also taking risks financially and socially in the course of aspiring to bigger and better things.

When everyone works together, and treats each other like professional human beings, then that is when magic can happen, and careers can progress on both sides. Go to it, and make things happen.

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