

Top 10 tips for getting booked for live performances

1. Get a website

Building and designing a website doesn't have to be expensive. If you are technically minded and have a good eye for design you can do this yourself through website platforms like [Wordpress](#) or [Weebly](#) but it is advisable to seek advice from an industry professional who knows what promoters are looking for from musicians' websites.

If you are not prepared to design the website yourself, then set aside a small amount of money to get a professional to do this for you.

Make sure your website is optimised for mobile devices as over 50% of people who will view your site will be doing so on smart phones or tablets.

Having a good presence online is vital to securing work in a crowded marketplace. It is important that your website is attractive and easy to navigate. It should clearly outline your work and include video and audio clips. This will give promoters, festivals and agents the information they need. Also, ensure that you display your contact details clearly.

[Impulse Music Consultants](#) offer ISM members discounted marketing advice and web page design and [Select Performers](#) also offer web design services to ISM members at a discounted rate.

2. Use social media to make connections and promote yourself

Social media platforms are now an important place for promoters and journalists to get information about you and your work and can often be their first port of call. They will expect your social media profiles to be the most up-to-date source of information about you.

Twitter provides you with a great opportunity to communicate with a global audience and make valuable contacts. It is easy for you to reach out to promoters, festivals and other industry contacts using Twitter.

To develop a following, musicians need to interact with others. Regularly posting engaging tweets, pictures or short video clips of what you are doing, sharing interesting information and asking and answering questions are good ways to develop a following.

Facebook is the other major platform that musicians choose to advertise their work. Facebook business pages are a powerful marketing tool for musicians and they have an advertising system built into them which can be used to target the type of people you need to reach. Facebook is a visual medium; great photos and video can be powerful and should be the focus for this platform.

Tip: Twitter and Facebook have different types of users, so resist the temptation to 'link' your accounts so the same information is automatically posted to both. Studies have shown that this kind of linking can be detrimental to marketing efforts.

3. Know your music and its marketplace

A common reason promoters turn down concert pitches is that the pitch doesn't fit the promoter's target audience demographic closely enough.

It is important that research is done into every performance opportunity you consider.

Remember:

- The genre of your programme must closely match the festival, **venue** or concert series you are pitching it to.
- If you are a classical performer, make sure the pieces within your programme haven't been performed at the festival in the last couple of seasons.
- If your proposal is quite niche, it is advisable to speak with the festival before submitting it formally.
- Festival management and directorship can change hands quite frequently so check you have the latest contact details.
- If you already have a busy diary or need some extra help, consider approaching agents or management companies to contact festivals on your behalf. They often have information about festivals' programming further in advance and have good working relationships already in place with them.
- Work with the festival to create your programme as they might be following a particular theme. They will be able to advise you on the demographic of their audience.

4. Create content people want to share

Musicians are great at coming up with innovative performance ideas and programmes. However, without a plan to get these ideas more widely heard and seen, projects may not receive the recognition they should.

High quality video and audio are the best ways to showcase work online and good quality recording equipment is now much more affordable than it was in the past. If your material is interesting enough, people will share it. Sharing via social media brings musicians the widest reach in today's world. The type of content you create is therefore important.

A full-length video of a concert or gig from one camera angle isn't engaging and doesn't capture attention. Try creating shorter (ideally no longer than 3 minutes) documentary style trailers with clips of the performance, performer interviews and behind-the-scenes footage. This will keep a viewer's attention for longer and explain the project in a more rounded way.

Press releases to mainstream print and online publications still have their place and should be sent whenever a large-scale project is announced. However, [blogs](#), [YouTube](#) and [Vimeo](#) are where most people will learn about, discuss and share your work.

If you can build a strong following on YouTube and the other social media channels previously discussed, you are a more viable proposition for promoters. They will see you already have a following and therefore become less of a risky proposition for them to book. Promoters are, and should be concerned with selling tickets as much as the quality of the artists they book.

5. Network and develop relationships

The ability to network effectively and build relationships is an essential skill for professional musicians.

Musicians are driven people who like to see results quickly. However, you should resist the temptation to ask people for favours from the outset. Instead, approach them with the view to having a conversation about anything you feel is appropriate, with no angle, and aim to build a relationship based on trust.

Performers should strongly consider building professional relationships and working in close collaboration with composers – such collaborations can bring important benefits to both composers and performers.

Don't forget that successfully building a relationship can be key to getting asked back. Proving yourself to be responsible, responsive, punctual and well-presented can help build a promoter's confidence in your value as a professional musician. For further advice on this, see **Your responsibilities as a performer** on page 10.

6. Hone your communication skills

The way you communicate with bookers is vital. Knowing how a particular booker prefers to communicate is the key to at least establishing contact and receiving feedback.

For example, most bookers communicate via email because it is quick and conveniently leaves a trail of correspondence but some prefer to speak on the phone.

The tone of your communication is also important. Adapt this depending on who you are speaking to. If someone communicates in a very formal manner, do so in reply. If they are informal, try to use a similar communication style.

7. Set the right price

The fundamental principle is that professional musicians should be paid a fair price for the work they do but, the market value of something is only as high as someone is prepared to pay for it. What is important is to establish what the going rate for your service is.

It is essential that you cover any costs associated with performing and make a profit on performances. After all, for most musicians, performing is their major source of income. If you find that, after your calculations, your prices are significantly higher or lower than what competitors are charging then adjust your pricing accordingly.

The options when setting prices are:

Be cheaper than competitors. This can entice people but can also have a negative impact, as you might be considered less good as a result. Undercutting your fellow musicians on price (or agreeing to play for free) can be damaging not only to your professional standing but also to the health of the profession as a whole. **The ISM does not advocate adopting this approach.**

Match a competitor's price. It's not difficult to find out what other musicians performing similar work charge. The music world is very small and a couple of open conversations with obliging colleagues can be really useful. Festivals are often open to discussing budgets with musicians, as there's little point in them having lengthy conversations with performers if, ultimately, they can't afford to book them.

Price higher than competitors. This can be a risky tactic as it can lead to out-pricing certain promoters. However, if you have done some research and understood the promoter's budget is able to accommodate your pricing at this level it can set you apart from competitors. How many times have you ordered the second cheapest wine from a restaurant as you consider the cheapest not good enough quality? The same can apply within the music world too.

If pricing high, ensure that what you offer looks and feels like a premium product. An excellent and up-to-date website with high quality audio and video examples of your work is essential at this level.

8. Invite people to see your work

The most effective way of getting promoters to book you is to get them along to a live performance. Whilst having a great representation of your work available online is a fantastic tool, nothing can come close to the experience of a live performance.

If possible, arrange for complimentary tickets for potential bookers and make an effort to engage with them before or after the concert. Building a relationship is incredibly important; people buy into other people as much as they do a product.

Don't forget that promoters will have a main location they work from. You should try to invite them to concerts nearby if possible.

9. Be proactive

Think like an agent. Agents make a living out of letting promoters, festivals, broadcasters and other musicians know what their artists are doing. If you don't have an agent or management company, you need to be undertaking this work yourself.

If this becomes too much, consider taking on an administrator to carry out this work for you. You will need to provide them with relevant copy, and a clear steer about the tone you want to come across in your communications.

If you have a concert, idea or release you want to publicise you might want to consider employing a PR company to help you get your information to the right channels. Be careful, however. Some PR companies are excellent, some are not, but the one thing all PR companies have in common is that they are only as good as the story they are working with.

10. Use critical feedback to your advantage

Receiving criticism is a normal and regular part of being a musician and can help you change for the better. However, responding positively to negative feedback doesn't come naturally to everyone.

The most common three reactions to criticism are: 'fight', 'flight' or 'freeze' and, depending on the level and type of criticism received, one of these reactions can be triggered.

It's important to remember you are not in control of how a promoter frames their response to your proposal or idea. Sometimes proposals are dismissed with a simply worded 'we're not interested' and sometimes a more elaborate reply looks to clarify the reasoning behind decisions. Sometimes you don't even get a reply.

It's always a good idea to try to gain as much information as possible as to why a proposal hasn't worked out. This may help you improve and provide ideas or advice not previously considered. Never be afraid to ask for further reasoning behind decisions. However, be careful to word this neutrally and professionally rather than aggressively. You should never come across as negative or hostile in the course of the conversation.

Whilst staying true to your beliefs is hugely important to artistic integrity, if many people give you the same feedback then perhaps the proposal needs further thought or adjustment to make it a viable proposition.