

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

by Jeri Goldstein

Booking gigs tends to be one of the least favorite tasks of many artists I've spoken with over the years. Yet, live performances are one of your main income streams that help you build fans, sell merchandise and share your creative gift.

I've developed a creative list of strategies that will help you **book more gigs, for more money, sell more merchandise and play to larger more appreciative audiences.** You'll learn how to **reduce cold calls and virtually eliminate your competition.** By incorporating these strategies, you will **become a Gig Magnet.**

[But first, a bit of background...](#)

As a booking agent and artist manager, I spent 20 years arranging national and international tours for my artists. When I first started, I was trying to book my acts where all the others in their genres were playing. I followed the crowd and tried for gigs at the choice venues whether my acts were right for those venues or not. I attempted to book top spots at the hot festivals whether my acts were ready for those spots yet. I was making all those dreaded cold calls to clubs whether my acts had developed a demand in that market or not.

It was tough going and often frustrating. I heard "no" and "maybe" many more times than I heard "yes" for the first few years. After a few years, I learned how to talk with the bookers and how to negotiate on behalf of my artists to get the best deal for everyone.

I often joined my artists on tour as their road manager, taking care of all the details, driving the van, advancing the tour dates and making sure we arrived for sound check on time. I've had my fair share of settling gigs, cashing out the merchandise table and collecting business cards from interested fans and presenters for future gigs and return gigs.

After 20 years booking cross-country tours by car, by van, by tour bus, by plane and multiple European, Canadian and Asian tours, I decided to stop being an agent and manager and gather all the information learned and create a much-needed resource for artists, agents and managers. That book, *How To Be Your Own Booking Agent THE Musician's & Performing Artist's Guide to Successful Touring*, is now used in university music business and artist management courses and by artists, agents & managers around the world.

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

I now offer *you* my years of booking experience in these simple to follow **5 Booking Strategies that Really Work**, that I wish I had known when I was making all those cold calls and getting rejections, or being told, "Call back next week." I wish I had used these **5 Simple Get-Started Steps** to make more efficient plans and choose the right venues at the right time for my artists. I would have saved so much time and effort.

But now you can shave years of trial and error off your learning curve and move your touring career much further much faster.

Let's get started...

Get some paper and a pen or your computer ready to answer the questions below. Then you can spend time answering them in depth for your own motivation, knowledge, and future action.

Successful touring involves more than simply picking up the phone or sending an email and trying to get gigs. To increase your chances of building a successful touring career, you must incorporate these important steps:

5 Simple Get-Started Steps

1. Assessment
2. Planning
3. Marketing
4. Booking
5. Evaluating

STEP 1: ASSESS YOUR CURRENT TOURING SITUATION

1. **Know who you are as an artist right NOW:**
 - What types of venues do you currently play?
 - What size venue can you sell out?
 - What are the ticket prices you can command?
 - How much merchandise are you selling at each gig?
 - What was the performance night like? - WX, Other shows, events in town, season of the year. (It might be

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

useful to make notes on that gig's contract.)

2. **Know your preferred set up and are you flexible**
(staging, time, standing venue, soft-seat theater)
3. **What is UNIQUE about your act and how do you express that?** *** more in the marketing section...
What makes you stand out from the other artists in your field or genre who play similar venues as you? How do you talk about that, write about it in marketing materials?
4. **What else can you offer to the buyer to get the booking?**
 - User-friendly marketing materials-downloadable
 - Availability for advance promotions (interviews)
 - Fan base in the area and a means to promote to them
 - Master classes to universities or assemblies to elementary schools
 - Previous media support such as radio promotions campaigns in the market
5. **Know your audience**
 - Who are the people who like your act? (not everyone)
Drill down and get specific
 - Demographics, socio-economic status, affiliations, interests, shopping habits

It's a numbers game—your value in each market depends on how you present the numbers suggested above to the promoter or booking person.

Track the info above and present it to the booker to establish your value in their market. If you haven't been tracking these items—**begin at your next gig.** Bookers need something to go on—If you have this information, you are way ahead of everyone else trying to get the same gig. Now, you can leverage your negotiations with the booker.

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

If you haven't played in a market yet—I have some suggestions coming up to remedy that.

STEP 2: PLANNING – We all need to spend more time planning.

Planning for your bookings and negotiations is like rehearsing for your gigs. The more you are rehearsed the better the gig. The same with booking—the more you plan, the easier it is to get better gigs for more money and the more professional and organized you appear to the booker.

1. Plan two years in advance to take advantage of:

- Booking conference and showcase early-bird fees, application and registrations
- Know booking time frames for various venues; i.e., clubs- 6-8 weeks out; festivals-4 to 8 months out; performing arts centers-12 to 18 months out; schools-semester prior to desired date.
- Various Types of venue performance time frames; seasonal, school calendar, summer, year-round

2. Establish & identify your reasons for touring

- Promoting a new CD
- Opening a new market
- Playing certain types of venues; such as festivals, support an anchor date, etc.
- Touring an area while attending a professional or personal event
- Touring to make money

3. Design Touring Patterns— Time of Year=Specific Regions

For example, you might tour in the Northeast in the summer, southeast in the winter, west coast in the spring, etc.

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

- Patterns build momentum for your bookings, for yourself as well as your bookers and your fans
- Creates a sense of urgency when making calls, giving you a time to reference when you'll be in their area
- Makes return bookings easier

STEP 3: MARKETING—THIS IS IMPORTANT!

Marketing can make a difference in your value in the marketplace. Creative marketing spells success. Here are 3 suggestions to increase your demand from bookers and your audience.

1. Create your Unique Identity as an artist***

- How are you different from all the others playing in your genre? i.e.: Singer/songwriters, blues, Country, jazz, hip-hop, etc. What is different about you within your genre? Tell a story that intrigues the buyer, the media, and the audience. The more interesting and unique the story, the more likely you will get some media attention.
- If your unique story can be related to the community in which you are planning to perform, the media are much more interested.

2. Use Themes to promote your tours

- Name the tour, name your show
- Coordinate all your promotional materials around the theme
- Make a list of suggestions you can offer to the booker to create excitement
- Coordinate all the media pitches with the theme including some unique give-away items

3. Create marketing tools that sell your act with benefits to the buyer & the buyer's audience.

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

- List any grants or funding available to help defray your fee
- Get quotes and referrals from previous bookers and audience members raving about your show—use those key statements on your promo materials and on your website
- Use statements that appeal to the booker's and audience's emotions; i.e. "Relax after a hard work week with the soothing sounds of the Jazz Smoothies." Or "Find out why a show with the Jazz Smoothies is smooth sailing for every presenter that books them."
- Create press releases that incorporate your unique qualities to interest the media enough to write about you.
- Tap into your social media networks on a regular basis to maximize your marketing impact.

Marketing is one area of your career that should not be left to the PR people at the venues. Work with them—absolutely!

Controlling your image and what is written about you and how often your name and articles appear in the media, play a major role in creating demand for your act. Don't leave it up to the venue booker to create your demand in their market—take charge of it and grow your audience and your income. **Make creative marketing a priority!**

STEP 4: BOOKING

5 BOOKING STRATEGIES THAT *REALLY* WORK

Even though everything we've discussed so far is a strategy that will increase your bookings and make them easier to achieve, here are **5 specific booking strategies** that are **easy to begin using immediately**.

1. Develop a Home Base of support from which to expand

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

- Assess your home base gigs (refer to the above assessment)
- Develop your strategies and build your booking and marketing savvy in your home town—then use those strategies as a template as you expand to neighboring cities, then neighboring states to develop a regional following.
- Like a drop of water in a pond, the drop ripples outward in concentric circles. Similarly, your home-base is the center. Move outward to nearby towns-10 miles then 20 miles, then 50 miles and so on.



The benefits of this touring approach:

1. You save money on travel expenses since you can return home most nights, until you expand regionally then nationally and internationally.
2. Your fans can follow you from gig to gig and get their friends & family to join them in nearby towns, building your fan base more quickly & easily.
3. Media is easier to access since there may be overlap from your home base to nearby towns.

2. Swap Gigs with other acts in your target markets

- Find an act that you are compatible with and that lives in a market you want to develop

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

- Offer to host that act in your market as an opener for one of your concert events
- You coordinate the event, do the marketing, and introduce the act to your audience
- They do the same for you in their market
- It's important to work with an act who you know has a well-developed fan base in their market and will work as diligently for you as you will do for them.

3. Reduce Colds Calls – Start Making Referral Calls

- For those who have played previous gigs, use your old contracts and contacts and begin making call backs—but not only to get another return gig—also ask for referrals to other venues, festivals events in the region that won't interfere but will build your audience. Get contact names. Then when you call, you can say Joe Smith at the ABC venue suggested I call you. You have an in and it's no longer a cold call.
- Make a list of businesses & other contacts that might have a connection with potential performance opportunities. Have a brain-storming session with your group or some friends, family and fans.
Start with contacts you know.
- Review and use your mailing list and fan base for referrals—start adding a column to your sign-up sheet asking for occupation. Perhaps some of these fans work in positions that could coordinate a future gig. These are folks that have already committed to your career development by attending a show or buying a CD.

4. Ask for your next gig when you settle the current gig

- Use the current enthusiasm for the success that night

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

- Ask for a letter of reference, a quote and a referral to up to 3 new venues, similar to that gig
- Ask for your next date right then, pull out your calendar

5. Make short lists of booking calls to insure success

- With all this planning, you'll be able to be selective about the types of venues you call.
- Don't attempt to book an entire tour in one day.
- **5 Calls a Week**-With your new list of referrals, make 5 strategic new booking calls each week. A busy signal doesn't count. If you are successful at getting through to these five calls and have a meaningful booking conversation, then add one more prospect to your list.
- **3 Attempts & Move On**
Give yourself a chance to feel successful rather than defeated or overwhelmed by a long list. It may take all week to get through to some of these and if after 3 attempts, you are no closer to contacting them, then add another new contact to the list and drop the first one. Keep the momentum going.

These **5 Booking Strategies** are designed to shift the whole booking experience from one of dread and overwhelm, to one of having friendly conversations with people who want to work with you. It changes the dynamic, it shifts your emotions as you get ready to contact each new referral. Your tours begin to shape up more cohesively, each date is more related to the next and as your circumference of gigs begins to expand, your fan base grows exponentially.

Begin to use any one of these steps or all 5 as you book your very next tour. Feel the difference on your very first referral call.

STEP 5: EVALUATING-

1. Do at least one evaluation every year

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

2. Evaluate each tour to give you even better information
3. Evaluation measures your successes and the strategies that caused them. It helps to eliminate the things that didn't work or tweak aspects of things that sort of worked. It gives you a place to start from next time. It provides a momentum upon which to build and challenges you to be more creative the next time.
4. If you are not evaluating your procedures and strategies, you won't know how to make the next tour work better than the last. Be honest with yourself about your discoveries. If it's working, keep it, if it's not, change it and try something else. Don't keep wasting your money on strategies that didn't work. Try something new, and then evaluate that strategy.

CONCLUSION:

So many artists I speak with, talk about getting to the next level.

1. Spend some time and answer the questions I've posed after reading this report.
2. Make the lists I've suggested.
3. Assess your current situation.
4. Incorporate some of these strategies I've outlined for you.
5. Evaluate your progress and see the results on paper to track your growth and control your career development.

You now have the basic tools to make clear progress to your desired next level in your development.

There are more in-depth steps and strategies that I've incorporated into my book, **How To Be Your Own Booking Agent THE Musician's & Performing Artists Guide to Successful Touring**, with resource sections following each chapter pertinent to that chapter. You'll find assessment forms, sample contract forms that you can use right out of the book and hot tips and savvy advice from industry professionals scattered throughout the book on each page. I also have many helpful

GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

articles that are on my website that you may read for FREE. Check them out as many of them go into even more depth on some of the topics I've talked about here.

<https://performingbiz.com/>

To order your copy of **[How To Be Your Own Booking Agent THE Musician's & Performing Artist's Guide to Successful Touring](#)** click on the link.

Now that you've signed up for my audio **Biz Booster Hot Tip!** emailed every Monday morning, you'll stay on track each week with new ideas, methods and strategies that will inspire you and add momentum to help you fill your calendar with Great Gigs every week.

To begin reading more career boosting articles, listen to audio classes and take advantage of all the resources that will continue to help you **GET GREAT GIGS**, join me at **[Performingbiz.com](https://performingbiz.com/)** and book more gigs for more money, sell more merchandise and play for larger, more appreciative audiences.

I can't wait to work with you in more depth and help you achieve your touring goals.

I look forward to hearing about all your successes. And, please email me with suggestions of topics you would like me to cover in my weekly Biz Booster Hot Tip! I always discuss topics that are important to you so you may maximize your career with minimal effort and cost.

Here's to your success,

Jeri

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GET GREAT GIGS!

5 Booking Strategies That *Really* Work

About Jeri



Jeri Goldstein, former agent and manager, now author and music business and performing arts consultant, provides valuable resources, instruction and coaching to those navigating their way to creating a successful touring career.

How To Be Your Own Booking Agent, THE Musician's & Performing Artist's Guide To Successful Touring was self-published in 1998. The award-winning book, now in its 4th Edition and 8th printing, is used as a text book in Music Business courses at Universities across the U.S. and Canada and by musicians and performing artists world-wide.

Jeri presents live seminars internationally and offers tele-seminars and online courses for musicians, performing artists, agents, and managers. she works with clients around the world as an artist development career coach. Her information-packed articles can be found on her website, <https://performingbiz.com/> and are included in leading music business and entertainment trade magazines and on industry websites. Her free action-oriented weekly audio messages, Biz Booster Hot Tips, are designed to help musicians and performing artists make consistent progress toward reaching their career goals by offering step-by-step strategies and techniques.

Having worked with some of the top touring acoustic artists on the circuit for 20 years, she booked national and international tours for artists performing in music, theater and dance. Goldstein makes her home in southern Florida.