

Manager Vs. Agent

By Kari Estrin (email via <http://www.kariestrin.com/>)

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Manager Vs. Agent

By Kari Estrin (email via www.kariestrin.com)

Your band needs help - better gigs, new promo materials, and a better demo. Should you hire an agent, or a manager, or both?

Exasperated with lack of work and with calling club owners, a band considers hiring a manager. After hearing the band tape and a brief phone call, prospective manager details some ideas he has for the group. Although they all seem to be in agreement, a band member anxiously interrupts and asks, "But what kind of gigs can you get us?"

With this band is probably looking for is someone to keep them working--an agent, not a manager. One of the most common mistakes made in the music business is confusing the functions of agents and managers. Since an agent's or manager's responsibilities may overlap, it's easy to see where this confusion begins. But, there are some basic differences between their roles, so let's begin with a rough definition.

Which Does What

An agent is someone responsible primarily for procuring and accepting work for hire on the artist's behalf, in the form of gigs, tours, and paid performances on television and radio. It is the agent's responsibility to negotiate and issue contracts, collect deposits, send out promotional materials, and plan a sound tour route. An agent may also set up press and other media interviews and make road arrangements, depending upon your agreement with him.

The Manager

A manager assumes many different roles, depending upon the nature of the relationship with the artist. In addition to "normal" managerial duties, it is not uncommon for the manager to step into the role of confidant, friend, or adviser. A manager's work is centered around developing the artist's career, not only in the long run, but on the day to day level as well.

The manager helps plan career goals and outlines a campaign for achieving them, develops promotional materials as well as the artist's image, occasionally directs the artist's booking agent to ensure more effective touring and routing (the manager does not book the dates himself), negotiates or oversees the negotiation of various contracts, and hires the artist's support team, including an accountant and lawyer.

The Agent

Although agents may perform some managerial functions and vice versa, it is best to define your needs before deciding whom to hire. When a band is first starting out they generally need the services of an agent, to keep the band working.

Finding agents in your particular area may not be easy, but begin by looking in music-related publications, alternative papers, the phone book, or word of mouth. Many of the best agents (and managers) do not advertise--they are the ones who are already very busy--and that's the kind of agent you want.

If you have not already built up a certain amount of your own bookings, you might not be able to attract an agent until you do. However, ask bands who are a step or two beyond your level about their agents. If this search turns up nothing, you might consider hiring an enthusiastic friend or a competent fan whom you can train to do your booking.

Once you have the names of prospective agents, do some homework. Does this agent/agency book the kind of music you play and have the connections with the right rooms? Check with other artists he works with--are they happy working with him and are they getting a good number of gigs?

When your band is ready to approach the agent(s) of your choice, appoint a band spokesman to make the introductory phone call. Be prepared--offer to send your promo package, complete with tape, bios, pictures, reviews, and other relevant materials. Ask when it would be convenient to call back to see if he's received and reviewed your materials. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Find out what services he performs for his fee and if he works on an exclusive or non-exclusive basis (whether or not he will be your sole agent, or if you may hire additional agents to work with you).

At this point your band should have a good idea of the kinds of places you want to work, but you may not have the experience, time or contacts to get you there. That's just what your agent is for. Once you are actively working, there will be enough money to give your band some confidence and to keep them committed.

Perhaps you've begun to attract some local attention, and are even considering making a record. Perhaps you're finding it more difficult to keep your publicity current, and would like someone to advise you about the next steps to take in your career. Now you are ready to look for a manager.

The Manager

Just as in hiring an agent, do some research. Check with other artists and ask others in the business if they know about a particular manager's track record. Once your potential manager has passed your early screening, know what you expect from him. Too often artists are content to remain vague in this area. Presenting a job description to a potential manager and stating in what areas you need help will be beneficial to both parties.

If you agree to work together, you will want to cement your agreement with a contract. An initial contract is usually valid for one or two years and will help you develop a time frame in which to evaluate your manager's progress toward your stated goals. Before hiring a manager, make sure you are both in agreement with the goals and directions for the band, and if the right chemistry exists for a good relationship.

Compensation

Agents and managers are normally paid on commission. Agents will usually charge on commission. Agents will usually charge 10-15 percent of your fee. Payment is usually made in one of the two ways. If there is a deposit, it is typically one quarter to one half of the fee, and the agent will take his commission from that once the gig is played.

The band gets the balance of the deposit, directly from the club after the gig. If no deposit is involved, you may send your agent a check after each gig, tour, or on a regularly established basis. An agent may charge you for phone calls and mailing expenses, depending upon your percentage rate and your agreement with him.

Managers may take anywhere from 10 - 25 percent of your *gross* income, that is your total income before your expenses are deducted. Your agent's commission is considered an expense, therefore your manager's commission is in addition to the agent's commission. On the average, your manager will probably agree to 15 percent, but if he offers you a wider range of services, expect to pay more.

If at all possible, before you sign any contract or agree to any percentages with either an agent or manager, it is worth your investment to hire an entertainment attorney to look over these contracts and give you advice. Even if hiring legal counsel seems expensive, it may save you hundred or thousands of dollars in the end.

The Reality

Industry norms have been briefly described in this article, but there are few hard and fast rules in the artist/agent relationship, and even fewer for the artist and manager. Due to the nature of the business and the individuality of these relationships, the best guide to running your own affairs is to learn as much as you can about the business: attend seminars, read related books, talk to others in the business, and temper it all with a dose of common sense.

It is easy to be taken in by promises of recording contracts, higher fees and better jobs, but don't accept too much at face value. Look into a person's motives for working with you, and your motives for working with them.

An agent or manager will be most effective if you are prepared and know what you expect from him. It's *your* career, so ultimately it's up to you to make the most of these business relationships and to make them work.

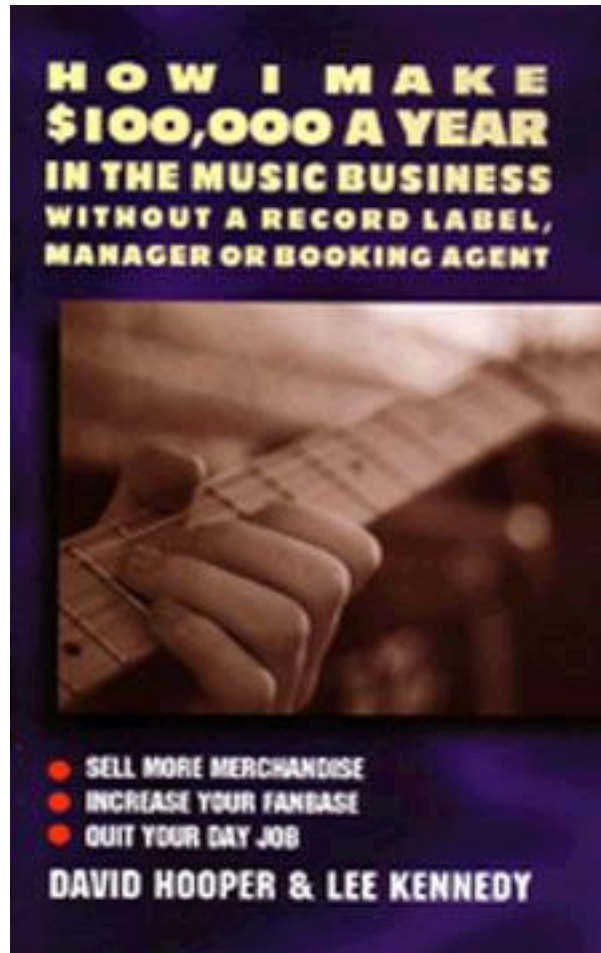
Kari Estrin (www.kariestrin.com) is an artist consultant who tailors career plans to the individual artist through her Career Assessment System. She is the editor of "How To Be Your Own Booking Agent and Save Thousands of Dollars..." and has been manager, agent, or tour manager for several artists, including Tony Rice, 3 Mustaphas 3 (#1 on Billboard's World Music Charts) and Suzanne Vega.

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