

The Music Managers Forum

Recommended Reading



How to...

Get your Artists to Play
at Festivals this Summer



Summer may feel a long way away but booking for the festival season has already begun.

Experienced managers with artists that have toured the festival circuit on more than one occasion will be well aware that planning a trail around the world's best outdoor music events is a task as big as any in an act's career. For those that might be looking at festivals for the first time, we've asked a handful of experts in the field to outline key things to consider as you start to jockey for position with bookers.

If possible, get an agent on board

As the 'CEOs' of their artists' businesses, the remit of the manager is wider than it ever has been. While managers are taking on more responsibilities from A&R to release, it still pays to bring in certain specialists at key points in a campaign.

When it comes to an artist's live career, having a good agent on side is still incredibly valuable. As General Manager of The Association of Independent Festivals Paul Reed puts it, "In an ideal world every artist would be able to send an email to a booker and get a slot. In reality, we know that's not how the business works.

"An agent gives you leverage and can help you with positioning," he explains. "Obviously, managers will develop those relationships with agents and there's often a natural tipping point when the workload dictates it's time to bring an agent on board."

When it comes to finding an agent, it's important to consider not only a candidate's track record but also whether they'll be a good fit for your artist and their ambitions.

"As with any other member of your team, it's important to work with people who are passionate about your artist," says ATC Management's Jonny Dawson. "In the early stages, you need someone who's going to do a lot of heavy lifting with you and use the contacts they have to get the ball rolling. You need someone who shares your vision.

"Also consider your agent's current roster because, if your artist fits well with those other acts, then there might be support opportunities and your agent might be able to use some leverage when it comes to booking festivals," he

adds. "For example, if your agent looks after Disclosure and you have a much smaller electronic act, then you've got a much better chance of getting a lower billing at Primavera if Disclosure are headlining, because the agent can start pulling some favours with the promoter. The reality is, there's a lot of negotiating in the live world."

Timing is key

As with any other element of your artist's career, the path from one festival to the next should be plotted carefully alongside any other campaign activity. The decision to play a particular event at any given time should only come once you're ready to capitalise on any boost in profile or audience it might bring.

"You don't often get the opportunity to play the same festival twice in consecutive years," says Dawson. "So if you take that opportunity at a time when your recorded music, release plan and audience isn't at the right stage, you've hit it at the wrong time and you may not get the opportunity next year when your music is picking up.

"That's one of the reasons why having an agent on board is so important," he adds. "They're not just there to book the shows, they're there to navigate, strategise and advise on the best way to do things."

In some cases, good timing can mean managing artists' ambitions and expectations so that they meet the reality of their current stature.

"Every band wants to play SXSW," Dawson offers as an example. "But a manager has the responsibility to guide their artists about when the right time for something like that is. SXSW has changed so much over recent years and the reality of it now is that you have to have momentum going in or you will not get noticed. It used to be a festival that would help you pick up a team, but now you have to have a team around you before you even play it.

"The mistake a lot of bands make is they get a bit of funding to go out there, drop 10k to play SXSW, and the chances of being noticed are minuscule. If you're sensible, save that money, build profile in your domestic marketplace, get attention and a team around you, then hit SXSW when you've got a buzz and some music for people to connect to – then it can turn into a great opportunity and is certainly money well spent."



Remember, indies may take more risks

If you're working with an artist that is still building a profile, convincing some of the major festivals to add them to their line-up might be tough. AIF's Paul Reed suggests trying some of the smaller, indie events.

"The AIF did a bit of research around our members' line-ups and what proportion was made up of emerging acts, which we defined as an artist who has been performing recorded music for less than three years and is yet to release a full album," he says. "Some of our festivals had a line-up that was more than 80% emerging talent. Even with a large event like Kendall Calling, in 2015, 43% of the line-up could be classed as emerging.

"Many independent operators are

primarily selling an event on the overall experience, which is a growing trend - audiences are more open to hearing new artists in those kinds of environments. It's not as restrictive as the concert experience, for example, where you've bought the ticket for a specific artist. With festivals, I think if the quality is there and the act fits the event, then the organiser will take a risk because they aren't really depending on that level of artist to shift tickets. And supporting emerging talent enhances the credibility of the event. Many organisers like to get in at the early stages of artists' careers, see them go on a trajectory and maybe have them back headlining in a few years."

Be clear about recording rights from the beginning

These days, the lifespan of any live

performance lasts way beyond an artist's time on stage. Now, most promoters will look to record performances for their archives and social media platforms as well as commercial partners.

Of course, any artist that has signed with a record company will most likely have done so on an exclusive basis, meaning that any such recordings need to be agreed with the act's label.

Beggars Group's Director of Live, Ruth Barlow manages recording requests for radio, TV, concerts, festivals, online and wherever else they might crop up.

"One of the fundamental changes we've noticed in recent years with festivals is they are increasingly seeing themselves as content providers or broadcasters so, when performance offers come through, there's a whole load of requests involving recording, streaming, and archiving musical performances tethered to the artists' performance agreements," she says. "That's something that we have had to be increasingly vigilant about. We have to decide with the artist managers and labels whether it can happen and, if we do agree to do something, set boundaries about what they record, where they can put the recording and for how long."

Barlow says that this issue has in the past put record companies at odds with managers, but increasingly she is finding that many managers are just as fatigued as labels about the number of recording requests that are being levelled at artists with every live performance.

"In the old days, you'd do a big

festival and any live broadcast requests tended to be tied to a handful of terrestrial national broadcasters," she points out. "But increasingly these requests are now tied into commercial partnerships and most if not all end up online. Couple that with the number of festivals out there globally, think about it, if an artist has a 35-day tour and the first 20 of those shows are being broadcast online, you really have to question the value of that for the artist, label and promoter. From the label's point of view, we have to question its value simply because of the way music's consumed these days. We definitely see a lot of it as a distraction from our official content because it all ends up on services like YouTube competing with our official recordings."

While managers will often want to keep promoters and agents happy just as much as they do their label partners, this is actually an element that is almost out of their hands when negotiating with live organisers – the decision rests with the label if an exclusive recording agreement is in place.

But Barlow is keen to emphasise that label and management will more often than not work together when such issues arise.

"We don't just dictate our policies from on high," she says. "We have lots of grown up conversations with people at the beginning of a campaign. We know this stuff is coming and we just ask managers to remain vigilant, make sure they're reading the offers properly and that any relevant requests are passed on to the label so that we can weigh up the best ones to do."

"All conversations have to be individual and all situations considered. It's very much to do with where the artist is within their campaign timing and whether it's going to conflict with other performances."

"The most important thing for new managers is that they know this stuff doesn't have to be compulsory," she concludes. "It's important that they work with the labels because of those rights issues and every case has to be looked at on its own individual merit."

Make sure you get your royalties

Regardless of any upfront fees, any songwriter is due royalties whenever they play their own music at a live event. Make sure your copyrights are properly registered

before you perform in order for money to be fed back as quickly as possible.

"Before the performance, the manager needs to make sure that the songs their act is going to perform are registered with the local performing rights organisation – if the festival is in the UK, that's PRS, or GEMA in Germany, for example," explains Simon Pursehouse, Director of Music Services at independent publisher Sentric Music.

"Making sure all of the necessary copyrights are properly registered and then administered means you'll get paid a lot quicker. If you have a publisher that deals with international collections directly, then you'll receive your money faster still."

"After the festival, you need to give the PRO or the publisher you're working with your entire set-list so that they can chase the performance royalties owed to you. It's revenue that can make a big difference to artists at any stage of their career, but especially those starting out."

"A manager isn't able to collect from international PROs directly for European festivals without a publisher – unless they were to set up as a publisher themselves," adds Pursehouse. "They can work with PRS directly, but registering copyrights properly and chasing revenue owed can be incredibly time consuming and costly."

Sentric has published two very useful articles that will be of interest to managers looking to begin festival booking. The first, ['What's That Festival Worth?'](#) outlines the elements of a festival that dictate the performance royalties a band can expect and applies the formula to an extensive list of top festivals and their various stages.

Meanwhile, Sentric's [2017 Guide to Festival Applications](#) offers a long list of festivals across the world complete with direct links to their application page.

Also, the AIF and Musicians' Union have collaborated on a joint ['Fair Play for Festivals'](#) initiative, which includes a code of conduct setting out a series of pragmatic guidelines for artists and festivals across areas such as remuneration, logistics, promotion and performance details.