

Tips for Booking Christian Artists

Bringing a new artist in for the pleasure and/or enlightenment of your congregation/audience is something that can be a very satisfying, or a very negative experience, or something in between. Follow the tips below, especially the final ones, to ensure that it's a completely satisfying experience.

- I) Ask why you want to book an artist. There may be one or more of several reasons.
 - A. A special event where a speaker or music artist would be appropriate
 - 1. Revival
 - 2. Camp or VBS event
 - 3. Evangelistic or outreach event for the community
 - 4. Any time you want to do something special
 - B. A monthly, fifth Sunday, quarterly, or other regularly scheduled service.
 - 1. Many churches substitute a speaker or musical artist on a regular basis, perhaps to give the pastoral team a break, or to give the congregation some variety.
 - 2. Some 'Christian coffeehouses', in and out of the church, have artists in on a regular basis.
 - C. To fill a time slot when the regulars are not going to be there.
 - 1. Due to vacations and other reasons, choirs or worship teams may not be complete.
 - 2. Pastors and other leaders may also go on vacation, or need time off for some reason.
 - D. God may be impressing you to do something special for the community or congregation.
- II) Determine how and/or how much you can compensate the artist(s). There are several ways.
 - A. Fees. Do you have funds to pay a fee?
 - 1. How much can you pay?
 - a. The amount you can pay may determine the level of famed talent you can bring in. Famous groups often demand higher fees and requirements because they usually have more requests than they can handle. Asking higher fees keeps them in somewhat less demand, a workload they can handle more easily. However, talent and fame do not necessarily go together. You can usually find talented artists in any price range.
 - 2. Are there other things such as lodging or food to be considered?
 - a. Well known professional groups may require more than just a fee. They may also have riders attached to their contracts requiring things that you may or may not be able or willing to do. Such rider requirements may include things like specific conditions on lodging, or certain foods or brand names being made available. You may actually be required to import a brand name product, or have special facilities available, such as specifically itemized dressing rooms within a certain distance of the stage. If you have the funds

available to bring in such a group, simply be aware that there may be more than just the fee involved. You might have to build something special to accommodate some of these rider requirements, a dressing room, a new stage, or even a whole building. Often, some of these things can be negotiated, so be aware of that as well.

B. Free will or love offering, perhaps with a guaranteed amount to cover expenses.

1. Good for many regional artists whose mission is purely ministry. Such artists make their living another way, even though they may be very talented and professional in their dealings. Because they don't absolutely need the money, they are often willing to go to small churches as well as larger ones, even w/o a guarantee.
2. Size of the audience or congregation may be a factor in getting the more talented and the professionals to appear. If an artist is dependent on such offerings to survive, they may need to ask about the size of the expected audience before agreeing to come. A professional will also ask if they get the whole offering or a percentage. They know that even pastors can be less than completely moral at times. They have usually heard many horror stories from other artists. [1- from a duo - "We traveled 250 miles from home to get there, stayed overnight in a motel to appear for a morning service, and got a \$50 check from the church." 2-from a nationally known artist-"We traveled 150 miles to this church. They took an offering from more than two hundred people after the pastor told them all the offering would go to us. I saw people putting in fives, tens, and even some twenties, and then they gave us a check for \$50." 3-from a very talented Nashville recording artist-"They told us they collected more than \$1600 in the offering, but didn't think any band deserved that much, so they only gave us \$400 after we traveled several hundred miles in our bus to bring our band there."]
3. Usually can't bring someone in from a long distance for an offering unless there are a lot of people in the congregation, or the group is traveling through anyway, which is where many opportunities happen for a church to book a professional group. If an artist is traveling, they will often offer to appear at places along their route, even for an offering. It all helps offset costs, and sometimes offerings pay more than fees.
4. 100% of the offerings should go to the group[s] when possible. While there are many "gospel sings" out there that take up offerings for the promoter's expenses, many professional artists will not appear at these unless there is a good reason to do so, such as sales of product to support their ministry, or bookings in the region due to being seen there. If such benefits do not occur, you will not get such groups to attend in the future. These types of gospel sings usually book any artist who shows interest, and may or may not have talented artists appearing, making it a "grab bag" affair at best for the audience.

C. Combination of fees/food/lodging/services. Often, even with professional artists, you can offer meals and/or lodging in someone's home, or perhaps in a travel trailer/motor home that's waiting for vacation time, to help offset the artist's travel costs. Offers to do laundry and other services can also be helpful to a traveling artist.

III) Never book an artist you haven't checked out thoroughly. Check out even those artists that you have seen and those that people you trust refer to you. It is usually not too hard to do so. These extra steps can keep you from having a very negative experience. Just because you met and liked them doesn't mean you don't need to check them out. They may appear to walk the walk and talk the talk when you are around, but it may be just part of their act.

A. KNOW who you are booking - check them out if you don't!

1. Sales pitches can be very convincing.
2. There are people out there who think they have talent when they don't.
3. There are well-meaning people, with a great heart for God, who have simply 'got it wrong', at least for your congregation/audience.
4. There are talented artists who don't have a heart for God, just cash.
5. Their music may be of a genre your audience would not care for. Would a country audience enjoy a hip-hop artist? Vice versa?
6. There are always scam artists and criminals out there looking to cash in some way.

B. KNOW the message[s] they deliver - check them out if you don't!

1. The artist you book should have something unique, something that provides variety. That may be original songs, or a comical delivery style, or whatever. It is probable that they will do something different from what is 'normal' for your audience. Personal testimonies vary and provide meaningful messages for many in the congregation or audience. Perhaps the artist can provide a different viewpoint, or deliver a message in a different way that would reach people you have trouble reaching. If you've been a "good guy" all your life, a former "bad guy" may help, or vice versa. People relate to different people in different ways. Sometimes they will finally "hear" the message you've been trying to reach them with for years, just because it's delivered differently, or by a different person.
2. You will want to know that they won't deliver a message that contradicts what you teach. You don't want to be 'cleaning up' behind them, especially in a major way. For instance, some denominations would not be comfortable with an artist speaking in tongues. Other denominations might actually look for such an artist. Even an artist that speaks in tongues would probably avoid doing so, if asked. You need to know and discuss what you want, or don't want, when booking an artist. Most non-denominational artists will comply with your wishes. If they won't, don't book them. It's best to know ahead of time!

C. KNOW their level of professionalism - check them out if you don't!

1. See the next section.

IV) If you don't know them, check them out thoroughly, until you do!

A. Ask for video and/or printed materials if they haven't provided it.

1. Be aware that they may not have good video/materials, it may be homemade, but still should be adequate to determine their heart and the level of professionalism in their appearances.
2. Ask for video of actual appearances in your type of venue, or similar venue if they have it. Appearances at special events may differ greatly from a church service. They may or may not have such a video. Don't let that deter you if you are interested. Go on and check out their references.
3. Be aware of the cost to send out video or printed materials. Allow them to send it by e-mail, if possible. Of course, famous groups can usually afford to send it by mail.
 - a. If they have a web site, view it first to see if it's adequate. Most web sites will probably be adequate for you to make a decision about whether or not to dig further. Hopefully, you decide to dig further, but be aware that web sites, and other promotional materials, tell only what they want you to know. Don't automatically trust them completely.
 - b. Let the artist know the format you need if you have to ask for material to be sent. DVD may be the easiest for the artist to send, but you may not be able to view it if you only have a VHS player and no access to an adequate computer. Older computers may not be able to view some file formats.

B. ALWAYS check out their references before your final decision to book an artist.

1. Ask for references if they haven't provided them.
 - a. Make sure you get references from places the artist have appeared at, not just some names of friends.
 - b. Get all information: name, organization, date they appeared there, mailing address, e-mail, and phone number whenever possible.
 - b. Try to independently check that the people referenced actually exist in the positions they are supposed to. One scam artist used famous names and faked e-mail addresses, which he personally replied from in the name of the famous person, to appear very well-credentialed. Independent checking can often be done fairly easily online, especially if the organization has a web site. You may have to find the organization in a yellow pages or online search, get a phone number, and call them to check on the referenced person.
2. Contact at least three places where they have appeared, using independently checked phone numbers or e-mail/mail addresses. This can be easily done online at superpages.com and other phone listing sites. Talk to the recommended reference, or a person who was actually at the artist's appearance. Do not depend on information furnished by the artist, until you can independently confirm it.

- a. Ask about each person's demeanor [before, during, and after the appearance]
- b. Ask about the artist's professionalism [before, during, and after]
- c. Ask about the artist's program [appropriate? timely? accurate?]
- d. Ask about the artist's messages [appropriate? timely? accurate?]
- e. Would the reference book them again?
- f. Don't expect to get much negative information about an artist. Don't ask why, unless you are talking to someone you know or have established a rapport with. In most cases, they may be hesitant to say, due to defamation laws, etc. After all, you may be a friend of the artist checking to see, and perhaps even recording what they say.
- g. You will probably know if the information is negative. The reference may hem and haw a little, not quite knowing what to say, then say something very neutral. Such things can also happen when they don't really remember too well. Don't stop calling if it only happens once, but, if it happens more than once, accept that, and go on to the next artist. If an artist is giving you references that give negative info, something is definitely wrong. The artist may be giving names thinking you won't really check them, a little trick that often works, even when looking for employment in the corporate world.