

## The 57° North Guide to DIY Gig Promotions

Being a gig promoter isn't as tricky as you might think – there are small DIY promotion groups popping up all over the place. Do things right and you can have a great gig. Do things wrong and you will quickly find that putting on a gig can be a good way to lose a lot of money. This guide has been designed by our team at 57° North to help you put on your own gigs – and avoid the pitfalls that could derail your project and hand your house back to the bank.

At the end of this guide, you'll find our handy checklist, which you can print off and use to make sure you've thought of everything in the run up and on the night.

### **1) Where to start?**

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First and foremost, if you're new to gig promotions and think this might be an easy way to make some cash, forget it. Most gig promoters are delighted to break even and do it for the love of the music, not because they want to make money. It takes a lot of work to put on a gig and things can go wrong quickly, so if you're not big on hassle then it might not be the thing for you. Also, there are very few individuals/groups who can make a living from gig promotions – best to think of it more as a hobby. But get it right and it's a great pastime!

It is still possible to put on great gigs, pay everyone a fair amount and turn in a profit. It's not easy though and the target for your first few gigs should be to break even.

Keep your costs low and your risk stays low. Getting too ambitious too soon is a dangerous ploy. It could work spectacularly, but equally it could be a financial and logistical disaster. Follow this guide, speak to people you know in music and always be prepared to learn.

Promoting gigs can be a great fun and incredibly rewarding, so long as you know what you are doing. There are a lot of things to think about, so by reading this guide you will have a better awareness of what needs to be done and you can hopefully avoid a lot of the little mistakes that promoters make when starting out.

The two main things to sort first are the venue and the line-up...

## 2) Venue

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Getting the right venue is crucial. It has to be somewhere you think people will be keen to go, it needs to be the right size for the expected crowd – a small crowd in a small venue can be amazing, but a small crowd in a big venue can be a disaster – it needs to be the right cost for your budget and it needs to have the equipment you need.

Legal issues: Also, you need to think about the legal issues – what is the capacity, how late can you have the space and does their licence allow for 14+ or is the venue 18+?

Day/Date: Availability will vary from venue to venue, but a general rule would be that if you want a Friday or Saturday night, you'll need to book earlier. These are the most popular night as people are more likely to go out at the weekend, but keep in mind that there is also more competition for gig-goers on these days.

Also, have a look and see if any other promoters have big shows on the same date as this could reduce your potential audience.

Size of venue: If it's your first gig, go for somewhere small, which is likely to be cheaper. There are some venues which will give you the space for free, although first-time promoters will sometimes have to pay a deposit, as the venue won't know if you can bring a crowd or not. If you have a successful first gig, this puts you in a stronger position to negotiate with the venue on cost. If you bring enough people, they will make a considerable amount on the bar. The venue will therefore be keen for you to put gigs on there again, so you can ask for it cheaper or go elsewhere. Developing a mutually-beneficial and solid relationship with a venue is very useful.

Some medium-sized venues will ask for a deposit of around £200-£300, which they will pay back depending on how many people you bring in. For example, one venue asked for a £200 deposit, saying they would give £100 if 50 people came and would refund the entire £200 if 100 people attended.

Small venues are often free, so that reduces your risk – the key is to keep your costs under control, otherwise you'll have a very nervous evening as you pray for people to turn up. Do keep in mind though that the venue needs to have all the technical equipment you require (see section 4 for more on this).

Starting with a small venue for your first gig makes sense as it allows you to build your reputation and audience without risking losing significant amounts of money. If you try to go too big for your first gig, mistakes could be costly. By starting small you can build up your experience and knowledge, making you better equipped to succeed if you want to try something bigger further down the line.

Finally, be wary of putting on a gig in somewhere that isn't usually a venue. They may not have a licence for music to be played there, which can often be a problem. This varies though depending on the local regulations. Secondly, if it's a hall, community centre, church etc, then it is unlikely to have any PA equipment, meaning you will have to hire all the kit you need. This can be very expensive, so is best avoided. Also, you may struggle to get a crowd if the venue isn't an established music place – some people go to gigs because they like the venue and trust that they put on good gigs.

### 3) Booking acts

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It's pretty obvious that the acts you book are central to the success of your gig. If you are thinking of putting on a gig, you probably already have an idea of who you want to book. Best not get too ambitious with your first attempt – book local bands as they should have a good following and you won't have to cover travel and accommodation.

If you have friends who are musicians then use those contacts – call in favours wherever possible. You have to decide how much to pay the bands too – this should be agreed in advance and you should always pay what you promised, regardless of the turnout. You are the promoter and it is therefore up to you to make sure people come along – if the turnout is poor, you are responsible, so don't try and re-negotiate with the band. Failing to pay agreed amounts will turn your name to mud and you'll find it hard to get people to agree to play.

Fees: For the fee, your headliner generally gets the most money, so be clear with any act you are booking so they know if they are headlining or if they are a support act. Paying the bands a fair amount can be a significant cost, so getting people to attend is crucial. Therefore you need to set the price of the gig based on your expenditure (but also what is fair and realistic).

Some promoters don't pay support acts, instead saying that it is good exposure and the band should appreciate the opportunity. This isn't very fair on the bands though, so you should always try to pay something, even just to show your appreciation. If you are making money from them playing, it's a bit rude not to offer some sort of payment.

Always agree a deal in advance. When disputes occur between promoters and bands, it's often because of money. Make sure you have an agreement in place before the gig and stick to what you promised – nothing will ruin your reputation quicker than disputes with acts over money. If a support slot isn't paid, make sure you tell the band this the first time you contact them.

**Promoter's Tip:** *“Something we have done in the past is offer a base fee (say £20-30) and then state that it will be increased if we get enough people through the doors to cover our costs. We did this because we wanted to pay the bands more than that, but couldn't afford to, so thought this was a fair way to do it. On occasion we were able to double the original fee; sometimes we weren't able to increase it at all. We always explained to the bands why we did this, and they all seemed happy with it (although maybe that was because they knew Hercules Moments wouldn't try to rip them off?).”* Eoin Smith, Hercules Moments.

Further reading: For an interesting perspective on disputes between bands and promoters, see this post by Matthew Young, founder of Song, by Toad Records in Edinburgh (he gets a bit swearsy at times does the old chap, so it's not really a suitable link for the young 'uns).

<http://songbytoad.com/2011/07/a-few-reasons-promoters-and-bands-dont-get-along/>

Set times: You also need to decide how many acts to book – three or four is the norm for gigs. The more acts you have, the higher the cost, so be sensible and don't go for an all-day festival with ten bands for your first gig if you aren't sure how many people to expect.

When contacting a band/solo act, best to do this by email first – most bands will have a Facebook page that should have a contact email on the info page (annoyingly, a fair few bands seem to forget the importance of having their contact details on their social media pages). If you don't have an email address for them, you can contact via Facebook/Twitter etc., but it always looks more professional to email. Also, set up an email account for your gig promotions – that will also look more professional. Get yourself a few social media profiles under the name of your gig promotion project. You want to inspire confidence in people – both musicians and audiences.

A word on booking bands from out of town – this can be tricky and it all comes down to basic finances. If, for example, you are based in Aberdeen and you're thinking of booking a band from Glasgow or Edinburgh, you need to be sure that people in Aberdeen will know the band and will want to come along. If the band is well established in their home city, they will have a fee in mind based on what they usually get. However, this fee is because they have a following in their home city – they are unlikely to pull the same kind of crowd in a city three hours away. Also, you'll need to cover their travel costs and possibly accommodation. Now things are getting really expensive and you might find that nobody in Aberdeen knows who they are, so you could lose hundreds of pounds on this deal.

That is not to say that it can't be done – once you are established, your audience will come to trust your taste - but you need to keep all of this in mind when negotiating with a band about playing your event. They may well all be able to fit into one car and might either have a place to stay with friends or could drive back home after the gig, so this makes things cheaper for you. Also, a band travelling up will probably expect to be fed too, so factor this into your costs. The general rule is to be very clear about what is on offer and what isn't, well in advance of the gig.

**Promoter's Tip:** *"With regards to hospitality; at Laika Come Home, we always offer a free home-cooked hot meal for all the bands (usually something one-pot and easy to transport), if you're going to go down the route of providing food, I always think it's polite to ask about any dietary requirements, just in case. I tend to just make something that's both vegan and gluten free to avoid any awkwardness."* Claire Harkins, Laika Come Home

Finally, when booking an act, you need to agree the length of their set. 30-45 mins is about average. You can ask the band how long they'd like to play for, then factor that in. They'll know how much good live material they have. Your headliner should get the longest set time though, with shorter slots for support bands.

Work out your start and finish times for the gig based on the set time of each band, plus 10-15 minutes in between acts for the changeover. Generally, the first act will go on 30 minutes after doors opening. Make up the running over with stage times and email it to the acts in advance of the gig.

#### 4) Sound

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Unless the venue is providing a sound engineer (check with them at the point of booking as this will impact on the price), you need to hire one. It's crucial your sound engineer knows what they are doing as bad sound or technical problems can ruin a gig.

57° North has a list of sound engineers, so if you're in Aberdeen/shire, visit:

<http://57north.org/resources/sound-light>

Different sound engineers will expect different prices. If you know a sound engineer, for a small local gig they may be happy to do it cheaply (some just want their beer paid for on the night). If you don't know any sound engineers, ask around – use your social media sites and ask the venue who they normally use. Also, ask the bands – they are bound to know someone who could do the sound.

Prior to the gig, you need to get a list from the band of what they need equipment-wise – this is generally known as their 'tech specs'. They will probably ask that you provide the backline (guitar and bass amps) and they'll need to know if the venue has a drum kit or not. Your sound engineer will need to know their set up, so you should pass the tech specs for each band on to your sound engineer in advance of the gig.

You then need to make sure the venue has all the kit the bands need. If not, you'll have to source it yourself. For example, if a band has three vocalists, does the venue have three good working microphones and three mic stands? This is why it's much better to put your gig on in an established music venue, as they are likely to have everything you need. They might want more money from you for the booking, but this is because they have invested heavily in the equipment and need to recoup some of the cost. A non-music venue might seem cheaper, but will cost you much more if you have to go and hire a load of equipment.

If you are unsure about what kit the venue has, ask them. Any decent venue should have a list of the equipment they have, so you can pass this to your sound engineer.

Drummers generally bring their own 'breakables' (cymbals etc) but they will need to know if a drum kit is provided. They may wish to bring their own drum kit and back line, but you need to check if they mind the other bands using their amps and kit – if they aren't keen on that, you have the logistical challenge of getting all their stuff on and off the stage mid-gig (not recommended).

Soundchecking: The headliner should be offered a soundcheck. Check with the venue to find out what time you can get access on the day of the gig – best to soundcheck at least 2 or 3hrs before doors opening, so you've time to sort any problems which pop up – unexpected technical issues crop up a lot, so by soundchecking early, you have a much better chance of sorting the problem.

It's up to you if you want to soundcheck with any of the support acts. Make sure this is clear well in advance of the gig so the acts know what time to arrive. Speak to your sound engineer too and see if he wants to soundcheck any of the other acts. Some may have a complicated set-up and it might be advisable to have a run through in advance so you're not trying to sort technical issues in front of an impatient audience at the actual gig.

Acoustic acts generally get what is called a 'line check', which is basically just plugging in and setting some levels. It takes about 5 minutes and can be done before the gig, or during the changeover of acts, before they go on.

**Promoter's Tip:** *"With regard to the fundamentals (venue, gear etc), if something changes or falls through, you must let the bands know about it. Keep everyone in the loop at all times and make yourself easy to contact. Stuff will inevitably go wrong from time to time, but just make sure you're always completely transparent and update everyone and you shouldn't have a problem."* Laika Come Home



## 5) Promotion

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It's called gig promotion for a reason and no matter how good your line-up, if people don't know about it, they can't attend. So it's fair to say that the success or failure of your night largely depends on your ability to promote the gig as heavily as possible.

Also, working hard is important - but working smart will get you the win. Who are your target audience and where will you find them? A lot of this depends on the genre of music you are having at your gig. There are though some general tips for promotion.

Listings guides: Most areas with a healthy music scene will have a few prominent places for gig guides. These days, this is all mainly done online. For example, in Edinburgh, if you have a gig going on, you want it to be in The List and The Skinny (they have both print and online versions). In Aberdeen, we have 57° North for a comprehensive gig guide and you can upload your own gigs via the Get Involved page. Local papers often have gig guides, so you should send the info through to them. Identify the key listings guides in your area and make sure you send the info to them – date and time, line-up, venue, cost.

**Promoter's Tip:** *"Be aware of deadlines for newspapers. For example, the P&J What's On listing is in on a Thursday, so they need copy before Wednesday (or ideally a bit earlier)."*

Posters and Flyers: It may seem a bit antiquated in the digital age, but posters and flyers remain an effective way to promote your gig. The more widely you can distribute these the better – the venue will be glad to take 4 or 5 posters usually as it helps bring people in (the more successful your gig, the more they make on the bar). Find out the main places where posters go up and make sure you have permission. There are also poster distribution companies operating in most cities, so look them up online if you're planning a big gig. It'll need to be factored into your costs, but could make a big difference.

Keep in mind that posters can be expensive. Here in Aberdeen, Iceberg Print is part of the Cyrenians – a charity working with homeless people. They offer reasonable prices on A4 and A3 posters in full colour. In other areas, have a search and compare prices. Generally, posters larger than A3 are much more expensive as they require a different printer. A3 is probably your best bet, 20 posters for £20 or less is perfect for a small-medium gig.

Also, who is going to design your posters? If you can't design them yourself, or get a friend to do it, you may have to pay someone. Posters don't have to be amazing though – they just need to be clear and have all the information your audience requires.

Flyers are great for generating interest in your gig, but they can be quite pricey. So if you are just starting out and not sure of your audience, then spending £50 on flyers could be a difficult decision – will the cost of the flyers be matched by an increase in numbers? It's really difficult to measure the success of flyers though, so there is no definitive answer as to whether they are a good idea for a small gig or not. Also, where you distribute them is crucial. Go to other gigs and flyer outside, use any friendly local shops, music shops/studios etc. Contact other promoters and offer a flyer/poster exchange – if promoters work together to build a strong scene, everyone wins.

Social Media: Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are incredibly popular and are a good way to promote your gig. You should set up profiles for your gig promotions group and keep this separate from your personal profiles. You can then use these profiles to build an audience and promote your gigs. On Facebook, you should set up a page, not a profile. It looks more professional, doesn't get lost in people's friends lists and allows you to use the analytics to see how many people your post reached.

You can also pay to have a post promoted on Facebook or Twitter – prices start at £5 but could help you find a larger audience.

A few words of warning on social media – despite the popularity of the medium, it is not the answer to all your gig promotion. It's a useful tool as part of an overall strategy for promoting your gigs. It is not a replacement for traditional tools like posters and gig listings. The problem with social media is that everyone does it, so it's really easy to get lost in the noise. Setting up a Facebook event is not enough as a gig promoter. Try to use all the tools at your disposal and you'll get the best result.

**Promoter's Tip:** *“Setting up a Facebook event isn't the be-all and end-all, but it is important for each gig - invite everyone you know and get them to do the same. Don't let the bands set up their own events (which many do, for some odd reason) – encourage them to invite their friends/fans to the official gig event page.”*

Also, you can encourage the acts you have booked to help promote the gig via their social media sites, but treat it as a bonus if they do any promotion. Ultimately, you are the promoter so you are responsible for publicising the event.

Finally, do not rely on the numbers on your Facebook event – plenty of people click 'Going' for an event even if they are not. Quite often, they join the event to keep up-to-date but will only decide on the night if they are attending or not. It is likely the number of people who are confirmed on your Facebook event will bear no relation to those who actually attend.

And never complain about a poor turnout at a gig via your social media pages – it looks really bad and just shows that you failed to promote it properly.

**Promoter's Tip:** *"When posting on social networking sites, we always make a point of trying to post content- ie. does that band/artist have a new track out? Have they been favourably reviewed/featured somewhere? Have they just played an absolute blinder somewhere else and oh my god, people just have to come and see it for themselves? Attaching links to music, videos and articles gives people a reason to investigate further instead of just going "I've put a lot of effort into this, please come along" etc. every couple of days. That just gets tiresome." Laika Come Home*

## 6) Ticketing

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For a small gig, you will probably just want to charge on the door. It's only really for big one-off events – such as an all-day festival or charity gig – where you would want to sell tickets in advance, although most medium-sized promotions groups will have an online ticketing option.

It is much less hassle to just sell tickets on the door, but equally, you are better able to judge demand by offering tickets in advance.

If you are offering tickets in advance, you can ask the venue if they will sell them and keep the money aside for you. Also, there may be local record/music shops which will sell tickets for a small fee.

You may need to factor in a cost for tickets to be printed, although for a small gig you could do this yourself. Be wary of making them easy to copy though and make sure you have a system of checking off ticket numbers on the door to detect any duplication.

Online ticketing is much more common now, with several sites set up to help you sell tickets in advance and people can arrive with either a printed confirmation of payment or a smartphone ticket.

**Promoter's Tip:** In terms of some online ticketing agents to use, here are some thoughts from promoters and bands:

“We use [www.wegottickets.com](http://www.wegottickets.com) quite regularly. It's not bad but it can take a wee while to pay into your paypal account after the event has taken place. They don't post tickets either just give the buyer a reference number which they print off and present at the gig. As long as whoever promotes the event remembers to print off the list of names and reference numbers, it's all pretty good.” Liam of The Last battle, Edinburgh.

“[www.wegottickets.com](http://www.wegottickets.com) - one piece of paper, great communication from their admin, always pay within three days, very efficient. IMP's used them for 18months, should have been sooner. Also, I've heard [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com) are very good.” Mike Tyers, Interesting Music Promotions (IMP) Aberdeen.

“I use SEE and Ticketweb - both reliable. Ticketweb do an auto transfer of money the Friday after a show matures, SEE need an invoice sent but pay quickly too. I also do BigCartel and send out emails but some customers prefer the fact they are using a "proper" site like See etc. SEE tend to be cheaper for the customer than Ticketweb too.” Ross Calder, AGP, Aberdeen.

## 7) On the night

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Some things to think about on the night:

Branding the venue – Is it obvious your gig is on at the venue? Have you got posters outside and, if the venue is secluded, have you got signs directing people to where they should be?

Stage times – Have you done your stage times and is each act aware what time they are expected to set up, play and finish? You may want to put the stage times up on the wall at the gig, but most promoters don't publish these prior to the gig as it encourages people to only turn up for the one act they might know.

Staffing – do you have people to take the money on the door? Who is going to manage the gig, making sure things run to time and that the sound engineer and bands are communicating with each other?

Stamp – do you have a stamp or a pen for the door, so people can pop in and out of the venue?

Change float – do you have a change float? Best ask the venue for this early on. Some venues may wish to take money off you up front for the change float, others will just want the float back at the end.

Merchandising – Bands may want a space to place their merchandising, so ask them beforehand and lay out a table for them, preferably somewhere near the entry-exit point. The bands will appreciate any efforts you can make to help them sell more 'merch'.

Rider – The rider is the list of requests you get from an act prior to the gig which forms part of the deal for them to play. If they have asked for food/wine/postcards/any other random things (as they often do) then on the night you'll need to make sure you have provided this for them.

**Band's Tip:** *"If you've said that you'll be at the venue at a set time, make absolutely certain that you are. Be there in plenty of time to get access and be in the venue to greet the bands on their arrival. We've been on the receiving end of turning up to the venue and the promoter's nowhere to be seen. Definitely does not leave a good impression." Seas, Starry*

Paying acts and sound engineer: Normally you would pay the acts in cash on the night. Some will prefer a bank transfer on the next working day though. Never pay bands in advance. Your sound engineer will probably want cash on the night too (unless they are employed by the venue). If the acts have agreed to be paid via a

split of the money taken on the door, it might be easier to pay them by bank transfer once you have counted out the takings.

Leave the venue tidy: If you want to continue to use a venue and enjoy a good reputation, best not to annoy the staff by not putting their equipment back as you found it. It's the venue's role to clean up after those attending the gig, but your responsibility to clean up after the musicians – so all equipment should be put away properly.

Bands leaving equipment at the venue: Some bands bring their own equipment but then fancy heading out for a few half pints of shandy after the gig, so they ask to leave their equipment at the venue. This is normally fine, but you should check with the venue first rather than assume it is okay.

### 8) Budget

Use the following table to keep track of all your costs and make sure you have budgeted for everything:

<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Headline Act	
Support Act 1	
Support Act 2	
Additional Support Acts	
Rider	
Accommodation and Travel	
Venue Hire	
Sound Engineer	
Additional Equipment	
Posters and Flyers – Design	
Posters and Flyers – Printing	
Posters and Flyers - Distribution	
Tickets - Printing	
Social Media – Promoted Posts	
Other Costs	
<b>TOTAL</b>	

<b>Income</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Pre-gig ticket sales	
Sales on the door	
<b>Total</b>	

### 9) Some nuggets of wisdom from promoters and musicians

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“At Laika Come Home, something that should really be obvious and that’s totally fundamental to us is only ever booking acts that we genuinely really like. If you can be genuinely enthusiastic and passionate about the music you’re promoting it really comes across, rubs off and gets people excited when you’re promoting and makes for a far better atmosphere on the night.”

- Claire Harkins, Laika Come Home, Promoter and Musician

“I’m not a big fan of promoters asking about how many people bands can bring to a gig, being proactive about inviting is much more worthwhile investment of your time. I tend to find that the people who show up to gigs that aren’t in bars or the student union are either friends of the band or the promoter. So whilst it’s good to cover social media and print press, early mail to mates can double the attendance.”

Ian McKelvie, The Colourful Band

“If you love music and the kind of gigs you want to see aren’t happening, it’s actually fairly easy to go and do it yourself. Everything is DIY in the music industry these days – people make albums in their bedrooms, manage bands from home, make radio programmes with a laptop and a microphone – gigs are no different. Just go for it”

Citizen Mule, Promoter

“Battle of the Bands is a terrible idea and should be avoided at all costs!”

HP Neilson, This is Music, Edinburgh Promoters (apparently not a fan of Battle of the Bands!)

“Always be polite!”

Andrew Mulhern, Vocoustics, Promoter

“Don’t bother”

Jim Ewen, cynical local musician



10) The 57° North Handy Checklist

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<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Tick when done</b>
Confirmed a venue	
Paid any deposit due	
Checked if it's 14+ or 18+ at the venue	
Checked opening hours and access to venue	
Asked what kit is available	

<b>Bands:</b>	<b>Tick when done</b>
Booked a headliner	
Booked support acts	
Agreed fees in advance	
Sorted any travel, food and accommodation	
Stage times confirmed with bands	

<b>Sound:</b>	<b>Tick when done</b>
Hired a sound engineer and agreed a fee	
Got the bands tech specs	
Checked equipment at the venue	
Sourced any additional equipment required	
Arranged time and access for soundcheck	

<b>Publicity:</b>	<b>Tick when done</b>
Posters/flyers designed, printed and distributed	
Set up Facebook event and shared with bands playing	
Facebook event updated with interesting content	
Event plugged through other social media	
Asked bands to help publicise the gig	
Contacted all local listings sites/papers	

<b>Tickets:</b>	<b>Tick when done</b>
Tickets printed	
Online ticket source set up	
Tickets to venue/local shops etc	
List of pre-paid tickets	

<b>On the night:</b>	<b>Tick when done</b>
Posters up outside venue	
Got change float	
Got stamp for door	
People to be on the door	
Space set up for merch	
Tech specs given to sound engineer	
Rider provided if required	
Stage times printed off and put on wall	
Form for signing up to your mailing list	
Bands and sound engineer paid (or agreed to pay later)	
Venue left tidy	