

THE SONGLAB: MUSIC BUSINESS DEJARGONISED

THE LIVE SECTOR



Knowing Your Value in Live Music

OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR

- The live sector of the music business is a global industry which employs hundreds of thousands of people. The current value of the global live sector is estimated to be £30 billion.
- Traditionally, touring took place to promote recorded music. Now that process has reversed. Recorded music is often the bait that brings fans to live events.
- Why is that?
- Due to the downturn in sales of recorded music, the live sector has become increasingly important to the livelihood of recording artists and musicians in the modern era.
- Artists and musicians have to come rely on the revenue they gain from live performances and the associated income streams that come with this such as performance royalties and merchandise.
- There is not just the performers that benefit from the sector, there are all of the other hundreds of thousands of people that work in this sector which range from caterers, engineers, lighting specialists, videographers, merchandisers, riggers, technicians and many more.
- Let's take a look at some other professionals which are key to gaining growth in the live sector.

ARTIST MANAGERS

- Artist managers are often the liaison between an artist, their label/distributor, their publisher/administrator, their agent and their promoter.
- Managers may often be the people that liaise with sponsors and brands in the context of an artists career.
- Strategy is a huge part of a good manager's plan and the live sector sits deeply within that strategy.
- Managers' work closely with booking agents in order to build the growth of a fan base for the artist through their engagement in the live sector. A part of that strategy between the manager and agent might be to design a scale up on venue circuit.
- An act might start out by touring the 200-300 capacity club circuit before progressing to theatres of 1,000-3,000 capacities. The progression from there is to indoor arenas where capacities can range from 5,000 to 20,000 and then to outdoor arenas and stadiums which can range from 20,000 up to 200,000.
- There is a great deal of others aspects and facets within the strategy of artists career that will sit alongside the live strategy in order to build this type of growth but lets now look at some of the other professionals which are key to this in the live sector.

BOOKING AGENTS

- Working in partnership with a booking agent is a crucial step for an artist when progressing up to the next level in the live sector.
- A booking agent essentially manages an artist's live performance career and works directly with the artist and their manager in building the live side of their progression.
- Booking agents may often work only on specific territories such as the UK & Europe for instance. As an artist's career grows they may have an additional agent who books other territories such as North America, South America and Asia.
- There are also many agents who operate on a global basis.
- Some agents also use sub agents who work to maximise an artist's potential in a specific country. This is somewhat comparable to how music publishers work with sub publishers for territory specialism and localised knowledge on translation and collection methods (see **WHAT IS MUSIC PUBLISHING** doc).
- Booking agents work in partnership with a wide range of artists and artist managers and often liaise between various parties for mutual gain. For instance, booking an up and coming indie rock band for a higher profile band's main tour support.

PROMOTERS

- Often confused with agents, promoters actually play a very different and crucial role in the live sector.
- A promoter will typically negotiate a fee with the booking agent in order to secure an act for a particular show, festival date or tour date.
- The promoters are the ones who make the most financial risks in the chain of events.
- It is typically the promoter's role to hire the venue and market the campaign to sell the tickets.
- Promoters' often work in agreement with booking agents and artist managers when it comes to agreeing ticket prices.
- A promoters' costs also typically include the contracting of the professionals who supply the audio equipment, stages, lights, screens, transport, security, caterers and insurance of an event.

FESTIVALS

- This is an area of substantial growth in the live sector.
- Over the course of the past two decades the number of festivals that take place has increased hugely.
- There are now thousands upon thousands of music festivals across the UK and Europe which take place in fields, towns, cities, warehouses and even cliff tops!
- It is not just music festivals however. Since the turn of the century, we are seeing the emergence of hybrid festivals which combine food, drink, comedy and various other creative arts and crafts with music.
- Whilst festivals were traditionally linked with youth culture, festivals have become a much more family based tradition over the course of the past two decades as the sub sector has evolved and developed on a much wider scale.

GRASS ROOTS GIGS

- Local gigs in pubs, clubs and bars are not only the heart beat of the live sector but also the breeding ground for emerging talent.
- All towns and cities across the UK have their own scenes which are linked to their own local culture and musical heritage.
- Promoters and artists play a huge role together in this area of the live sector, often without the aid of agents and managers.
- Emerging artists often make the mistake of pitching for gigs directly to venue owners when there is usually far more to gain from working in partnership with local promoters who are either contracted by the venues or perhaps who have even rented out the venues on a weekly basis. For instance, a local club might work exclusively on Wednesday nights with Promoter X who books rock and metal, Thursday nights with Promoter Y who books singer songwriters and acoustic based acts and Friday nights with Promoter Z who books Electronic based acts and DJs. It is therefore always good to do your research on who your local promoters are and how they operate.
- Local gigs such as these are a great foundation for artists to develop their craft. It gives them a chance to test out their recorded material or perhaps even to flesh out their creative ideas in front of a live audience before committing to their recorded sound.
- Once again the financial risk is very often on the promoters here. You will often find that promoters will often give local artists a fee per head once they hit a financial threshold. For example, it might be that the promoters will sell tickets at £5 in advance and £7 on the door but for any artists that get more than 25 people through the door they will pay £1.50 per person back to the artist.
- Once an artist progresses beyond this point of popularity, it could be that they bypass the promoter completely and hire a venue themselves which leaves them in control of the risk and ultimately a better profit share. Often there is extra work to do here with tasks such as organising a DJ to play between live sets, organising security and admissions for instance.
- One of the growing areas of grass roots gigs is national gig swaps. This is where artists from one town or city trade off with an artist of a similar level of popularity in a different town or city. For instance, Band X from Bristol have Band Y from Birmingham support them at their local headline show and vice versa. This approach offers the chance for bands to establish themselves in more than one area.
- The next stage beyond this is DIY touring and merchandising. It is at this stage that representation in the form of artist management or a booking agent could be the next logical step in partnership work.

ONLINE LIVE STREAMING

- Streaming has transformed many sectors of entertainment and the live sector is no different.
- Whilst we witnessed a rapid charitable surge in the early covid-19 era of spring 2020, live streaming has perhaps developed since then.
- Live streaming has become a sub sector of the live industry due to the simplicity of not having to travel to gain an experience, albeit a modified one.
- Live streaming from a fan's perspective can perhaps offer an insight into an artist's mindset, style and way of life, perhaps even the view of the artist's lounge during an acoustic set for instance. Artists that use live streaming as a tool for engagement also bypass the need to hire expensive locations and personnel to showcase a performance. This emerging sub sector seems to hold little in the way of limitations as to its potential.
- With social media platforms such as facebook and Instagram available, artists also have the opportunities to tap into new audiences with platforms such as twitch and discord whilst the live streaming revolution continually evolves with both free and paid platforms for artists and fans to engage.

SUMMARY

- There is a level of accessibility to live music which makes it a welcoming and crucial sector for both consumers and creatives alike.
- Perhaps even the word “live” is redefining itself. Whilst for some the word “live” means being present and in the moment, for others it is about contact and engagement through screens and audio.
- Regardless of territory, genre or career level, there is a place for everyone. You just have to choose where you want to sit within it and how it best serves your strategies moving forward.