

Promoting your gig

The old days of just sticking up a few posters around town and buying a handful of radio ads to promote your gig are (mostly) gone. In the modern world, there are a multitude of ways to connect with potential fans and encourage them along to a gig. There is no set approach that is going to work for everyone, but here are some crucial aspects to think about in order to get an audience through the door.

TIMING

Before you book a gig, consider how you might time it to provide cross-promotion for other things you are doing. For example, if it's possible to release a new song or music video in the week leading up to a gig then any coverage of the event will also promote the release (and vice versa). Editors and radio programmers will be more interested if it seems like there is a concerted effort taking place, rather than just a random gig being put on or a single released with no wider plan to promote it.

Alternatively, it could be that another act on the line-up releases something new in the lead-up to the gig and they are the ones who frontfoot the publicity for the show (since releasing a track-per-gig is not realistic in most cases!).

It's also a good idea that the date you have planned for a gig doesn't clash with any other big events that are taking place in the city/country. Take it from me - playing a gig on the night of a Rugby World Cup quarter final is a very bad idea, even if you think your fans aren't big on sports (for a start, parking will be a hassle and the town

will be filled with very happy or very sad drunk people!). It will also be a bad clash if there's a big show on the same night by a popular act in your genre (unless you can turn your gig into an after-party).

Tying a gig in with an already existing event can be also be very helpful, whether that's a club night or a genre-specific gathering - e.g., if you have three punk bands playing together, list it as a 'punk night' so even people who haven't heard of the bands might be tempted along if they like punk.

SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION

Hopefully you already have your social media game happening and have a huge list of followers that will read any posts you put up. However, before any gig it's worth having a quick think and see if you can invite any further people to follow your band. It might seem overkill to have a Facebook page AND an Instagram account AND a Twitter profile for your act but it does give you the best chance of people keeping up with your band. If a potential fan has a lot of friends on Facebook then there's a chance they'll miss

your posts/events, so posting it in other places where their feed might not be so cluttered is worthwhile.

Next up, you will want to create an event listing on Facebook, as well as the various online gig guides. It's best if the poster for your event can easily be edited, so that it fits the different layouts these services might need - e.g., having both landscape and portrait shaped versions can be helpful, with a bit of extra space around the edges to leave room for cropping. Do create the original version at a decent resolution in case you later decide to print out copies to paste around town (etc). Once you have a Facebook event, it's worthwhile to ask every member of every act that is playing to invite as many people as possible - even if they're unlikely to come, it's helping to spread the name of your act to new people.

Of course, there is the option of paying for a Facebook event/post to be promoted which ensures you gain the furthest reach possible (depending on your budget). Though equally just getting your friends to be supportive of these posts is a good first step. For this reason,

you want to think of a few ways you can share interesting facts about an upcoming gig without just sharing the event listing over and over. Here's a few ideas to get started:

- Take a photo/video of rehearsal
- Put up a new song or demo
- Share songs/videos by the other acts on the bill

These activities should be spread over the weeks leading up to the event (definitely no point posting multiple times on one day or you risk each one being buried by the algorithm).

TRIED AND TRUE APPROACHES

When it comes time to put on an album/EP release show or playing a gig in a new city/cities, then it will be necessary to put more time and (probably) money into getting the word out there about your show. This can lead you back to some of the timeless, real world approaches to promotion.

Firstly, it's worth considering what free options might be available. Is it possible to organise an interview or live-to-air on a radio station? This is especially helpful when you

by Gareth Shute

are playing a new town - for example, if you can turn up early on the day of your gig and talk in-person to a DJ at the local student radio station then you'll have a chance to meet the staff who work there and help put your act on their radar. If your music would suit Radio New Zealand, then they are also good to approach since their reach is nationwide. Alternatively perhaps you could arrange an instore at a local record store on the afternoon of your gig (especially helpful if you have physical product to sell, whether that's vinyl or T-shirts etc).

Similarly, does the local university have a magazine which might be interested in doing an interview? It's all about doing the research to find out whether there are particular blogs, online magazines or writers who focus in your area then making a dedicated effort to contact them. For this reason, it's good to have a few promotional shots on hand - hi-res photos that can still work when cropped to be either landscape or portrait shaped.

In all these cases, if you're in a city for the first time then it's best to offer names on the

door for any locals you meet that might be helpful in future, whether they're radio people, music writers or record store staff. Equally you could offer giveaways over the radio or via online sites (e.g., getting readers to tag friends in comments under a post to win tickets is a good way to boost the reach of an event posting on Facebook).

If you do have money to spend, then there are many options available - from paying for a run of street posters to hiring your own PR person. Some acts may prefer to grow in a grassroots manner and therefore keep spending to a bare minimum, while others may feel they are already at a stage where they could be a commercial success or reach a wide audience so might be willing to put in a serious investment to push themselves to the next level.

The benefit of having a PR person is that they will also have a contact list of people to approach to promote music events - whether that's journalists, editors or radio staff. If you are doing it yourself, then creating such a list will require research and an understanding of the local scene. A PR person

can also help create a plan of attack, so that publicity arrives when it is most beneficial (not too long before a gig) and according to a schedule that suits the media involved (e.g., an established outlet might not want to run a piece once an act have already been featured in rival publications, which have taken the same angle).

Some forms of promotion may also have added benefits - a street poster not only advertises your gig, but will help get your name in front of large amounts of people, while paying for an ad on a student radio station might help form connections with the staff there (and hopefully gain you more airplay further down the track).

If you're playing a new town, then the venue themselves might have the best idea of where it's best to put your promotional dollars. For example, Wellington has a strip of busy cafes and record stores along Cuba Street, so flyers might be effective. It's also worth supplying your poster to the venue so they can put it up on their own walls before the gig (and hopefully even put up a few around town). Do tap the knowledge of the bands

you are playing with - if you're travelling to play their city, then they'll have a much better idea of what works for promoting gigs in their scene.

THINKING IT THROUGH

At every step along the way, it's worth asking yourself - how do me and my friends find out about shows? Look at what other bands in your genre are doing to promote their gigs. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that will work for everyone. A pop band might find that splashing out for an ad in the Herald might work for them, while a more underground act might get much more out of smart, targeted social posts.

The situation you want to avoid is bumping into a friend a day after your gig and having them say "oh, I didn't even know you were playing!" so don't be shy of getting the word out there. Every weekend, there are plenty of people in every city that are looking for an event to go to. With a bit of planning, your gig can be the one they chose to check out and then all you have to do is blow them away so they come back next time ... and bring along some friends!