WHY DOES THIS ACT COST SO MUCH?

Here's How All Breaks Do

BY STACY OLSON

It's a new school year and you may be new to your school's programming board. As you learn all that it takes to plan and budget for entertainment programs and other events on campus, you may initially be shocked by the fees artists and attractions request for their performances and/or services. You are very likely wondering, "Why does this act cost so much?"
EXAMPLE

consider an example. Your board has received a quote for a performance by a regional four-piece rock group. Your school will be required to provide sound and lights, as well as two double hotel rooms and four hot meals. Simple math leads you to conclude that $1,500 divided four ways for one performance means easy money for the guys/girls in the right? Wrong! Let's start from the beginning...back a few expenses that also must be deducted from that $1,500 fee.

Promotional Materials

get a call from an agent who touts the "best the market today." You request promotional materials so you can begin considering the act. The agent sends you a promotional kit that includes a 8x10 black-and-white photo, a DVD, a bio and information, and a sample of a poster. The agent tells you the promotional kit costs $20. If you don't like the promo package, or don't check to see that you received it and request another one, that's another $20. (Postage to send the promo kit to the cost, as well.) They may also ask you to visit their Web site. There are costs involved in maintaining the site, as well, which we'll comment on later. Even there is likely to be a game of phone tag and the agent attempt to follow up with each other. The more you each call and miss each other, the longer the distance bill goes. The agent's portion of that cost, which is variable depending on how soon you connect, also has to be figured into the fees.

Now you have reviewed the promotional materials, you call the agent to get more details about the act. Such as whether or not it travels with its own sound and/or lighting equipment. Is the act head-n -tered in your area? If not, it will have to travel to your area to reach you. Does the act's price include travel and lodging? If it does, the act's price reflects those costs, which again, can vary.

When it comes to the promotional materials you reviewed, consider that in order to have those items available, the act had to have them produced in quantity. The cost to record a CD is about $8,000. Making 50 copies of the master recording costs about $500. (So you can see why agents ask that you take only one CD.)

The cost of recording a video is about $3,000. (Again, take only one, please.) Although some promoters are making their own video, that video needs to go to an editing house for formatting and editing. The fee for that is about $175-$250. The video must be then be reproduced onto a DVD. The cost of 1,000 DVDs with packaging is approximately $500.

The fee for the photographer who shot that 8x10 black-and-white photo was about $300. Having 100 copies made costs approximately $150. On the average, five copies are given away per booking. Yes, hard copies are still requested along withjpeg or PDFs.

You will use these photos for your school newspaper and for other promotional activities. Also, hundreds of copies may be made for promotional/press kits. These kits may be updated every three to five months, requiring more copies to be produced each time an update occurs. Along with the updates of the hard copy kits, Web sites are constantly being updated. While some of us have the talent to do these updates on our own, time to do them is crucial and artists and agents often have to pay others to implement them. Fees for Web site maintenance range across the board and depend on who hosts the site and builds it.

All of these costs are incurred before the act even hits the road.

WHAT THE ARTIST'S FEE COVERS

(in addition to the performer's compensation)

- Promotional materials (print, Web, audio and video)
- Travel and associated costs
- Wardrobe and equipment maintenance
- Agency fees and insurance

Travel and Associated Costs

Remember that artists often are on the road for months at a time. While they are traveling, they must still maintain their residences and related costs, such as electricity, gas and telephone. These costs can vary, depending upon whether or not the artists have family living at home. However, most artists must still pay rent or mortgages while they are traveling and have high telephone/cell phone/fax bills. As artists travel, they often need to rent a van, which can cost $170 per day, plus gas. And who knows where the price of a gallon of gas will be when a booking is made six months in advance? Tour buses cost about $2,000 per day. That fee includes a driver—but not the gasoline needed to fuel the bus.

Wardrobe and Equipment Maintenance Costs

Artists must also be concerned with wardrobe costs and upkeep ($15 per show on average) and equipment purchases and maintenance. A five-piece drum kit costs about $10,000. This may be consid-
ered a one-time expense, but you never know when a drum kit might be damaged in transit or even stolen. Drumhead replacements cost $30-$150 each, and drumheads need replacing almost monthly. Drumsticks cost $80 for six pairs, and drumsticks break very frequently. An electric guitar costs about $3,500 and an amplifier to go with it comes in at around $2,000. (These pieces of equipment are also subject to damage due to accidents or may be stolen.) Regular guitar strings cost about $55 per set and bass guitar strings cost about $80 per set. And strings, like drum sticks, break frequently. Nine-volt batteries used in conjunction with some of this equipment cost about $5 each. (A nice thing to do for performers visiting your campus, and which might even save time for you, is to have a couple of nine-volt batteries on hand. Also, have a list of music stores in the area in case they need new strings or sticks. They'll love you for it!)

- **Agency Fees and Insurance**
  There are also agency fees and insurance costs to consider, both of which are variable, that eat into that $1,500 performance fee.

**A BARGAIN, AFTER ALL**

When you consider all the costs incurred as a band travels and performs, you can see that it is not a matter of simple math. In fact, you may come to understand that $1,500 is quite a bargain after all, especially if you've been quoted that fee as part of NACA's Cooperative Buying process.

As you and your fellow programming board members participate in regional conferences this fall, keep all these figures in mind as you negotiate with agents. It will help you understand their side of the CO-OP equation. Sometimes an agent can reduce an act's fee only so much, but if you are up front with the agent about the limitations of your own budget and show respect for the constraints they must deal with, you can work together to bring successful events to your campus.

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**About the Author**

**Stacey Olson** is the owner of Olson Entertainment Group, Inc. (WI). She is the music agent for the company. Her career experience has involved club management and work as a talent buyer for festivals and various venues for more than 20 years. She has been affiliated with NACA for 10 years. She has served as a regional representative for NACA and travels to all NACA regional conferences, as well as the annual NACA National Convention. She recently opened a branch office in Michigan featuring a comedy and lecture roster.

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