



Working With an Entertainment Buyer

by Anthony "Bert" Bertino

"Be selective of who is buying your entertainment as they will handle a great deal of your budget and are your eyes and ears in the performing spectrum."

Entertainment buyers have a unique feel for the market – they know who is touring, who is relevant to the gaming industry, what the costs are and revenue generated. Most importantly, buyers can utilize routing for a greater discounted cost to your entertainment budget.

Booking entertainment is always a large and questioned expense by a gaming organization. Entertainment is a drawing event available for your customers, not your competitors. It can draw the guest who does not frequent your property and needs a specific reason or opportunity to visit your facility over other options available.

The reason the cost of entertainment is oftentimes questioned is the difficult metrics to realize profitability:

- Did the entertainer draw in enough business to cover their costs as well as production costs?
- Did preferred customers attend and enjoy the event?
- Did you gain new customers?
- Did you sell out the event and utilize a sufficient number of seats for all of your desired segments?

These questions are all important, but profitability can only be measured with the financial yardstick of how your existing and new customers react. If you are able to attract and draw in new segments you feel are profitable, you are on your way to greater success.

There are many different processes that are used by facilities to book their entertainment. Some organizations prefer to see what is available for their facilities, others have a specific genre they want to book (Country, Classic Rock, R&B, etc.), while others know specifically which entertainer they want to book. All of these options are effective and will prove successful by having an entertainment process for your team and your buyer. Some like to choose specific artists in a genre that reach their typical demographic or one they wish to reach for. Knowing what works for your organization is imperative and knowing what to reach for is what grows your organizations success. For example, an artist for the millennial generation may expand your reach and satisfy your customer's children and grandchildren, and you may win on all counts, although that can be risky if not marketed correctly.

No matter what your budget may be, your entertainment

department is often stretched to the limits on an ongoing basis due to cost of artist, cost for production plus fringe costs associated with the form of entertainment. Utilizing professional buyers can be desirable due to their relationships with agencies of all sizes that represent artists, especially up and coming performers. These relationships are built from years of bookings and negotiating with artists and management agencies. Turnover in the gaming industry can be high, however, the buyer/entertainment professional is a constant and can develop a calm and steady entertainment policy as changes happen in and outside the casino facility.

Many entertainment buyers offer different ways to service your organization and you should choose the program that works best for you. If you have a program that is year-round or just during specific months, you then should find the program that would best service your entertainment buying and what will be the most cost efficient for the organization. An entertainment program that interests your guests throughout the year can be very effective. Be selective of who is buying your entertainment as they will handle a great deal of your budget and are your eyes and ears in the performing spectrum. A trusted entertainment buyer can be a watchdog for the casino to stop proprietary charging (often a problem for tribal entities). A trusted entertainment buyer is also the helping hand to tell you who is performing outside your radius and may be able to route to your organization for a lower price than they would normally charge.

There are many different areas that can cause profitability to fluctuate, with entertainment being a major channel in either direction. Having a strong and trustworthy entertainment professional involved can allow you to have a true partner to obtain the entertainment you want for the price that is cost effective to your organization. Knowing that you are spending the appropriate amount of your budget on entertainment can always be reinforced by outside organizations that track cost of artist, actual number of attendees and especially what their schedule will be. This allows you to be an interactive partner with your entertainment buyer. ♣

Anthony "Bert" Bertino is CEO of Casino Excursions Resort Gaming Group. He can be reached by calling (609) 892-1298 or email bert@casexc.com.