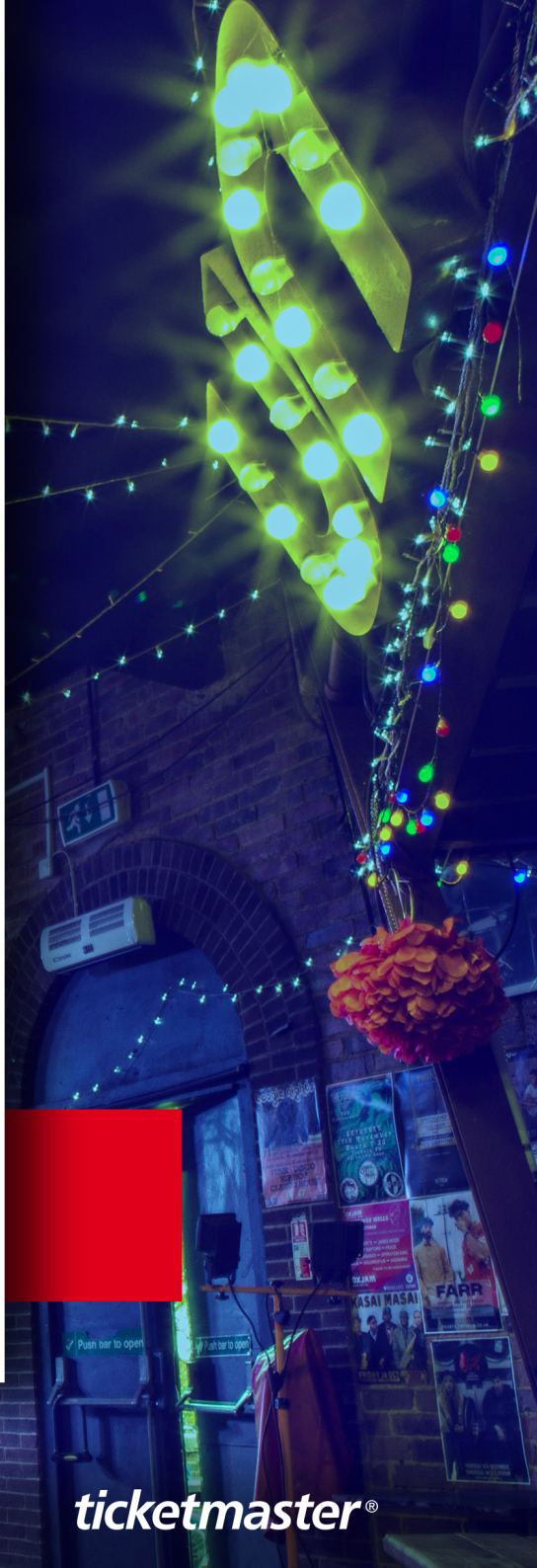
MVT
Music Venue Trust

Presents

HOW TO OPEN A GRASSROOTS MUSIC VENUE

WORDS BY DAVID POLLOCK
PHOTOS BY JANNICA HONEY



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INTRODUCTION

Music Venue Trust is a UK charity created in 2014 to protect, secure and improve the nation's Grassroots Music Venues (GMVs). We work with and for the small independent venues which nurture new talent and connect audiences with live music experiences, building communities around music in towns and cities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

How this book works

This book is one of a pair – How to Open a Grassroots Music Venue and How to Run a Grassroots Music Venue. The chapters contain some common information but are written for the reader depending on whether they are embarking on creating a GMV or reviewing the venue they already run. The guides are intended to be practical and straightforward, while linking to supporting materials both in the Guidance section at the back of the book and to online Resources on the Music Venue Trust website. Throughout the book a key tells you when information is Vital, when to cross reference with the Guidance and when to refer to online Resources: www.musicvenuetrust.com

We urge you to read through the good practice Guidance which has been created by experts. Even if you are not able to do everything, it tells you what you should be aiming for. As the book states several times, running a successful venue is underpinned by doing what you need to do, setting the scene for you to develop the venue you want to create.

For inspiration, the practical guide is interspersed with interviews with some of the people who own and run existing GMVs. These provide a snapshot of the range of different venues across the country, selected not to suggest that they are 'the best' but that they portray a cross-section of personalities, career paths, priorities, environments and tastes. United by a passion for what they do, all interviewees represent the Music Venues Alliance community of which they are a part.

Acknowledgements
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Thank you to David Pollock for turning the project brief into coherent narrative and condensing 28 interviews into features to bring the books to life. Of course, we also need to thank the venue representatives for their time and help with this. Thank you to Jannica Honey for travelling around the country to take fantastic photos in some of the venues featured. And to Niall Forde, MVT's Licensing Guru, for pulling together the Guidance section so that you don't have to go searching for all the information you need. Thank you to Charlotte Michelle Simonsen for designing the books for us. Thank you too Simon and Sam for our ever-evolving website: www.musicvenuetrust.com

FOREWORD

When I was 17, I put on my first gig. Across the next ten years I met lots of other people also putting on gigs, and eventually, after five years of trying, we got together and opened our own venue. Nobody ever told us what to do or what not to do, we just felt we had to make a music venue work in our town so, by a process of trial and error, we did. In the last 25 years, I think we must have made every mistake you can read about in this book. Practically every-one I know in the Grassroots Music Venues sector has a similar story.

Hopefully, you can learn from the errors we made that led to us all thinking that this book was needed. You can build a stage the band doesn't fall through, get a licence that doesn't prevent you from opening on a Wednesday, and avoid having to rebuild the venue from scratch, only this time with enough doors. Running a music venue has given me and everyone in this book a lifetime of friends, experiences and stories which I could never have achieved otherwise. We hope you're inspired to join us and open your own.

Mark Davyd - CEO of Music Venue Trust

I saw my first live music gig in a grassroots venue in New Jersey when I was 15 years old. From that moment, I was hooked. When I arrived in London in the early 90s, I was eager to get out and experience as much live music as I could. Going to one of the capital's grassroots venues and discovering a new band alongside other music fans is my passion and what keeps my love of music alive.

London's diverse music scene is driven by its Grassroots Music Venues. They provide a vital platform for musicians to hone their craft, play an important part of our musical heritage and help maintain London's position as a global culture capital. There's no doubt that challenges exist with rising rents and business rates, but the Mayor and I are committed to doing everything we can to protect these vital cultural assets.

Music Venue Trust's tireless championing of grassroots venues and the people that run them shines a light on the importance and the hard work that goes into keeping live music thriving. I'm delighted that we have partnered with MVT in their work and have no doubt these books will become the go-to-guides for venue owners for years to come.

Amy Lamé - Night Czar, Mayor of London



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Useful information



Go to the Resources page on musicvenuetrust.com for further information on this



Vital information



Go to Guidance at the back of this book for an explanation and advice on good practice

01: WHY DO YOU WANT TO OPEN A MUSIC VENUE?

There might be people reading this whose answer is: "to make lots of money, of course." In which case, we'll take this chance to invite all those folks to stop reading here, put the Kindle down and go off to study an MBA instead. Of course, having an MBA might come in very handy when you come back to get that music venue off the ground, but it might also go a long way to getting you a job in the City of London – and if you're looking for a job which is going to make you a ton of cash, investment banker wins over live music venue owner every day of the week.

The old joke about football clubs applies: "How do you make a million pounds as the owner of a music venue? You start with two million pounds." If there's one thing which unites more or less every venue owner across the country interviewed for this book, it's that **no-one recommends getting into the business because it's a money-spinner.** This is a sector that's got 50 years of history of people not making much money. If you imagine you might suddenly overturn all that because you have an idea that hasn't been done before, you're probably wrong. Every type of model of this venue has been tried and experienced operators will be able to point to the other venues – surviving or otherwise – whose revolutionary new ideas were just the same as yours.

Instead, here are some of the most common reasons we've heard given for running a music venue:

•"There was nowhere to hear live music in the local area, so we thought we'd do something about it.

•"There was nothing at all happening in the area and this seemed like the most fun thing to do."

•"I was already running a bar/restaurant/venue of some sort, and I thought I'd try out live music nights."

•"I just fell into it." (More common than you might expect; from people who have inherited a venue, for example, or started out pouring pints part-time and ended up becoming the boss further down the line.)

•"I love music." (This one is more or less mandatory, to some degree)

And here are some of the perks of the job which people enjoy (note that a ride on a private jet with Beyonce and Jay-Z doesn't appear):

•A sense they're doing something good for their local community, whether that's the audiences who enjoy coming to see gigs or the businesses which might provide a meal before the show or a taxi home after.

•Giving local artists a place to play, which is a reward in itself. And who knows, maybe when one of them turns out to be the next Adele or Coldplay in a few years' time, you can say you helped discover them.

•Getting to see dozens or even hundreds of live shows a year for free, as well as meeting and helping the people behind them.

•Meeting plenty of new and interesting people, and enjoying a working life with a bit of variety.

•Making a living, even if it isn't a fortune. And helping your staff and the artists who pass across your stage make a living too.

•The satisfaction of knowing that this is happening all because of you. Although you have to run your business correctly (read on to find out more), no-one says you don't get to feel at least a bit smug about the good job you'll be doing.

Here's the other key trait which unites everyone who runs a Grassroots Music Venue and makes it work – **they might not know how to do anything else, and they wouldn't want to even if they did.** They love the fact that they do something which is at the centre of the local community and they love the personal relationships they get out of it. The feeling is, you can't bottle the tiny inspirational experiences you get on a day-to-day basis out of running a Grassroots Music Venue; you can't write down how it feels to see a young kid come into the club and hear a band for the very first time, and what the expression on their face is like.

That doesn't mean that by opening a Grassroots Music Venue you can't build a very effective reputation in the music industry that may take you on a different career path later in life, of course. Maybe you might end up working for a label or managing a band, or have a knack for promoting which you spread to other venues in your area. **It can be a stepping stone to something else,** but trying to run a really fantastic local resource in a place you love, have lived in for a long time or have connections to is a career with an intrinsic value all of its own.

It all starts with the actual experience of seeing the band you love walk out onstage and say they're really pleased to be in your venue, of feeling the way audiences react in a close atmosphere. **Putting on a successful gig is a buzz**, and these experiential things contribute to venue ownership being the way that some people just have to live. We could have produced a whole book about how much people hate washing towels, or trying to get that one bloke to go home at closing time, but venue owners still continue to do this even after everyone – including the bank manager – has told them to stop. If you know deep inside what the reasons for that are, then put away the application forms for the MBA and keep reading.



THE ADELPHI, HULL

Founded: 1984
Capacity: 200
Staff: 3 full-time, 5 part-time
Events per year: 250

Paul Jackson, Owner:

"I didn't go to university. I was expelled from school because I was never there. Instead I worked 9 to 5 in a shipping office at Fenner's in Hull and I was fairly cheesed off with it, so I initially started looking for a venue with a couple of other guys who wanted to get into the business too. But I very rapidly realised that I don't like sharing decisions three ways, so I went off myself and got the cheapest place I could find, which was the Adelphi. Against all advice, I took it on. It's an old working men's club which was originally a house, probably, but it opened as a licensed premises in 1918. Our car park was created by the Luftwaffe.

"Doing this has never been easy. It's always been the last thing you'd want to do to make money, but music does inspire a certain passion in people. Within six months we were programming live stuff every night of the week. I wanted a community around the Adelphi, **I wanted to open the kind of place where I'd enjoy spending my time.** I always enjoyed conversations in pubs, even when I was bunking off school, and I wanted that kind of social buzz. I like hearing people say things like, 'I grew up at the Adelphi'.

"I love my city, but that doesn't mean I'm always proud of it. Hull at the time we opened was characterised by all the small-town failings; it was a predominantly white town, it was rare to see a non-white face or hear a foreign accent. I wanted to do something about that, I wanted to create a



cosmopolitan and inclusive space. I'd spent a lot of my time in the '70s and early '80s going to student unions, because that's where all the decent gigs happened.

"I liked the cosmopolitan nature of these places when I was young and I wanted to integrate student audiences with young local audiences. I've been quite successful at doing that over the decades and I think that's contributed towards the city moving into the 21st century. I'm quite proud of that. I always had an interest in music. Even before I started I probably had one of the larger music collections in the city, and I spent all my time going to gigs. If I wasn't going to gigs I'd be wandering around in the country somewhere, which I still do. For me it's either quiet or loud.

"We have a good relationship with local bands, and the scene is thriving in Hull. As for touring bands, I stopped dealing with agents quite a while ago because I don't think they like or need longstanding relationships with promoters. I don't like paying fees in advance. I did it once and lost £1,300 on it, so I won't do it again. I don't like

having tour supports imposed on me. I'll agree to promote a band, but I don't want to do it for a support who are each going to cost me 50 pounds and 50 admissions. Agents move the goalposts too often, so I don't deal with them.

"You've got to contrast an industry which rewards mediocrity with the needs of a venue which stands for the progress of music as an artform, which is being massively ignored at the moment. It's a DIY venue and most of the bands we book are DIY bands. They are their own sound and road crew and are very hardworking. We provide accommodation, we don't enforce a rigid curfew, and we've got a sacrosanct period after the show for merch sales and meeting the band. That's quite nice. We have a lot of great relationships with touring American acts and I do deal with some agents in Europe.

"We've had a history of moans and groans from very small numbers of neighbours. It's always the owner-occupiers who want to double their money (on their property). We've just about managed. The police and council have both doorstepped the neighbours and 99% of them are very supportive of the Adelphi, in fact many of them use it. We're in the Good Beer Guide, we have one of the best bars in the area and a pool table, although we're only open three or four hours a day.

"We're transitioning into a Community Interest Company at the moment. For 35 years I've done pretty much everything. I'm 64 now, I've done my decades of 20 hours a day, seven days a week with no holidays. I can no longer sustain that, so a CIC seemed to be the way forward. There are a lot of talented people around the Adelphi and we're moving forward and evolving. It's happening. **For anyone else who wants to do this I'd say get stuck in, really. There's much to enjoy."**

www.theadelphi.co.uk



02: WHAT IS A 'GRASSROOTS' MUSIC VENUE, ANYWAY?

We're not talking about an arena here, or a concert hall. A **Grassroots Music Venue (GMV)** is the compact basement room beneath a pub, it's the community hall with the blacked-out windows, it's the converted Victorian swimming baths. They aren't like a national chain of coffee shops or supermarkets, where one size fits all and the interiors, fixtures and fittings look broadly the same. **Each one is as different as the locations they're set in and the people who run them,** but they have far more in common than what separates them, and recent efforts, particularly from **Music Venue Trust (MVT)**, are seeking to bring these venues together in a national network.

MVT has a very specific definition of the term 'Grassroots Music Venue', agreed upon at Venues Day 2015 and based on extensive audits of UK music venues. This definition is comparable to the EU-wide definition of similar music venues used by the European network for live music, Live DMV.

MVT's definition is used by Arts Council England, the Department of Digital, Media and Sport and the Mayor of London's Music Venues Rescue Plan of 2015. The full text can be found online (see "MVT's Own Resources" on the Resources page of the website)

1. The 'elephant test'. That musicians and audiences in the town or city think of your venue as a GMV; you have to walk the walk, there's no point in telling everyone how important you are unless it's the truth.

2. A focus on cultural activity is the main purpose of the venue. The music it programmes is the reason it exists, although it might (should?) do other things as well.

3. It's a music business, run by music experts. This feeds into the last point, but with the focus on 'expertise'. Other services like alcohol, food and merchandise are subsidiary and dependent upon music activity.

4. It takes risks with its cultural programme, and that risk-taking is the ignition system of the UK music industry. You're going to programme artists that deserve audiences with no expectation of direct financial reward, and although this might be a loss-making activity, significant economic returns might become available to the UK music industry. You're training the stars of tomorrow, essentially.

5. It's a 'Beacon of Music' and a key generator of night-time economic activity. The presence of a Grassroots Music Venue or venues provides the music activity that inspires towns or cities to be musical, and without it there's no music activity. A GMV attracts audiences who add significant value to other aspects of the night-time economy, such as restaurants, pubs, bars, clubs and transport.

6. A GMV 'plays nicely with others'. It occupies an important role within its local community and is open to further networking.

A GMV is a part of the local community, and not just the music community. **It's probably providing more than just live music,** it might be a hub of local activity. For example comedy nights, theatre shows, arthouse film screenings, a place to meet and eat, or a space for charity and community events. Where GMVs branch out like this is an important element of running a venue in the present day. These aren't just nice add-ons to have, but may be essential income generators and important ways to develop community goodwill in the face of outdated ideas, like having a local music venue means biker gangs will soon follow.

At the same time, **your GMV is an entry point for people who might be performing their first ever show**, which is hugely important both to the aspirations of people in your local community and the music industry at large. We don't want to over-romanticise this, but it's music and it's there to be over-romanticised. Even if someone only performs one show ever, it might be a huge part of their life that they get to stand up and perform a song they've written. And believe it or not, that's how the music industry makes its money; by people walking onto a stage for the first time, deciding they like it and then making a career for themselves.

Some first-time musicians may pack it all in and do that MBA we spoke about. Others might become world-famous, but what unites them all is that once upon a time, they stood on a stage just like yours and gave it a go. It might not have made you rich, but the fact you were there to offer that chance is what keeps this industry going.





BOOTLEG SOCIAL, BLACKPOOL

Founded: 2014
Capacity: 300-350
Staff: 1 full-time, 5 part-time
Events per year: 60-80

Stephen Skelly, Joint Owner:

"I'm the joint director and owner of the venue with James Ogilvie, but I'm also the sound engineer, promoter, manager, cleaner and many other things besides. By trade I was – and still am – a web developer, but I also promoted and ran a lot of gigs and the odd club night while I was at uni, and I continued this when I came home to Blackpool. Eventually I opened my own venue, whose story goes back a long way. The Bootleg Social is in a basement. It used to be Blackpool's only indie club, which me and my friends used to frequent when we started going out at 18. It hosted the odd local gig, and so was the first place I played guitar in public.

"At the time I ran a website called Blackpool Bands and through this I got to know the venue owner quite well, so I knew what they were doing would be a dream job for me. Roll on a few years and the place had changed hands, fallen into disrepair and closed down, going on and off the market as people looked at it, found it to be in too bad a state and did nothing with it. In early 2014 it appeared on the market again, and at this point in my life – I was 26 – I had a bit of money saved up to buy a house. But I mentioned to a couple of lifelong friends in similar situations about the idea of turning the place into a bar and music venue, which at the time the town was completely lacking.

"None of us had any real idea about running a venue, we just saw a gaping hole in the market and decided we'd give it a go. We put in an offer for the venue and started a lengthy process with solicitors sorting out the terms of our lease for it. The venue's original premises licence had expired and couldn't be reinstated without having to make a new application, so this was another challenge we faced. In fairness our licensing department were quite helpful, along with the local police force, in helping us sort this.

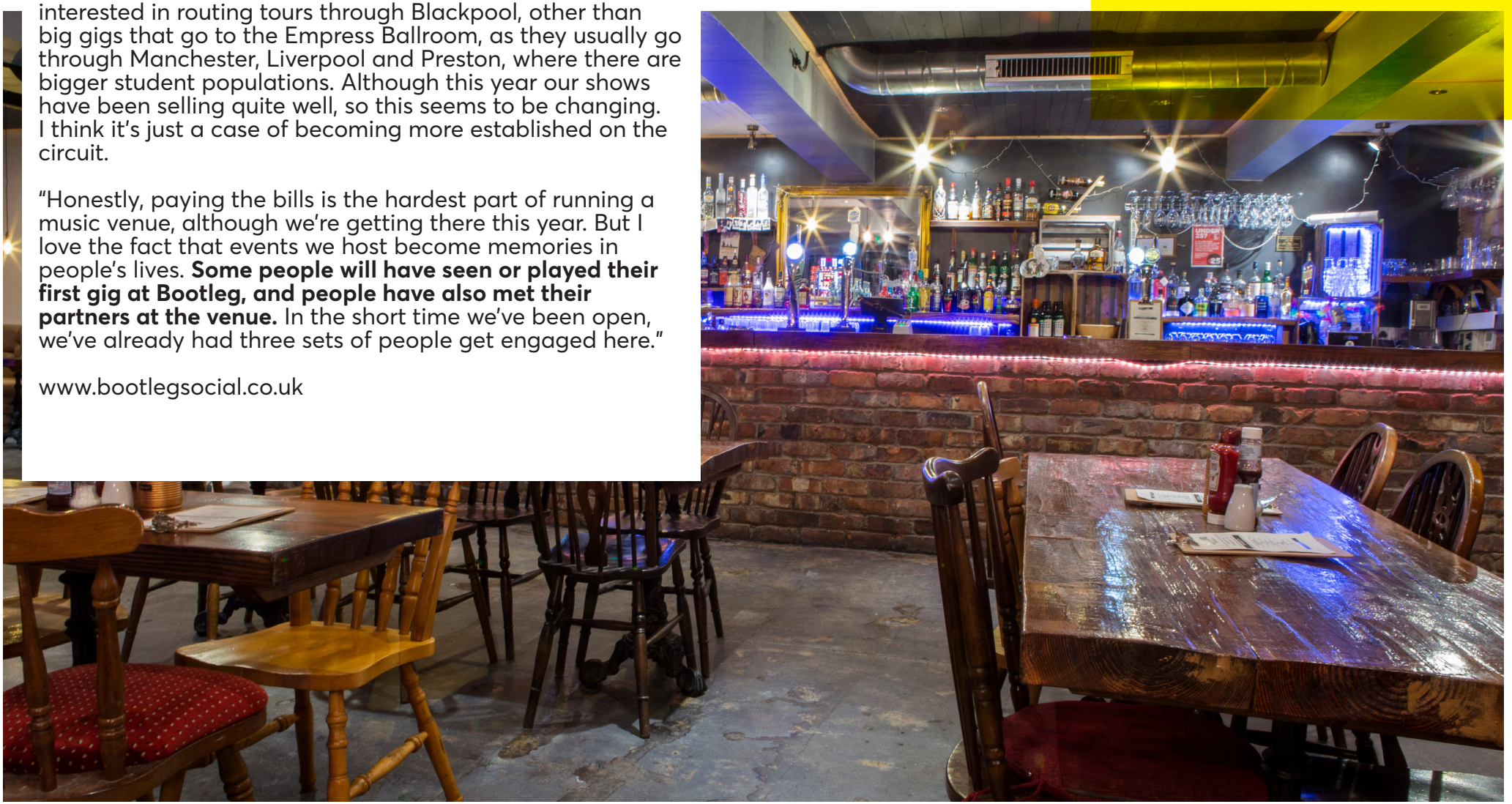
"Six months later we got the keys to the venue. Our plan was always to basically strip it out and start again, but we had no idea how much work or how many surprises were actually involved in doing so. We had to have a whole new air conditioning system installed and the venue required a full electrical rewire, which cut massively into our budget and meant we did a lot of the building work ourselves. We took over the venue in August 2014, then spent four full months working every hour of every day turning the venue into what it is now.

"With a lot of help from friends and family **we finally opened in December, initially as just a late bar and music venue opening from Thursday to Saturday.** Although in the first twelve months **we got approached by people wanting to put on other types of events such as live art, theatre and poetry nights, so we diversified towards becoming a community hub for creative and artistic events too.** No national promoters or booking agents have seemed really

interested in routing tours through Blackpool, other than big gigs that go to the Empress Ballroom, as they usually go through Manchester, Liverpool and Preston, where there are bigger student populations. Although this year our shows have been selling quite well, so this seems to be changing. I think it's just a case of becoming more established on the circuit.

"Honestly, paying the bills is the hardest part of running a music venue, although we're getting there this year. But I love the fact that events we host become memories in people's lives. **Some people will have seen or played their first gig at Bootleg, and people have also met their partners at the venue.** In the short time we've been open, we've already had three sets of people get engaged here."

www.bootlegsocial.co.uk



03: FIND THE RIGHT VENUE FOR YOU (AND EVERYONE ELSE)

Where to open your brand new GMV is without doubt in the top two or three decisions you're going to make in your new career as a venue owner and will have a bearing on everything, from the identity of the place to the type of bands you book and customers you welcome – and your ultimate success.

We don't want to go all Kirstie and Phil here, but **location really is extraordinarily important.** It helps if you're able to show your working here, to be able to explain to yourself or to anyone who asks the precise steps you took to set up your venue where you have. The main question you want to ask is 'Why is this a good place to start a GMV?' Here are various factors which should be informing your answer as much as possible:

Do you have the right venue? Are you *really* sure?

Like looking for a house, we know that you'll just know when you find what feels like the right venue for you - it'll be that pub basement room, the community hall with the windows which you can fasten curtains to, or the converted Victorian swimming baths with masses of potential which you fall in love with. You might know which end of the room you want to build the stage at, but have you thought about everything else the interior might need? Do you know where the dressing room(s), the staff room, the bar, the keg storage and the cloakroom are going to go? Where do customers enter and exit, or go for a smoke before the headliners come on? Where is the band's gear loaded in? Does any of this entering or exiting the building by day or night cause any exterior problems; for example can the band get their van parked close enough in the afternoon, or are you turning your customers out into a housing development at 11pm?

Who are your neighbours?

It's that housing development thing you want to watch out for in particular. Noise complaints have been the bane of a great number of venue owners' lives around the UK, and have been instrumental in closing many venues down. National and devolved governments around the country have made positive noises about introducing the Agent of Change principle (broadly, that an existing venue shouldn't be disadvantaged by an improperly soundproofed new housing development), but this cuts both ways. If you're the new opening and you have any residential neighbours, you'll want to get state-of-the-art soundproofing and introduce as stringent planning and rules as possible to try and mitigate against antisocial behaviour. Even then you may not completely cover your back. We'll come back to this.

What makes your neighbourhood or town a good fit for a GMV?

Research is possible here, but nothing quite matches up to the benefits of local knowledge – either your own or that of a trusted partner or colleague – and a bit of common sense. Look and ask around. Have you found the ideal building in a sleepy residential area with not much to speak of by way of bars or restaurants? If so, are you going to be just what the locals are looking for to liven things up, or will you be mistrusted and unwanted? Are bus links non-existent, are you half an hour's walk from the nearest tube stop, or can the place only be accessed on foot through an unlit industrial estate?

Who is your audience, and how close to you are they?

Is your town filled with young commuters looking for something to do nearby, or is it mostly elderly retirees? Not

that the latter rules out starting a venue where you are, but whatever the demographics are, you have to target the audience to the music and vice versa. For example, one promoter in Scotland has set up semi-permanent home in the back room of a hotel in a large village, and does nicely out of booking still-touring classic rock acts from the '60s and '70s, for an audience of predominantly over-50s. As with nearly everything we discuss here, **there are no hard and fast rules**, only things which might badly trip you up if you don't give them some thought.

Who is the competition?

You live in a moderately-sized town and you want to start a 500-capacity venue which books a mix of cross-genre touring acts. Yet just a few miles up the road is a larger town which contains a 500-capacity venue and which is well-established on the national touring circuit. Now, we're not saying that your place is doomed to failure, but it just got a whole lot harder to make a success of it.

A useful piece of advice here – and we know it may be tricky, when you're only just starting to think like a venue owner – **is to think like a tour booker.** If a booker is putting together a national tour for a buzz band who have hit the stage where they're going to be playing 500-capacity venues, they'll either go back to established venues and towns where they know the band are going to get a good reception, or they'll go looking for 'gaps in the map'.

So look at the map yourself, and the other venues on it. Do you want to set up a few miles down the road or in the next street from a similar venue? Then you're going to find it very tough to overtake their reputation any time soon, and they won't be making it any easier for you if they see you as competition. On the other hand, do you have nobody else doing what you want to do in your area and a large captive audience just waiting to be entertained? Then you're probably on the right track, and bookers will be pleased to hear from you.

Remember, think laterally

As we've said, GMVs aren't one-size-fits-all and finding the right place to start one can be as much about finding a gap in the market as a gap in the map. Maybe you live in a large university city with plenty of venues, but you still can't find a place to hear the kind of marginal and experimental sounds you're really into? Then you might be the person to start it.

Or, if you're in that big town with a 500-cap venue already well-established, what the place might really need instead is a bar basement which fits no more than 100 people, where local bands can play and smaller touring bands can get a start? If you know the owners and they're good people, that bigger venue might even be able to help with contacts, because any touring band which has a good time in your town playing to 75 people will likely want to come back and play to a larger audience once their album's out and become a hit.



THE UNDERGROUND, BRADFORD

Founded: 2016
Capacity: 400
Staff: 2 full-time, 5 part-time
Events per year: 120



Nigel Booth, Director:

"I'm actually a building contractor by trade, a commercial builder. **I was asked to be a keyholder for the building, which used to be an old music venue until around eight years earlier. I fell in love with it and decided to give running it as a venue a whirl myself.** I absolutely adore live music, although I can't play it for toffee. The Bradford music scene had died off by this point, to be honest. You could only see music in bars. They were really good, but none of them could fit more than 60 or 70 people.

Fortunately my other business has been able to prop the cost of this up, to an extent – the rent, the rates, PRS, kitting the place out, all that. I've used my own money to get it going and I don't think I'll see much of that back, but if this was purely a business venture for me then I don't think I would have done it, because financially it wasn't viable. I'm doing it because I have a passion for it. **Let's say I'm at a point in my life where I thought I needed a challenge, and I'm very passionate about Bradford as well, which helps.**

"The first year was hard, but we're getting there slowly but surely. We're trying to do new things. We want to work with young people and colleges. We're applying for Arts Council funding to do that. **We're very keen to work with local musicians, and to give them a home where they can develop. There are a few bands who play here now who actually have the potential to make it in some way, which is a nice feeling, knowing that you've helped them.** We're doing a good job.

"At the moment we're only open Thursday, Friday and Saturday, but we've just put a new kitchen in, so we're going to do food, we're going to start comedy nights on Sunday, and we've had a couple of theatre productions in. We want to do more of that. I'm also building a crazy golf course for the local council, and I think we're going to open the space midweek as a crazy golf place. That sounds strange, but it's just diversifying – looking at the target audience, working out what the people want, and trying to figure out how we can sustain the venue and give it a bit of a boost.

"Unfortunately we open as a live music venue about as much as we can justify at the moment, but we're still spreading the word and trying to let people outside of Bradford know about us. You can open for midweek gigs in Leeds, but they have a close student population, whereas we're a bit out on our own. We're predominantly a music venue, though – we have a good PA with heritage, it came out of the Cockpit in Leeds – and that's what we want to do more of. I think we're doing something right, because we were named the third best music venue in Yorkshire last year.

"We want to get on the map and attract bigger bands to Bradford, ideally so we can put local talent on alongside them; although people do seem to be more fickle about what they go and see these days. It upsets me a bit that

I know when I put a tribute band or a DJ on they'll always draw a crowd, but the industry won't survive if new bands don't find places to play. This venue isn't about making money, it's about giving something back and supporting those local artists.

"We've brought people from overseas to see bands here and there have been nights when the hotels around us have been full, but I know the council doesn't have any money to support us. All they can really do is talk about us and advertise us. **I also don't want to be competing with any venues near us who are doing something similar, because then you split your audience.** I don't personally believe that alcohol should be supporting live music, but there you go, you have to depend on it.

"Leeds is seen as being a better, safer city to go out in, so it's all about changing people's perceptions of Bradford at the moment. I'm excited about the future. I mean, some days I do think, 'why did I do this?', but then I get just one gig that makes it all worthwhile. We recently had a great show by Tony Wright from Terrorvision, an old Bradford band, and it made me realise just what a musical heritage we have here. It's nice to help rekindle that."

www.undergroundbradford.com



04: HOW DO YOU GET INTO YOUR VENUE?

You've found the right space in the right place, but how do you make it yours? Or at least get the right to use it for what you want, which is opening a GMV and putting on a bunch of outstanding musicians. **Again, sorting out the correct lease or ownership** is a **hugely important** part of the bedrock upon which your business and your future stands. It can often be a major reason why GMVs get into trouble and fold later in life.

If you move into a building on what's pretty much a handshake leasehold, then you won't have many leaseholder rights and your GMV could be fatally compromised from the start. There are owners out there who found a building that was abandoned, shook hands with the person who owns it and said "I'll put some bands on here and let's see what happens."

Now, many years later, all the problems associated with that arrangement could have come home to roost. For example, they don't have the required agreement with the owner to do what they're doing, they don't have the appropriate licences in place for the premises they have, or they have no protection in place if the owner decides to sell up or convert the place into flats.

When you're making arrangements to take on your premises, here are some important points to be aware of and look out for:

Owning your own premises is great, but…

If you own your venue, there are no worries to be had about your owner deciding a block of flats looks more attractive and turfing you out to get the diggers in. Putting the shoe on the other foot, owning bricks and mortar will rarely be a bad investment if you're in a prime site, and you might be free to act with a bit more confidence and assurance (but not foolhardiness!) if this is the case.

There are no major 'buts' with this plan in general, although how many aspiring venue owners have access to enough cash to go snapping up a big chunk of property? Not so many, unless perhaps you're bequeathed the venue or you manage to find it at a bargain price. Otherwise you'll likely have to go down the leasehold route (see below).

In the meantime, even those with access to their own property won't have carte blanche to do what they want. Until you have all the necessary licences and permits to run the venue you want to, all you have is four walls and some good acoustics.

For reference, MVT's 'Understanding Small Music Venues' report of 2015 found that, of the 109 venues across the UK which responded to the survey, 78 weren't the freeholders of their building, and of those 44.87% had long-term leaseholds, 3.85% had short-term leaseholds and 28.21% had renewable tenancy agreements.

Make the lease work for you, as much as possible.

Naturally, you don't get to dictate the terms of your lease to the person who owns the property, but you do get to make a decision on whether you sign it or not. So negotiate. Ask them what they'll be happy with, tell them what you need in order to run your business . Here are some things you'll want to think about in terms of subjects to discuss:

- **Will you be able to afford it?** Presumably now you'll have costings, budget estimates and the like. Let the landlord know what you can afford and when you can afford it, or if they're driving a hard bargain and you're keeping your cards close

to your chest, at least set yourself a realistic rental limit and don't go over it.

- **Will you be allowed to make the necessary alterations to the building?** Putting in a stage, building lighting and sound rigs, putting in a bar, maybe even making structural changes if need be. Again, talk around this, come to compromises if necessary. Whatever you do, do NOT fail to bring this up and then go and do it all anyway. Or no-one will cry when you're kicked out without notice.

- **Make sure you have some protection,** in terms of notice to quit times, against rent hikes and any other unannounced and onerous obligations which may be placed on you. It's still the owner's property, and they quite rightly hold most of the cards in what happens to their premises, but you have a number of legal rights which can help give you a certain amount of peace of mind. Think about them now, and hopefully avoid as many disputes as you can in future.

- **Get legal advice and put detailed agreements down on paper.** No explanation needed here. Just a very firm reminder to do it.

And very important:

Be honest.

We know you're desperate to get your first band on-stage, but if the plan is to run five nights of music a week and you tell the property owner you're opening a bar which might occasionally have a little live music, your problems are all in the post and winging their way to you. Make sure you get the kind of lease that ensures you can run a GMV in that kind of building, tell the owner what you plan to do, explain to them exactly what it means. If you're upfront and they don't want you to do it in their place, imagine how they would have reacted if you'd fibbed to them. Being above board in all things is essential as a GMV owner, but your landlord is – aside from HMRC – the person you want to be most faultlessly honest with.



FIERY BIRD, WOKING

Founded: 2018
Capacity: 1,000
Staff: 1 full-time, 24 part-time and casual
Events per year: 150



Elaine McGinty, CEO and co-founder of Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC:

"**I had no choice about opening a music venue, because we didn't have one in Woking.** When (the Woking-raised) Paul Weller came to a photography exhibition at our local museum, he pointed this out and people moaned about it. **Now, never say something like 'instead of moaning about it we should just get on with it ourselves' out loud on any form of social media, because then everyone knows and you have to get on with it yourself!**

"For 20 years I've worked on various community development projects, as well as singing in my own bands. We (Elaine and Phoenix Cultural Centre's co-founder Joe Buckley) started doing this in 2011, when the town was - and still is – regenerating. We have a population of 100,000, a great history of music, a diverse community, shops and national chains coming in, and unused empty buildings, but there was still nowhere for bands to play. People in the midst of this regeneration who didn't have money were feeling left behind.

"At first we negotiated a small shop premises with a local landlord in 2013, and set up an acoustic venue and community space. We held book and CD launches, training for people who are out of work, affordable creative writing, guitar and vocal workshops, women's groups, beginner's open mic nights and private hire. **Then we put it to the council that it'd be a good use of an unused building to make a grassroots arts space that reflected the community and gave people an alternative to the current night time culture** – which is basically falling out of bars or drinking coffee in one of the numerous chains.

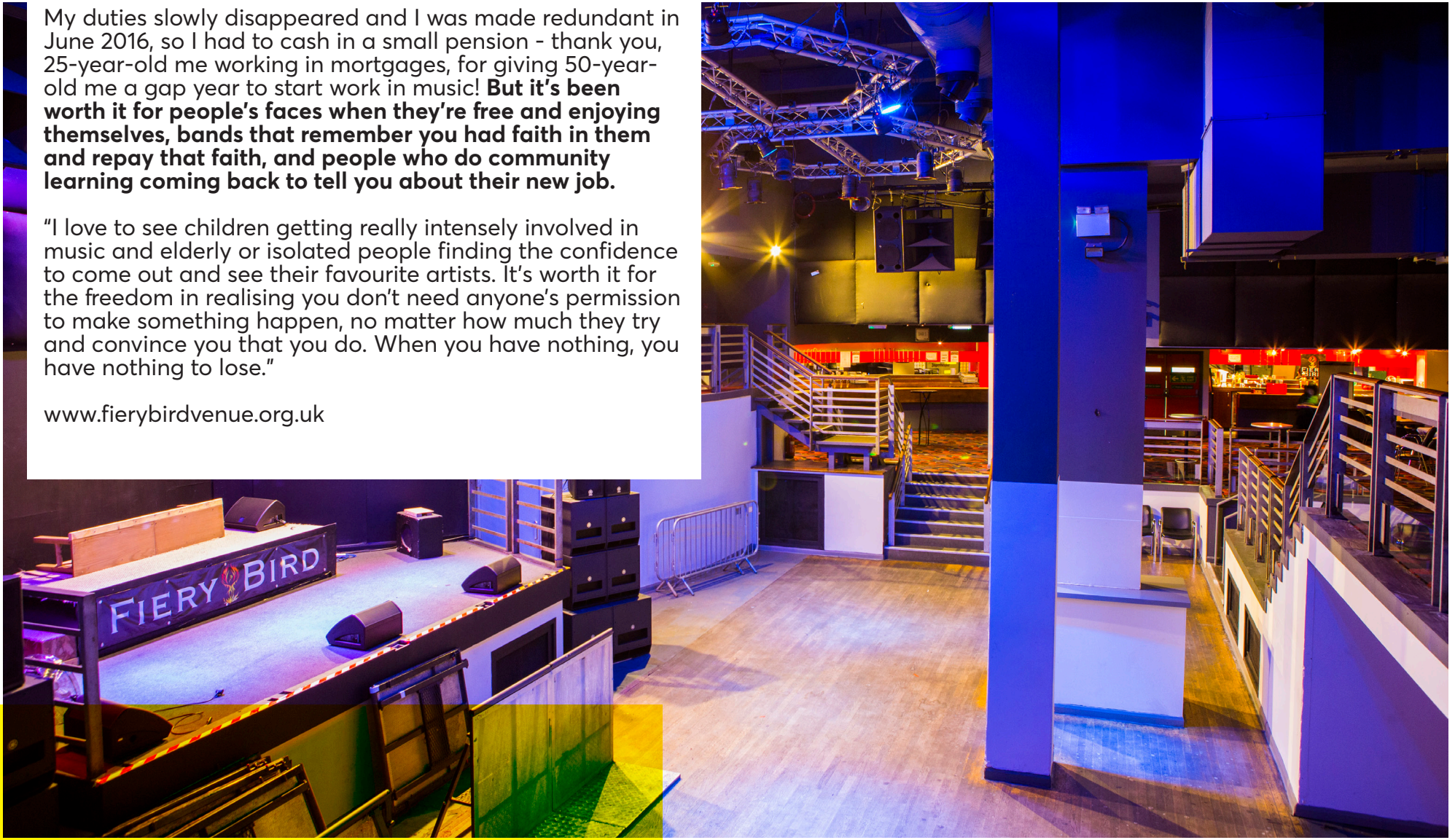
"We've been lucky with local press. One of the papers started a campaign to get behind us years ago and they've followed and championed our progress ever since. **We now have a 1,000 capacity venue** – a former nightclub and before that an old supermarket – attached to a conference centre, hotel, Laserquest and bowling alley, with pubs and bars around us, about five minutes from Woking train station. **We have the building at peppercorn rent from Woking Council until March 2020, when it's being knocked down. We have two years to prove the town needs a live music venue for touring bands and new talent.**

"It's been a struggle. Apparently we were the longest lease negotiation the solicitors had ever dealt with. It took as long as the lease itself. I also lost my job in the meantime.

My duties slowly disappeared and I was made redundant in June 2016, so I had to cash in a small pension - thank you, 25-year-old me working in mortgages, for giving 50-year-old me a gap year to start work in music! **But it's been worth it for people's faces when they're free and enjoying themselves, bands that remember you had faith in them and repay that faith, and people who do community learning coming back to tell you about their new job.**

"I love to see children getting really intensely involved in music and elderly or isolated people finding the confidence to come out and see their favourite artists. It's worth it for the freedom in realising you don't need anyone's permission to make something happen, no matter how much they try and convince you that you do. When you have nothing, you have nothing to lose."

www.fierybirdvenue.org.uk



05. GET THE RIGHT LICENCE AND COMPLIANCE IN PLACE

For years the plan for a music venue owner has been to get any licence they can, any planning consent they can, and accept whatever restrictions there might be in terms of compliance for security, opening hours, and so on. The main aim was to try and get venues open, and people have accepted the most extraordinary conditions on their licences. One well-known London venue, in fact, even has stipulations on its elderly licence about the appropriate dress for customers to wear.

Now we're in 2019 and the whole industry has professionalised to the point that we're starting to get an idea of what a professionally-run venue looks like. This means we can see how, much like selecting the correct location, **getting the licensing and planning consent right from the outset can have a huge effect on why venues eithersucceed or fail**. Put simply, if you put a venue in a good place with a good licence and it's well run, particularly when it comes to compliance with health and safety and the like, those tend to be the venues that are doing better in every way.

Part of this is that these venue owners aren't constantly running around trying to deliver something they agreed to on their licence, purely because they were so desperate to get the place open. Faced with desperation of local people to get the live music venue back into their town, or to open the first one ever, they might literally agree to anything, and then they're surprised when the venue's total capacity is 60 instead of 500.

The type of licence required varies depending on whether you are in England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland as the laws governing alcohol and venues differ. Here's a rough guide to what to apply for, though please note that the details, times and capacities here may be inaccurate for your area:

- **Premises Licence** – If you're putting a gig on (or playing recorded music, staging comedy acts, showing a film and so on) you'll need the appropriate premises licence. In England and Wales you would specify all proposed activities, including Entertainment and the selling of Alcohol, that you wish to provide on the application for a new premises, or if you are taking over an existing premises.

- **Entertainment Licence** – In Scotland and Northern Ireland you may need one of these too to put on live music. In England and Wales, since the Live Music Act came into effect in 2012, there are certain exemptions, in order to make things easier for venues just like yours to operate. For example, you may not need an Entertainment Licence if your events start after 8am and finish before 11pm, are for audiences of fewer than 500, and you have an alcohol licence in place. Speaking of which…

- **Sale of Alcohol Licence** – Again, you'll need a registration to sell alcohol, but you may not need to apply for a separate licence, depending on how your business works. Essentially, if you have a Premises Licence, then you need to have a Personal Licence holder – who will generally be you, as owner – authorised to oversee the sale of alcohol as part of your ongoing business. In Scotland and Northern Ireland this is a separate licence, granted by the local authority or the Courts. In Northern Ireland new alcohol licences are very difficult to obtain.

- **Late Night Entertainment** – If you're going to be operating and serving after 11pm, you'll need to make separate licensing arrangements.

However, much like Sale of Alcohol, this can be added to your ongoing Premises Licence rather than reapplied for each time.

- **Temporary Event Notice** – You shouldn't need one of these to run your venue, but you might if, for example, you want to put on a small summer festival one Sunday in a tent in the beer garden or on the square across the road, or extend your existing licensable hours to host one off clubs nights, etc. In this case speak to your local licensing authority for the appropriate application forms. You must apply in advance of any events as there are normally strict time deadlines and late applications will simply be rejected.

- **PRS for Music and PPL Licences** – If you're going to be playing any music in your venue, live or recorded (and you will be, right?) there is a legal requirement to ensure that the writers and performers of the music are paid for use of their copyright. In the UK this is normally administered by the acquisition of a licence from a collections agency. Both PRS for Music (Formerly the Performing Rights Society) and PPL (Phonographic Performance Limited) licence the public performance of music on behalf of record companies and the musicians who wrote and performed it. In 2018 these two organisations formed a joint venture to create a single licence known as The Music Licence.

The terms and licence conditions vary depending on the policies of your local authority and/or your national or devolved administration, so the best advice we have is to get onto their website or give them a call to check what's required.

When applying for a new licence you must detail the licensable hours and activities that are being sought. It also gives you the opportunity to describe the steps you intend to take to ensure that the licence sought does not negatively impact on your surroundings, via nuisance, increasing crime, being unsafe and causing harm to young clientele. It is vital that this element of the application is the main focus of your time and effort as it is the key document when considering the application. Any steps offered in your application should be specific to the venue, be able to become enforceable licence conditions and be drafted with reference to the local authority's licensing policy.

If your application receives objections your local authority's licensing board, in consultation with the various council departments for Noise, Health and Safety, as well as the Police and the Fire Brigade, can also add additional conditions to your licence in order to facilitate what it sees as the smooth running of your venue and the area around it. These can be negotiated until such time as a final decision has been made and you just have to get on with it. In addition, local residents are also consulted on licence applications so measures can be imposed to appease their concerns. They may include some, all or none of:



- Defined opening hours
- An agreement of what the maximum capacity of the venue will be
- The need for security on the door, particularly at busy times
- Any defined minimum age limits, beyond the normal
- Assurances about noise and disturbance levels, both inside and outside the show, and before and after the set.

Also remember, just like your landlord, **be honest with the**



council's licensing team on this. If you're found to be in breach of any of the terms of your licence, this is a big deal which may result in your venue being shut down or severely restricted.

It is important that the **planning consent** also reflects the permitted use or proposed licensing use of the premises and the hours of operation. If not, a planning application will be required. Appropriate planning consent is generally expected to be in place when seeking an alcohol and regulated entertainment licence (these are separate entities so you could have the right licence and still have issues with planning consent). Although retrospective planning could be applied for, if this is not granted then all your hard work at the venue would have been wasted.

A note on the **Holder of licence** - ensure that your premises licence is held by a legal entity or applied for by a legal entity. A premises licence lapses in a case of death, incapacity or insolvency of the holder, or even if the holder ceases to be entitled to work in the UK, if no valid application for transfer of the licence has been made. Therefore, should you be considering doing any future changes to licence, always ensure that the licence is transferred prior to any changes as they can be difficult to acquire on the same terms.

The MVT team can help with pre-advice on licensing and planning so don't feel like you are doing it all alone.

And remember, a licence isn't all you need to sort out…

It might be a very specific and essential requirement for a GMV, but you're also a business just like any other, and there are a number of other areas of compliance which you might or must have to deal with. We won't go into them in detail, because there's plenty of advice available through HMRC, at www.greatbusiness.gov.uk, through a trusted accountant and so on, but here are some pointers:

- **Register with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)** to facilitate the payment of any taxes due; an accountant can tell you what these are, or there are guides on HMRC's site if you'd rather do it yourself. But remember, you want to be comprehensive and accurate with your taxes, so we'd suggest you hire a professional unless you're very confident you know what you're doing.

- **Get business insurance cover.**

- **Set up a business bank account.** It makes it far easier to refer back to your business transactions, and having one is essential good practice for any business greater than a single employee.

- **Keep good accounts, and hire an accountant if necessary**. Record all of your incomings and outgoings, and keep receipts, both for tax purposes and general budgeting and forward planning.

- **Register your company with Companies House.** And while you're at it, register the internet domain name you want and the social media accounts you'd like to use.

- **Make sure you're compliant with regulations** on health and safety, data protection, employment law, etc – and if you don't know what they are, research them!

- **Decide on the structure of your company.** Which brings us to…

Consider Setting Up a Community Interest Company (CIC)

If you want to set up as a traditional business, there are three options open to you in terms of the structure you use:

1 Limited Company

An organisation that you can set up to run your business – it's responsible in its own right for everything it does and it's finances are separate to your personal finances. Any profit it makes is owned by the company, after it pays corporation tax. The company can then share its profits.

2 Sole Trader

Where you run your own business as an individual. You can keep all your business's profits after you've paid tax on them. You can employ staff. 'Sole trader' means you're responsible for the business, not that you have to work alone. You're personally responsible for any losses your business makes.

3 Business Partnership

Where you and your business partner (or partners) share responsibility for your business. You can share all your business's profits between the partners. Each partner pays



tax on their personal share of the profits.

All of the above are useful if you're a profit-making business, but MVT's research suggests that music venues will spend 130% of the money they solely make from running cultural events in putting those events on. In other words, on average the industry at this level is losing money putting gigs on. Here is how MVT suggests managing your company structure in light of this:

A Community Interest Company (CIC) is a type of company introduced by the UK Government in 2005 under the Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004, designed for social enterprises that want to use their profits and assets for the public good. A social enterprise being an organisation that applies commercial strategies to maximise improvements in human and environmental well-being; in this context, human well-being includes the presentation of cultural opportunities to the public, just like that being carried out by GMVs.

We suggest creating a Community Interest Company (CIC) to deliver all your cultural activities, from booking through promoting, ticketing, production, and every aspect of putting the artist on stage. This is not a tax evasion or business rate management scheme; it is correctly putting in place a company structure to reflect what it is GMVs actually do.

There are some trade-offs, such as having the complete freedom to do what you want to do, in order to comply with the intent of a CIC, but most GMVs these days aren't run by a single individual who insists that only their vision is the one that meets the needs of their local community. They are collaborative spaces, run in great part by volunteers. The bar at a GMV is a commercial activity; it might make a profit. The cultural activity is an inherently charitable activity; it cannot make a profit, and in practice, even if it does, it simply invests that back into additional cultural activities.

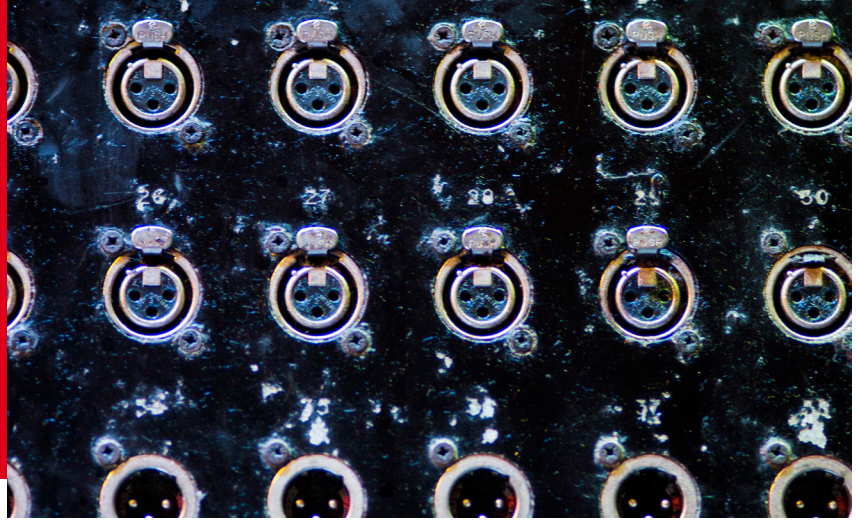


Company structures that reflect the reality of the two roles of a building that houses a GMV can remove the VAT burden from tickets, and create a conversation with the local authority to remove the burden of business rates for the activity that is delivered by a CIC, whilst leaving commercial activity, the bar, food, merch, where it belongs; in the commercial profit-making sector.

These are practical outcomes that can support Music Venues to continue to offer great cultural opportunities to their local communities. GMVs should adopt this model, not because it might involve much needed tax or rate relief, but because it is the correct one and you are entitled to the support that the Government has put in place for you.

MOLES, BATH

Founded: 1978
Capacity: 220 for live shows, 320 for club nights
Staff: 6 full-time, 15 part-time
Events per year: 150



Tom Maddicott, Co-owner and Managing Director:

"I was a full-time DJ, music producer and promoter in 2012 when I took over Moles. I'd been involved with the club since 1992, when I was the Assistant Manager, and then went on to be a resident DJ and promoter here. In 2012 the company which bought the club in 2009 went into administration and rather than see the place go under I got in touch with the original owner and we bought it back from the administrator. I basically couldn't bear to see Moles go, because I knew the potential that was here.

"We had to build the reputation back up again. There were still some busy nights – Moles has been a club as well, for as long as I can remember - but for it to work with the rents around here then it needed a lot more consistency. **I brought in a strong team who I trusted and knew would do a great job, and they did.** A fairly recent development is that it's also now a bar from 5pm on because we wanted to make use of the space as it was just sitting there doing nothing.

"I don't think there's much that isn't tough about running a venue, but I knew what I was getting into having worked in venues all my adult life. **There's still a lot that most people wouldn't know about, though, everything from health and safety to dealing with licensing, residents' associations, agents, managers, press, IT, technicians… the list goes on.** The fire that hit us in 2014 would be pretty hard to beat as the worst thing that's happened so far, but getting the venue reopened again after it, following 21 months of hard work, was very special.

"Bath is a city of around 100,000. There are several other clubs so there's competition on that front, but no-one really does what we do and the other live venues here are either little pubs or bigger venues of over 700 cap, so they don't really affect us. Sometimes it can be tricky to attract bands, as being so close to Bristol they often go there. With our reputation and history, though, they often want to play at Moles.

"The very obvious thing about dealing with bands is to look after them well. We have a dedicated artist liaison who greets them, shows them around and looks after them - doing this simple thing means they want to come back, and they then tell their agents, management, and so on. Word soon spreads that it's a great venue to play. **With customers it's the same. It's about making them feel welcome, providing a safe environment and putting on great nights**. It's not rocket science, **but it does require a lot of work and attention to detail and a lot of places get it wrong.**

"Being in the heart of a city there are always going to be new residents who move in and decide they don't want to live next to a club, so they complain. After the fire we even had a group of residents trying to stop us reopening, but as we hadn't done anything wrong that fizzled out. The main thing is communication, as any issues can usually be resolved – I meet monthly with the heads of the local residents' associations and have a very good relationship

with them. **If you run the place professionally and adhere to your licence conditions then it makes it harder for people to bring anything serious against you.**

"People are generally supportive, though. We're an historic venue that most people in the city grew up with. We've been here for 40 years - it's our anniversary this year – so lots of people grew up, met their partner, made lifelong friends or found their favourite band here, and the list of who's played is just phenomenal. The building is listed, so it isn't easy to make it more accessible, but we do everything we can and have staff on hand to help people. We have gender neutral toilets and we run a scheme for women who feel uncomfortable or at risk from someone, whereby they can discretely contact staff who will get them to a safe place and ascertain the problem. We're working closely with the University on an anti-harassment campaign called Never OK.

"There are reasons to be optimistic, as year on year we're improving all the time. It would be great, though, if the music industry could support grassroots venues more, as without us it's going to be hard to bring through the arena and stadium sellers of tomorrow. If they put money into infrastructure to bring all venues up to a certain standard and supported us by funding some smaller tours from bigger artists, that would make a huge difference."

www.moles.co.uk



06. WHAT SHOULD THE FACILITIES LOOK LIKE IN A GOOD GRASSROOTS MUSIC VENUE?

Once upon a time, what we're now starting to think of as Grassroots Music Venues proudly wore the description 'toilet venue' like a badge of honour. Most of the small venues on the UK-wide 'toilet circuit' would see it as a positive that they could take the most basic of situations and turn it into a venue where the 'magic' could happen; where gigs could happen in a room with next to nothing but a PA, a working lightbulb and space to sell some beer.

As romantic as the whole CBGBs vibe is, however – and we're not denying that pop-up venues which are thrown up like this still have an air of edgy cool – anyone who wants to run a GMV as a long-term business is going to have to pay attention to both the greatly changed demands of licensing and environmental health law, and the vastly different tastes of young gig-goers. Put simply, **where there's a world of personal and communal entertainment to be had by just sitting at home, you have to offer at least some of the comforts of home** in your GMV.

So what needs to be on your agenda, in terms of necessary facilities?

Never mind opening a 'toilet venue', how are your toilets?

Festivals are having to deal with the generational change in expectation around watching live music, and venues are beginning to get on top of it as well. Just like any bar or restaurant, a good method of checking the quality of the place is by going to the bathroom. If you're still happy to use a damp, paint-peeling cupboard with no room to move and a trough along one wall in the gents, your customers are likely to think you don't care. The basics should be obvious; lots of space; cubicles with working locks; hand soap, hand dryers or towels and toilet roll which is well stocked and working; functioning lightbulbs. You should also take note of the increased awareness around gender-neutral toilets with private cubicles which can be used by anyone. As well as helping customers who don't fit into non-binary gender roles feel safe and welcome, you might also be able to save space in your layout by not having to portion out male and female toilet spaces.

Where possible, accessibility should come as standard

Not just a wheelchair ramp: external and internal doors which are wide enough to fit a wheelchair, a space where customers with mobility issues or who can't remain standing can take refuge and watch the gig, or a disabled toilet space. These are all among the least elements you can design in when you're fitting out your GMV. Otherwise, what can you do for customers who have visual or hearing impairments? Can you fit a hearing loop, for example, or get the drinks list laid out on the bar braille-printed as well? These aren't revolutionary customer service facilities by any means, but the expectation of customers that as many as possible will be available – if not all of them in any newly-built establishment – has become greater than ever, as has the willingness of any good business owner to widen their customer base and let as many people as possible enjoy what they have to offer. Don't beat yourself up if you've taken on a basement bar which is only accessed by a narrow winding stone staircase with no room to put a lift in – but if you can easily design in these elements from the start at little extra cost, there's absolutely no reason not to.

Even venues with challenging physical environments can do something positive about access by creating an Online Access Statement to be open and honest about how accessible the building is. The UK experts on access in music are Attitude is Everything. Visit their website for up to date guidance on good practice: www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/resources

You're going to have a bar, so better make it the best you possibly can
For a long time, the bulk sale of alcohol has essentially been propping up live music, but in 2019 alcohol consumption is on the way down, particularly amongst younger people, for whom it's dropping off the edge of a cliff. The answer to this isn't as simple as just hiking the prices of pints and spirits up and hoping for a bigger profit. You should be conscious of the fact that people - especially younger people, once again - are making healthy lifestyle choices, and may even take offence at explicit attempts to ply them with drink.

In fact, GMV owners in 2019 and beyond should probably move towards disconnecting the experience of going to a live music gig with the experience of getting drunk while they're there as much as possible. Certainly they should be thinking about offering things which aren't alcohol. Do you have a proper coffee machine and a good range of soft drinks? Do you serve food, whether that's full meals outside of gig times or in a separate bar area? Or even hot, pre-prepared bowls if all you have room for is a fridge and a microwave? To take two examples in Glasgow, both Mono and the Hug & Pint are arguably more well-known citywide for their excellent vegan food, although they're primarily gig venues.

Of course, just because any sensible GMV owner is going to diversify away from alcohol, that doesn't mean they shouldn't serve it. What they need to understand here, however, is that a wallpaper paste table with a few cases of warm cans stacked behind it isn't a fit-for-purpose drinks offering these days. You have a captive audience for two or three hours only, and what they want is to be served good quality products, and quickly. Educate yourself on craft beers, gins and other drinks are popular and make sure you have a good range. And have enough bar staff on duty to get everyone served within a couple of minutes, because few things say "this bar doesn't care" like a long wait at the bar. Is your venue designed sensibly in this respect, so the bar is as long as possible and queues don't get in the way of your audience, or vice versa?

And don't forget…
You're going to want a smoking area, so why not make it a nice place to be if you have the space? In fact, what about decking a larger area and letting non-smokers enjoy a bit of fresh air as well? Do you have a coat-check room, and does it make you any money? Is there a good phone signal within the venue? If not, should you be looking at installing free WiFi for your audiences?



BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB, LEEDS

Founded: 1913 (venue rebuilt in 1978)
Capacity: Two rooms of 400 and 350
Staff: 13 full-time, 35 part-time and casual
Events per year: 500



Nathan Clark, General Manager and Booker:

"I've grown up around the venue. My parents started working there on behalf of the committee which ran it around 1990. I collected glasses for them, and all that. I actually started out as a professional footballer, although me and some friends also promoted some shows around the late '90s, until I went off to play in America. My dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2003 and I came back home and started running the place in his absence, until he passed away shortly after.

"The Brudenell was originally a working men's club, but the licensing laws changed in the early 2000s, at which point we applied for a full public certificate. We wanted to open up and let anyone in, not just on temporary events notices or on the basis that people became a member before they bought a ticket. **We're in the middle of a very dense student population, which changes on an annual basis as some leave and others arrive, so the way we were run didn't work for the business**. Changing the way the club was run also meant that if it folded, the assets wouldn't all go to 30,000 students that had signed up two weeks ago.

"The club was in financial difficulty at the time, and my father paid the money to save it, so he took it on. A lot of the old community wanted to save it as a working men's club, to keep it for them and not for the students, but the population around the area had changed. When the time came to put up money to save the place, my dad was the only person who came forward and it was a case of either embrace the change and evolve, or die. When the students come back after summer our footfall trebles, maybe even quadruples in a week.

"The Brudenell's a social enterprise now, all the money is reinvested back into the business and the building. We're achieving a bigger turnover, greater footfall and more shows than we've ever done before, although I feel that's partly because **we're a venue which has evolved with the times, reinvested in good PA and made sure that the place is well-maintained.** Our view is long-term and not profit making, but we're very loyal to and focused upon our local community, including councillors. It's not about putting in an investment and then pulling more money out in three years' time.

"The gigs bring in a high footfall, but on the whole they generally lose money for the venue. What they do, though, is bring the turnover with them. **Our bar is very busy, it's open right through the day and into the night, it has food on, it has a Pieminister outlet, and we do well out of that regardless**. This part of the business works hand in hand with the gigs, though, and I feel that if you didn't have one you wouldn't have the other. **We couldn't invest in the infrastructure if we didn't have the bar, so we couldn't run the gigs which bring people in and ensure that the bar makes money.**

"We have two gig rooms and a lounge and community room which can host gigs as well. We can run three at once, but we like to keep the lounge for the community as well. **We've just taken a big step in replacing a car park with a new 350-capacity venue**, and I would say the next step is how we can utilise that successfully. It was a major statement in an area where generally there's a massive decline though, we've been one of the few places that's invested in a full new building.

"I'm undoubtedly a fan of live music, and without that I couldn't put the belief and passion and energy into the shows that we do here. I think that comes across to managers and agents, and it's all tied up in the pride we take in our work. **The Brudenell's my home. We all enjoy doing what we do here and we all keep friends in musical circles. I can't explain why I love what I do so much, but I think it's definitely part of our success."**

www.brudenellsocialclub.co.uk



07. WHAT KIND OF SERVICES SHOULD A GRASSROOTS MUSIC VENUE OFFER?

Where facilities are the tangibles inherent in the very makeup of your business, services are the intangible extras you can introduce to make the customer experience even more rewarding. Of course, the main service you're going to be offering is a programme of live music which is as outstanding as possible, but have you given thought to any of the following? It's in your interests to, because **the statistics tell us you won't be making money from just putting on live music,** so you have to become as many things to as many people as possible.

Before we start, it's important to note not all of the following are appropriate for every venue. For example if you're trying to build a reputation as a cool and credible experimental venue it's unlikely you'll want to go running karaoke nights. Treat these as more of an indication of where imagination might take you, rather than a definitive shopping list of must-haves.

What are you when you aren't a music venue?
If you're very lucky, demand and availability will support a healthy live music programme on your stage, and you might even be busy seven nights a week. This means that for most of the hours of the day, even if you're doing very well, your venue will be sitting empty. What can you do to get as much use out of it as possible? Here are some ideas.

- As discussed in the last chapter, **a good food and drink offering is a very strong addition to any GMV.** Are you able to lay your space out so that a bar and seating area is separate from the veue floor, possibly even in a different room altogether? Then why not open longer hours as a bar and restaurant in its own right (with the necessary permits, of course) and become a destination for people in your neighbourhood who don't go to gigs? Who knows, they might even take an interest in one of the posters you have up on the walls which advertise your own shows.

- **Build contacts with specialist promoters** with a reputation for professionalism, or who can convince you they know what they're doing, and work out hire arrangements which suit you both. National promoters can get you larger and more recognisable names, but maybe smaller or more local promoters can get you attractive three-band bills of experimental artists, obscure metal groups or local bands with a healthy following.

- **What else can you put on your stage?** Don't just look at music here. What about comedy or spoken word gigs? Maybe a local or touring theatre group with a new production would be a good fit? As above, you'll want to build relationships with people who know these fields and how to programme and promote them.

- **What about all-ages gigs?** Audiences are getting older and many don't want to give up going to see live music just because they have a family. Nearly every boutique festival in the country trades on its family-friendliness, and some artists will play, for example, a Sunday afternoon show before their headline gig in the evening. Speak to bookers and promoters about this and actively explore the opportunity, or find some bands you know who might suit your own family music afternoon.

- **Run club nights later in the evening.** These are a very popular and music-related way of maximising use of a music venue, but be aware that

the crowd at a club night is very different from that at a live music night. In many ways, clubs are as unfairly maligned as potential dens of iniquity as live music venues have been for decades (see that biker gang stereotype we've previously discussed). But the truth is you'll most likely have to have a robust drug policy and to convince the police that you're discharging your security responsibilities here in a responsible manner. Club nights may also change the character of your live offering somewhat, because on any night where you're running both, the bands will be subject to an earlier and stricter curfew than usual.

- If you have a more traditional pub space within your venue, then **perhaps you can host album playbacks and launches, karaoke nights, music quizzes, craft beer events or gin tastings?** Whatever is practical, potentially popular and fits the brand of your venue.

- Some venues have worked out how to combine being a **rehearsal space** with being a live venue. Timings can be tricky for this but it can be a great way of nurturing local talent.

- Hire out the venue for **photography shoots or filming**. If the venue is distinctive then there may be demand to film there. Naturally it's about cultivating the right contacts, but it might be worth looking into as it can generate extra income.



How accessible are you to your local community?
This feeds into the above, but is a question worth asking in its own right. Whether you're a Community Interest Company or not, we can't stress how much **good relationships with the people around you are essential for any modern GMV**. To put it bluntly, when a lone noise complaint appears or a developer starts eyeing your place, who would miss you if you weren't there and who is going to stand up for you and help you stick around? There are many ways you can help grease the wheels of goodwill, for example:

- Offer a space for local groups and clubs to meet for free or for a nominal fee.

- Host charity fundraising gigs for good causes.

- Offer a catering service for parties and special occassions, if you're the sort of venue which might accommodate that sort of thing.

- Involve yourself in local events, for example hosting some live bands during your town's gala day.

Take advantage of technology
We'll deal with the many ways you can promote your venue using social media a little later on but in the meantime, it's possible to enhance your business by giving a thought to technology and how it can be harnessed. We're talking about things like:

- **How good is your website?** What would you want from the website of a venue you were thinking of visiting? At the very least, something which looks decent and is easy to use; which tells you what gigs are on when; and which gives you the opportunity to buy tickets, or links to the appropriate page of the ticket sales agency which you use. Some venues also create their own fanzine-style online newsletters or even interview the bands who are coming to

visit before they arrive. Here it's all about trying to build a connection between the band, their potential audience and your venue, and if you can somehow put into (ideally eloquent and definitely proofread) words how much you love them, so much the better. Might the above even be better in an app?

- **What about podcasting?** Interview the bands who appear at the venue or who are on their way, give a little chat about the local scene and your venue's place in it, or just show off your amusing and/ or insightful opinions on new music releases (NB this will only work if your opinions are actually amusing and/or insightful). You may be too shy or have no interesting in broadcasting, so it's certainly not an option for everyone, but if you do it right it could be a real attention-grabber.Maybe members of your staff could be a natural fit instead?

- **Live stream or create live albums of the artists you put on.** Of course you aren't going to be allowed to bootleg entire concerts by big names, and you don't want to let people watch gigs from home, but think about effective, creative ways you might be able to use this technology. Maybe you could create a pay-what-you-want live download album of local artists for charity? Or if you have enough clout and you can get it done right, maybe some bigger 'name' artists might let you do the same thing. Although you probably want to have enough of a 'brand' that it's worth their being associated with you, don't make it a mission to ask every band who plays the first week you're open whether they can be recorded.

Are you trying to sell the brand of the venue in a way that people can buy into?
What's become increasingly clear of late is the fact that you can't make any money out of just live music. You can do it across the venue, with everything you offer, but on average GMVs in Britain spent around 130% of their ticket price on putting the gig on. So how do you make up the difference and enough profit to get by? Why not think about the identity of the venue itself, which is a fairly unexploited avenue at the moment. A lot of these venues are iconic places that people become very closely attached to, either locally or nationally. So what can the customers buy that attaches them to it more and that you can make money out of? Think about things like T-shirts, badges and tote bags - products which you can sell to local fans who want to identify with your venue, and to national or international visitors if your reputation becomes that strong.



OH YEAH, BELFAST

Founded: 2007
Capacity: 300
Staff: 3 full-time, 5 part-time and various casual and volunteer
Events per year: 125 approx

Charlotte Dryden, Chief Executive:

"Oh Yeah was a response to Belfast not having a dedicated music hub. It came about through a conversation between our founding chief executive Stuart Bailie and Gary Lightbody from Snow Patrol, who decided to make it happen alongside a group of like-minded local music people. From there it was about getting help from people who had specific skills – for example, in how to put a board together – and finding money from enterprise organisations and so on. It came together and now we're in the heart of the Cathedral Quarter, Belfast's fastest-growing area for gigs and art and culture.

"We celebrated our tenth anniversary last year, and I've been working here for 10 years. I worked my way up through the ranks. At first I was a part-time development officer, then when Stuart moved on 4 years ago, I applied for the job and got it. I'm a big music fan, but there aren't too many jobs in the industry in Northern Ireland. I'd been doing a bit of freelance music journalism, running the odd gig, volunteering at festivals, and then when the job came up that combination helped. **I'm dedicated to the place, it's a labour of love. It's been trial and error. I wasn't trained to do this job, let me tell you!**

"The building was previously Outlet Records and we're on a twenty-year long-term lease from the owners. **The live venue is the beating heart of Oh Yeah, but hats off to people who can run any venue which is *just* a venue, it must**



be extremely tricky. Ticket prices on average at this level haven't changed in 20 years, we'd love to raise them, and the licensing laws in Northern Ireland are probably more restrictive than elsewhere in the country. **We put on gigs and we're here to support the local scene do just that, but we're lucky in that we generate income in other ways. If anyone else has a bigger building, I'd definitely recommend doing other things which you can make money from.**

"We book the local bands ourselves and run nights for under-18s, but we sublet to promoters for touring artists; Bastille and The 1975 both played here earlier in their careers. **We also open as a coffee bar, rent rehearsal facilities out to young bands and to the local college – we're a campus for their music tuition – and sublet offices to music businesses.** There are about nine of them in the building, including a recording studio, a record label and a music festival. We're a charity and we get public funding, but it's a very small part of what we need, so we need to operate with a commercial head on to survive.

"The Oh Yeah organisation is also involved in music tourism, we have a bus tour, an exhibition and the largest

archive of Northern Irish music memorabilia available anywhere. **There's also talent development. We work with four acts a year and take them through everything they need to know in the music business,** from meetings with record labels to arranging recording time, writing press releases and getting photo shoots done.

"Then we have outreach programmes, some of which go out into disadvantaged areas and teach young people how to run gigs and we run two festivals, which is all about audience development and trying to build a blossoming, grassroots local music scene. Northern Ireland has a strong scene at the moment. Quite a few bands are touring internationally and making an income and **as a venue we've seen an upsurge in footfall and in the number of bands wanting to book gigs."**

www.ohyeahbelfast.com



08. IT'S ALL (MOSTLY) ABOUT THE ARTIST

When we say 'mostly', of course, we mean it is all really about the artist. **They're the reason your GMV exists, let alone survives.** No venue owner or manager should lose sight of the fact that having anyone perform the fruits of their labour and artistic craft in your place is an honour (even if you may not be a big fan of the music or you find they're not the most endearing of people in real life).

The simple fact is, you're all in it together. You want them to feel relaxed and looked after while they're at your venue and in your town, for them to put on a great show which draws a crowd and might do so again next time they come back, and for as much money to flow over the cash desk and the bar as possible. Broadly, there are two key unspoken rules to be remembered here, in terms of how your relationship works:

1. **Respect the band, and their crew** . Your reputation as a venue rests in large part on how words gets around booking agents, tour managers and tour bookers, and if you're professional, friendly and accommodating, they'll give you a glowing review when they speak to their colleagues. If you're having a bad day and you act like a grumpy sod who wants to do no more than just open the doors to let them in, they'll remember that too.

2. **Remember who knows best in your venue, but don't shout about it.** If any technical assistance, advice over how much door take might be expected, discussion over the rider or firm insistence on whether there's an aftershow party and how long it can go on for is needed, you're the person to offer it. You may have to be diplomatically persuasive about certain things, which is all part of the art of being a good venue manager, but losing your rag isn't an option. And the overwhelming majority of artist who play will give you no need to.

Also, there's another rule you're also going to want to take note of:

Do everything through the tour manager
This isn't a divaish, Liz Taylor-style demand that you never look the talent in the eye or be blacklisted forever, but **the tour manager is your best friend, where touring bands are concerned.** They're the adult in the room, the person who holds the itinerary, the technical requirements and all the other info you need, as well as being the person who's there to act as a kind of de facto boss (or at least older sibling) to the band, to advocate on their behalf while they're out on the road. A lot of people in bands, of course, are perfectly capable of doing that themselves, but the TM is still the designated collective representative, so what they say is ultimately what goes.



A footnote here about smaller and more local bands, who may not be quite so advanced that they have a TM; do the negotiating through their manager or agent, if they have one, or at least try to establish who the arranger is within the group themselves. A designated point of contact is essential.

Think about what bands need, rather than what they want. Ultimately, if a band has a brilliant experience at a venue, they want to play there again and they'll tell all their peers and colleagues about it. If you want to run a successful GMV, you've got to prioritise the band having a brilliant time, but at the same time, you've got to run an effective and sustainable venue. We'll get onto the band's own requests and the necessity of them a bit further on in this chapter, but beyond the shopping list which some – not all, by any means! – may choose to email in before they arrive, here's a checklist of the things you really want to be getting right for them.

- **The facilities.** As we've covered in a previous chapter, you need the right facilities for your customers, but they need to be right for your artists too. Do you have a good array of lighting and sound equipment which is appropriate to the venue and well-maintained in good working order? What's the room where they'll be spending time before and after the gig like? Give it a lick of paint, get a clean couch in, sort out the damp problem. If you're feeling really generous and you have the space, put in a mini-kitchen and a television.

- **Think about diversity.** How many mixed-gender bands or bands with members who don't identify through gender binaries are out on the road in 2019? And how many venues have only one space for pre-gig preparation? Maybe you might want to split the room up, or at least install a separate, private dressing area and/or bathroom. And remember what we said earlier about mixed-gender toilets being the way forward.



- **Think about the mental health of the artists and crew who are playing your venue**. Mental health issues in the workplace have always been there, but it's only very recently that they're beginning to be tackled in a concerted and holistic manner. There isn't a huge amount you can do about the details of a stressful touring life, but you can contribute in some small way to creating a welcoming and relaxed environment. If you're designing a venue from scratch, can you create a quiet space off the dressing room with a bunk bed in it, perhaps? Is your dressing room bright, with a source of natural light? Even just your manner and helpfulness, and that of your staff, can go a long way to making things easier.

The Rider
This has been a hot topic of discussion among members of the GMV community lately. There's often a disconnect between what an artist at this level actually needs, what's being asked for on their behalf by their agent or manager, and what it is they want themselves. Those are three quite different things, and GMV owners need to have an honest conversation among themselves and with band representatives about it.



It's not that many bands who pass through a GMV fancy themselves as Elton John playing Wembley in the 1980s and for a seafood platter each to be laid on as standard, but there's still an expectation that a certain level of service will be provided as part of the rider. Yet if you, as a GMV owner, were to take an extreme view of it, in how many other walks of working life do you expect to be provided with a hot meal as standard? That's a more contentious point, because often artists have been travelling for hours to get to the show before they arrive, but how great is their need for a mezze plate, hummus, cut vegetables and assorted snacks?

These requirements are a kind of tradition which has built up around the concept of the rider, and each GMV owner should examine them on their own merits. The balancing act, of course, is that you want to make the band feel wanted and well looked after during their time with you, so you have to be inventive about making sure the artist knows you want them to be there, that you've chosen for them to be in your venue and are promoting them and treating them well, but that you're also trying to run a business and you want to pay them money.

One point which bands may not realise is that the bigger the rider, the smaller the fee to them. There's only a certain amount of money being made out of music, and artists need to be aware of the fact that every dinner arranged for an extra member of the crew, bottle of spirits sorted out for after the show or bowl of hummus on the table is on they're paying for.

So be aware of where the money is coming in, and make sure the band is too.
A typical contract for a touring band visiting your venue will generally be a guaranteed flat fee, plus roughly 85% of the door take, after costs. So as a rough guide, if you imagine a £1,000 show (a 100 capacity venue at £10 a ticket) where the act is on £300 plus 85% of what's left after costs, do they want you to spend £100 on their rider or £300? If it's

the latter, that's more of their own money they're chucking away.

Here are some general ideas on how you can mitigate against wasting money:

- **Let the tour manager know the above** – nice and early, and very diplomatically – in the hope that the rider request email which comes back is sensible.
- **Don't scrimp, but don't throw money away.** If the chips and dip or the off-licence carry-out haven't been requested, don't go flinging cash around needlessly by getting them in anyway. If you run five gigs a week and even just save a tenner per rider, that's £2,500 saved over a year.
- **Do your research and set limits.** Know all the best places to get takeaway in town and know where is good value. Tell the band you'll give them a tenner a head and send someone to get the food, and email them some menus beforehand.
- **Set your own rider, and be consistent.** Buy some supplies in bulk from the cash and carry, and leave out a welcoming (but modest) selection.

And also, be a good tour guide in your own area

Bands don't always ask for the moon on a stick, of course, but they might just want a bit of time to enjoy themselves in your town, especially if they have time to kill. So let them know about the best restaurants, the cheapest and most reliable taxis, the local tourist attractions and when is best to visit. Anything which might make them glad they visited and happy to come back. To your venue, of course.



OMEARA, LONDON BRIDGE, LONDON

Founded: 2016
Capacity: 320
Staff: 15 full-time, 80-100 part-time and casual
Events per year: 200



Phil Renna, Finance Director and Co-owner:

"I'm one of five key collaborators and co-owners, although the majority owner is Ben Lovett of Mumford & Sons. **We were a collective of touring musicians and crew who have know each other for 10 to 15 years, and have spent a lot of time together in splitter vans.** I played in Laura Marling's band between around 2006 and 2009. At this time the rest of her band was Mumford & Sons and I've also done a bit of touring with Mt. Desolation.

"The idea with Omeara was to create a music venue for musicians, by musicians, I guess. That means we wanted to take the stereotype of a 300 capacity backroom venue and improve it and we also wanted to do something to buck the trend of music venues closing in London as it was an alarming trend at the time we were researching this. **We want to try and redefine what's possible when you see a show in that kind of intimate setting.**

"I had a brief spell out of music where I went and did some work in the City, which I guess was a reactionary thing. Finding a little break in my touring schedule and thinking, 'crikey, do I have to get serious and learn how to do a proper job?' I went to work in finance for two years, which I realised was a bit of an extreme. But it means I've got an interesting mix of skills for running a venue business. I know what the vibe should be from an artist's perspective and I also get the economics behind it.

"The concept for the venue existed a long time before this spot became available. In fact we thought we'd found a venue in Shepherd's Bush, although it wasn't quite making sense. We heard about the Flatiron Square development in London Bridge, a food, drink, art and culture development which wanted a music venue at its core to hold the whole thing together. We went down and had a look, and realised it was perfectly situated in some renovated railway arches in Southwark, flanked by lots of bars and restaurants that go really well with a night out at a gig, in an exciting part of London that's steeped in history and enjoying a resurgence. It was a perfect spot.

"We're all about the experience for the touring artist. The height of our loading bay is the same height as a splitter van, we've got unexpectedly high-quality PA and lighting and the dressing rooms are spacious and well put together. When artists and tour managers turn up, we want them to say, 'wow, this is awesome'. What that also means is, we have the facilities to attract serious underplays. In the last 12 months we've had Beck, the Maccabees, Mumford

& Sons… lots of artists you wouldn't expect in a venue this size. **And having such good technical specifications for artists means the audience also gets to see a great show.**

"The experience is also added to by the stuff we do nearby. The venue is one arch out of seven, plus a really large outdoor space, so we run a host of street food-style offerings, where we curate seasonally-revolving menus. I think we have about 15 different bars around the site that cater to a range of tastes, from an Oktoberfest-style bier hall to a wine bar, to a Mexican-inspired tequila and mezcal-based cocktail bar. We want people to come and make a whole evening of it, like you would if you were going to a bigger show. It's an occasion, it feels a bit more special.

"The whole thing pays for itself, although the most important thing that we've found is that - **although the music venue is at the core of the business and the reason we're there - it couldn't generate enough income to support itself. It's all the other food and drink offerings which create the money to allow the music to happen.** We absolutely do this because we love live music and we want to give something back. We want to see a capital city that has a growing number of excellent small music venues that can support the kind of talent that needs a platform to grow.

"I don't want to think of the number of shows our management team has played between us – maybe 20,000, something like that? It's a hugely important part of our lives, and the core of why we do this. **We're not passionate about the food and beverage stuff, and we're not in it to make money. We just want to create a relevant cultural location,** especially when you have things like the Astoria being lost to Crossrail. We want to see a fightback against this, because live music is such an important part of our culture."

www.omearalondon.com



09. PROMOTION: HOW DO YOU GET YOUR GIGS SEEN AND HEARD?

Often your job isn't so much about the promotion of your show or your venue, but about the promotion of the band who are coming to play. They're on your stage so they must be good enough to come and check out – why is this? **Why are they so interesting, and why should people be waiting to fall in love with them?**

The technology may have changed, but this is an old-fashioned business of knowing which customers you have, which bands they might like, and making sure those customers go to the correct gig for them. It's a very important skill, which can't be replicated by Facebook adverts.

Any touring artist is holding up their end of the bargain when they do their own press, whether that's in a Saturday magazine or a music blog. But they or their rep can't do the microcosmic promotion which requires a small-scale knowledge of your neighbourhood to get the right audience out to see them on a Wednesday night. They don't know the right bars to flyer, the right shops to poster, or the writer on the local paper who you reckon would love their band. It's your job to push these angles as much as you can to get people through the door.

Let's look at places to target. And first of all, let's start out by busting a myth:

Social Media
After a ten-year period of many people in the industry thinking social media is the answer to everything, there's a distinct kickback against that at the level of the GMV. Here, owners are starting to appreciate that the behaviour of an online audience in terms of clicks and engagement with what will end up being a real event isn't a representation of how they'll behave in real life. Anyone can click on a button saying 'I'm going to this gig' the second they see it, but it takes them a lot longer to decide they're going to buy a ticket.

Anecdotally, this is a bane of many promoters' working lives, where they anticipate the crowd who say they'll be there on Facebook, and what they end up with is the percentage who can actually be bothered to leave the house. What the live industry has been seeing is a massive over-reliance on Facebook, which is a service whose use is actually falling within the 18 to 25 demographic. If you want to reach that age group, you have to advertise on Instagram and so on.

In short, social media is a useful tool, but it's not the be-all and end-all and, much like everything else you see on it, you shouldn't believe what it's telling you. By all means have venue accounts and set up web pages, but you have to keep on top of these things once they're active. Your own experience will eventually tell you how worthwhile they are, but what we can tell you is that your working life shouldn't become a slave to them.

Mailing Lists
A simple but effective tool: gather the email addresses of everyone who purchases your tickets, enquires about your gigs or attends your shows and send them a regular news mailer with new on-sale dates, venue updates, promo offers, and so on. But not too regular, once a week is more than enough. Remember that there are data protection issues here, and you'll also need to comply with GDPR.

Flyering and Postering
Thanks to social media, of course, these have become oddly quaint methods of promoting a show – but they are, make no mistake, still two of the most effective, as long as you know what you're doing or hire a reputable company which does. If you don't know what these entail, let's break it down quickly.

Flyering
…is creating and distributing postcard-sized pieces of paper which advertise a gig or gigs. They're more effective objects than an easily-forgotten Facebook invitation. People stick them on their fridge or pin them on the wall behind their desk, a physical reminder to them. Don't be obtuse on these. However it's designed, a flyer needs to clearly state where, when, how much and who's playing, otherwise your money is wasted. It's more effective to flyer in a larger town or city, with more competing events going on; if you're the only venue in town, it's probable everyone knows about you anyway. Employ a good designer, but it's unlikely you'll need to pay a company to do the whole thing. Just hire a couple of students or bar staff for an evening's work dishing them out. Be selective but creative about where you distribute these. There's no use leaving them all over the place, maybe just a couple of bundles left in the right coffee shops and bars, and certainly put some in your local record shop (if you still have one). Outside other venue's gigs or club nights is a given (and a universally accepted thing to do, they'll be flyering your place too), but are there any other opportunities? Is your local cinema showing a good music doc which you can flyer when it finishes, for example?

Postering
…is creating and putting up posters which advertise a gig you're putting on, in bars, cafes, shops, designated outdoor sites and anywhere else you're allowed to. It's very important that you realise from the off that postering isn't the same as fly-posting. The latter involves sticking posters up on walls, disused shop windows, generally anywhere on other people's property, and the fact the word sounds like fly-tipping will tell you just how illegal and hated by the public the practice is. As above, at the very least competent design and a note of where, when, how much and who's playing is essential. Do you need to get a reputable professional company in to do it? Many will design, print and hang them around town for you, and it may be a good bet to do this in a larger city where there's a lot of competition for attention and poster sites to get around. But if you live in a town with three bars and a record shop, maybe just hire a designer and then hang them yourself. Just make sure you have the owner's permission before you put them anywhere.

With both of the above, remember – **bad design is only acceptable if it's intentionally bad!**

Other promotional avenues to look at are:

Local Press
Reports of the death of the printed press have certainly been overexaggerated, even if they aren't exactly the force they once were. But if you know where to target the correct information, they're still a valuable resource in getting info about your GMV out there. Here are some ways you can do it:

- **Advertising** – Do people read the weekly what's on pages? Then it might well be worth paying for an advert for your upcoming gigs on there, or even just an ad for one special show if someone big is coming.
- **Cultivate good relationships with your local entertainment reporter** – Get to know them and what they like, invite them to shows, offer them any exclusive bits of news you have about notable bands coming to play or special events you're doing.
- **Think about the demographics** – it's unlikely that teenagers are going to be scouring the local paper for live music news, but maybe their parents will be interested to hear a classic punk group or a singer who had a few hits in the '80s is coming to town.
- **Don't be standoffish** – If your contact at the paper asks for a couple of free tickets to run a competition, or a couple of tickets so they can attend with a friend

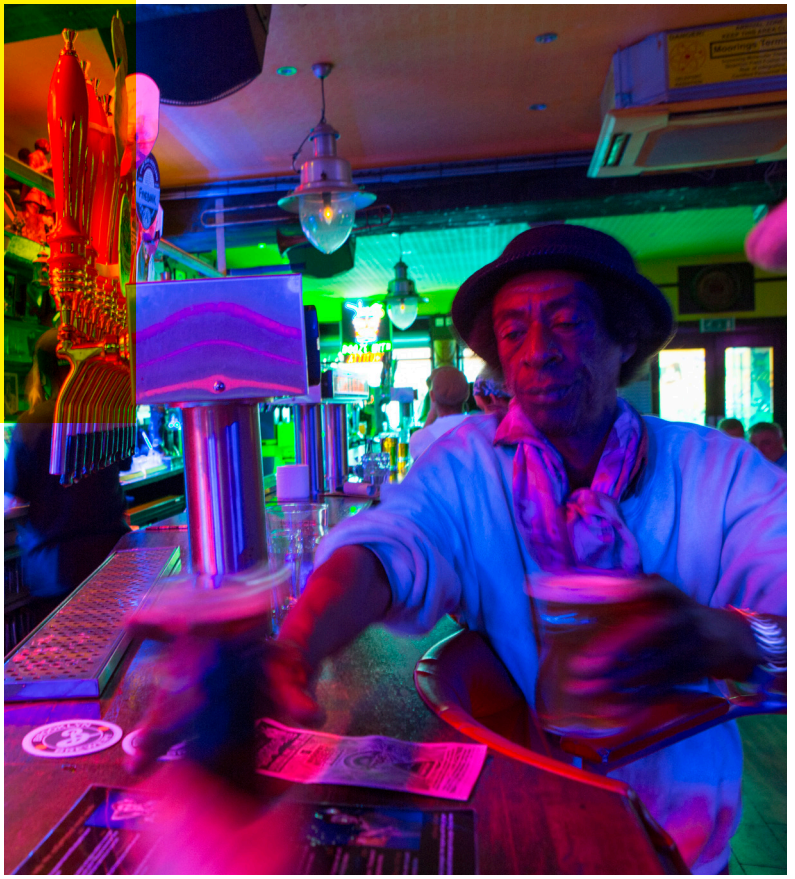
and review the show, these are standard methods within the industry of spreading the word about your venue and programming. So accept without complaint (although it's fair enough to withhold the +1, with apologies, if there's a huge demand for the show) and make up your own mind about offering a free drinks tab (this should never be expected by your guest).

- **Make yourself available** – Are a good new band who a lot of people will be interested in coming to your venue? Be prepared to talk them up to a reporter when the gig is announced, and you might get a news story out of it.

Music Blogs and Sites
Handle them much like local press, although they'll likely have a more specialist audience whose taste mirrors that of whoever runs them. Usually a hardcore music enthusiast in one field or another, who runs the blog outside of their day job. **The key here is to do your diligence**. There are many music blogs, fansites and proper web publications out there – and while some have a large audience, others are simply vanity projects aimed at a small group of friends. Take a look at their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages; a couple of dozen followers means they aren't a big deal, but a few hundred followers on a local site or in the thousands on a national or international one are numbers worth paying attention to. Whether to let the smaller ones down gently is up to you. They might only have 50 followers, but maybe they're a fan club devoted entirely to the band you're putting on?

Points to remember about press:
Much like everything else, you get out what you put in and you'll want to create a nice balance for yourself. We'd recommend being amenable to requests and sending new info to the correct people, but not breaking your back to chase every scrap of promo you can. As far as the big newspapers and magazines go, that's the lookout of the band and the press company they've hired for their tour.

But it's always nice to see your name in lights, so be prepared to grease the wheels. Try to have a contact for each band's press rep handy if a reporter calls looking for it and be helpful with adding working press to your guestlist if a PR or record label puts in a request.



WEDGEWOOD ROOMS, PORTSMOUTH

Founded: 1992
Capacity: 400 standing, 280 seated (small venue: 100 standing, 50 seated)
Staff: 2 full-time, 18 part-time and various freelance
Events per year: 250-300



Geoff Priestley, Director:

"Previously I worked in retailing for John Menzies and House of Fraser. I didn't intend to get into running a venue, but circumstances meant it fell my way and there was no-one else around to do it, although I didn't say no when I was asked to. I came to work here for the previous owner. I was a techy from when the place opened, which I did outside my full-time job. Then I found myself out of work and was asked to put together a business plan so the venue could be developed and brought up to date, at which point I started working here full-time. Then when ownership of the venue changed I became the venue manager, and over time I became the business owner myself.

"I've always loved live music and although this wasn't something I planned to do, when you get offered a job you know you would love, how do you say no? The venue started as a comedy club, so we've always done comedy. We do theatre, we do a lot of work with local colleges, both formally and informally, and we also work with parts of the wider community, for example with charity fundraising. We've always done club nights as well, starting with techno and hard house nights in the '90s.

"We're based in the southern part of Portsmouth, in the middle of a residential area, but on a road with a theatre and a lively and alternative day- and night-time economy. Portsmouth is one of the top five most densely populated parts of the country, but isn't really part of the rich South-East. It's been described as a northern town which has slipped down south, and there's a high transient population of naval staff and students. **We're the only dedicated Grassroots Music Venue in the city, although there are a lot of local pubs that do free live music.**

"Our nearest competition is in Southampton, 16 miles away, although attracting bands here isn't as easy as it was. **Portsmouth has a reputation of being a hard place to sell tickets, and given that tours are getting shorter we miss out on shows.** We appear to be in the top 25 touring destinations, but as tours seem to now consist of 12 to 15 dates we seem to miss out over Southampton and Brighton. **We do no local press advertising, but we do have a local journalist who loves what we do and takes great pleasure in interviewing acts. We cover all the social media bases**

and try and keep abreast of this week's algorithm, but we still put up posters, put out flyers and do all the old school stuff.

"Some of the housing nearby attracts students or other people on short-term leases, so normally once a year we get a noise complaint. I have a good working relationship with the noise team at environmental health, so they're aware this is a seasonal issue. In saying that we have a quite extensive list of things that we do to meet all the licensing objectives, and I believe this document is currently being used as part of the training session for new licensees.

"There have been various incidents over the years, including a series of serious, escalating noise complaints about 15 years ago, which, had they not been dealt with swiftly and proactively, may have closed the venue. The key is to nip them in the bud and don't be afraid to talk to the people who make the decisions. The value of two hours at a local community meeting versus losing your licence is time well spent. Also, I find that making it personal helps. **We chat to all our neighbours about life and suddenly we're not a noisy building, we're Geoff and his staff. I find that makes a difference.**

"I always endeavour to be optimistic, but I have the concern that GMVs get overlooked, ignored and, when you've been around for 25 years, taken for granted. I think that if we can get some recognition of what we do, and some additional funding to help develop that, then the future could be rosy. **As long as venues stay flexible, accept there's change within their industry, and can adapt to the change, then small venues will be here for some time to come."**

www.wedgewood-rooms.co.uk



10. KNOW YOUR PLACE IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY (AND USE IT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE)

The music industry is one which relies on trust and there's a chicken-and-egg situation going on in that venues which aren't known and trusted can find it tricky – at least at first – to book the kind of high-profile gigs which let them build a sense of it. This is why we often see bands going back to towns and cities they've already been to, because these places contain established, trusted venues, and it's very easy for them to put in offers.

Where you fit into the machinery of the UK music industry very much depends on where you fit into the UK itself whether you're an established urban venue or a lesser-known one in a town. Either way, if you're doing your business right there's a very good chance you might become an established cog in that machinery. But, as ever, it's all about knowing your strengths, capabilities and the area you're in.

Here are a few aspects of the industry you may be able to consider as relevant to your business:

Booking Agents
Think of them as the band's management, but with over-riding responsibility for getting the band live dates booked over every other aspect of their career. At the level of the GMV circuit, there are nine or ten key booking agencies that book 80 to 90% of the entire touring market in the UK. and those agencies typically consist of between 20 and 40 agents.

A new band's manager will either book a few shows themselves, to establish that a band are good enough for a label to sign them, or they might be signed to an agency to build them up to a signable position. Either way the process will be the same, with the agent/manager either contacting the venues they think the artist(s) should play at, or the venues themselves putting in advance offers to try and attract popular groups. Generally you'll only be dealing with them if you're promoting a show yourself. If you have an external promoter in, dealing with an agent will be their job.

MVT are trying to compile a list of UK booking agents which is accessible to their network of venues, but in the meantime your friends are Google (other search engines are available), personal recommendations and, eventually, your own experience and the relationships you've formed. As ever, the key here is to do a professional and respectful job for the bands who visit, and word will spread. And don't – although we know it can be tempting – go offering too much money to artists just to get them in the door.

Promoters
A gig promoter is the person who puts on shows, whether they're a local person with a specialism in metal bands, experimental techno or whatever else, or someone with a large multi-national group like Live Nation (although you're less likely to encounter the latter). It's a role you'll perform yourself, if you're going to an agent or a band direct to make a booking, but otherwise think of the promoter as kind of the middle-person between the band and you. If you're using one in your venue, their payment is generally the ticket sales cash, after band fees etc have been deducted, while you keep the bar take.

In many ways promoters make your life a lot easier. You might have 101 things to do as a GMV owner, but booking bands is all they do, and you still make money from the hire fee they pay for the venue, the bar take, and so on. Some venues have a preference either way over their use of promoters. They either use them all the time, giving up the ticket money but outsourcing the risk of losses on poor

sales. Or they do it all inhouse, possibly even having a full-time promoter on staff, because they know their local market is strong and they stand to make money over the course of the year.

It's unlikely at this level that you'll ever come near to a huge organisation, but if you live in a city it is likely you'll have contact with the bigger regional promoters: SJM in England or DF Concerts in Scotland, for example. Whoever you're working with, the same balance of courtesy and respect, mixed with looking out for your own interests which you bring to your dealings with bands and their agents, is essential. If you live in a town you might be the only place they can put gigs on. If you live in a city you might be competing with others venues for a promoter's business, but either way professionalism will make things go smoothly for everyone.

How close to the industry itself do you need to be?

There's a disconnect between how people approach setting up their local indie venue and what they want that to be, and how the music industry intrinsically behaves. Not that there aren't people within that industry who have a good understanding of how a local venue works, because a lot of them started out ripping tickets or checking coats in just such a place. The disconnect isn't so great.

As we've said, though, where the city venues have relationships with the really big promoters which work, how might that relationship work in smaller towns? These places are what we might call secondary or tertiary markets, and there's a school of thought which says there isn't a role for a national promoter here at all. Does a national promoter necessarily know more about an audience in a medium-sized town than someone running a venue there? That doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't work with larger promoters, of course, but venues in this position should be able to stand up for themselves and press the point that they know their own audience.

A word on not getting shafted…
It's important to remember that you're in an industry and that you have to be able to put your business head on when it's needed, particularly when dealing with other parts of that industry . That's not to say that the music business is an evil empire and all involved with it are to be mistrusted, but some of the people you'll deal with in larger organisations have jobs they're required to put outputs on, with targets to hit and a focus on making money. Which is what a business does, after all.

It's also, when all's said and done, what your business should be trying to do as well; or at least not unnecessarily losing any of the revenue you need to break even. So you have to think commercially, like those working in the large organisations do. If you're going to enter into a contract with a large promoter, look through it to make sure it's in your favour. If an agent tells you they're really looking for a guaranteed fee of £xxx for a band, it's you who's most likely to know how many tickets will sell and at what price, and whether you can fulfil that fee and still make your own cut.

Don't be taken for a ride, don't be sweet-talked, and don't do favours for people if they put you at a disadvantage (but help out where you can). There are moves afoot to collectivise how the relationship between the GMV network and the music industry works – but in the meantime, our advice is to keep on running a hub of charitable activity for your local area, by all means, but when you're dealing with the music industry you have to act like you're in the music industry.



Immy and Risa, Owners:

"We're two music-loving friends who founded and opened Green Note in 2005 in Camden Town, London. **Our dream was to create a place where we could share music that we loved, and we're a unique, intimate, independent music venue with a cosy vibe and friendly atmosphere.** We've been friends since our school days, so the seed for this idea was planted many years ago, and after lots of hard work, ups and downs, and learning more than we ever could have imagined, our dream became a reality. **We're really proud of what we've created and are constantly astonished by the wealth of incredible musicians who grace our stage.**

"Camden is an area with a high concentration of venues and a strong musical history, and it's also really well connected in terms of public transport and isn't too far from central London. However, being in London also has its drawbacks. There's so much going on every night, so there's a lot of competition when it comes to entertainment, even if no-one else is doing exactly what we're doing. **The closure or change of ownership of some larger London venues in our early years left a gap which really helped to put us on the map in terms of touring Americana acts. So we're now often the first port of call for artists at the early stages of**

GREEN NOTE, CAMDEN, LONDON

Founded: 2005
Capacity: 65
Staff: 12 part-time
Events per year: 350+

their UK touring careers, and have really gained a reputation in the Americana community.

"We're now known as one of London's top spots for folk and roots music. When we first opened we were a vegetarian restaurant as well, but we soon found the two elements were competing, and in many ways incompatible with our vision. Some people came for the food and talked through the music, others came for the music and didn't eat anything, although they still took up a table for the evening. Running a restaurant was very demanding, and our staff serving food could be quite disruptive to the music, so now we just serve a selection of vegetarian bar snacks.

"When it comes to staffing we have a policy of only employing part-timers. Everyone who works for us is either a student, a creative, has another job or is involved with other interesting projects. This means we have a bigger and more diverse team with everyone just doing a couple of shifts a week. We find this keeps people's energy up and they really enjoy coming to work.

"One of the toughest things, which anyone with their own business can attest to, is the long hours. It's often impossible to switch off and get a good work/life balance. We often say it's like having a child and refer to Green Note as 'our

baby'. Having said that, one of the best things about running our own business is that we get to be our own boss and have a certain amount of flexibility with our time. Another of our favourite things is coming in to watch a gig on our nights off and seeing what we've created from the perspective of an audience member. We don't do this often enough but it's always a treat to sit down and watch the music. **One of our all-time highlights was the day Leonard Cohen decided to pop in. He's one of our greatest heroes and we feel really blessed to have met him!**

"We're really lucky working at the level we are, in that the bands we book are generally appreciative of what we're trying to do. Because we've also curated and promoted shows at bigger venues, so we've seen first-hand the bureaucracy entailed in running larger venues. As we do most of the booking for Green Note ourselves we generally have a connection with the artists, which makes the whole experience a lot more personal and human, and therefore more enjoyable."

www.greennote.co.uk



11. BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

Anecdotal evidence tells us that if ever a local councillor hears from a member of the public about an arts venue in their area – and not just a live music venue, although these are at least as likely as any other to be the cause of a message – it'll be because the person getting in touch wants to complain or pass on a negative opinion.

This stands to reason, of course. After all, most people surely consider writing a letter or email of complaint when they encounter something they're dissatisfied with. But how many of us take the time to pass a message on that we really love something and that we're very impressed by a good job being done well?

As much as we might wish it were the case - and satisfied customers may be telling you how much they value your GMV every night – **no-one is going to fight your corner as effectively as you.** Even the best-run music venue can be subject to any kind of external issue which throws their role in the community into sharp focus, so it's up to you to get on the front foot and **make yourself indispensable to your neighbourhood** and the people who live in it. Everyone from the people who live, work and own businesses around you, to your local elected representatives and even the people who might not want you there in the first place.

Here's a breakdown of ways you should be trying to get people onside:

Your local residential neighbours
First of all, **who are your neighbours?** We've already discussed this in the section about how you choose your venue, and hopefully you've managed to find an area which is appropriate for the sort of business you want to run. In other words, probably not in the middle of a suburban housing estate with residential properties all around. If you're in the centre of a town or city, however, then it's going to be unlikely that there will be no housing around you.

The key here is not to be scared of doing anything because there are people living around you, but rather to instigate a policy of honest, proactive engagement to keep everyone onside. Or at least avoid accusations that you haven't taken your responsibilities to those around you into account. Here are some obvious practical measures, first of all:

- Soundproof your building properly. The technology exists to make your venue almost inaudible from outside. And remember the Agent of Change principle, that it falls on the newcomer development to make sure the music can't be heard next door. If your venue is the newcomer, then this is on you.
- Take into account when and where people will be leaving the venue, where they queue, where the smoking area is, and so on. Don't let people leave with bottles, glasses or cans, and put a bin outside to mop up much of the rubbish.
- Think about where your band gets in during the day and how they do their soundcheck – noise can be just as much of a nuisance to people in the afternoon, and a large van blocking the road or pavement will be even more so.

And here are some ways you can provide a personal touch:

- Get to know your neighbours. This can mean everything from saying hello in the street, to going around the doors when you open, even just with flyers explaining what your venue is, what it will be doing and when events will be on.

- Make them feel welcome. Get to know regular faces who might attend, particularly if they're local. If you have a contentious neighbouring property. For example, a block which adjoins the venue , then offer them free tickets every so often. Every neighbour who's in the venue is one who isn't at home complaining about it.

- Keep people informed. Going to put on a louder-than-usual outdoor gig in your car park or beer garden, which do you have the council's permission for it already? It might well come as a surprise to some of your neighbours when it goes ahead, in which case they'll be picking up the phone to licensing officers. Again, going around the doors with explanatory flyers (with a contact number to call if people have concerns) can help defuse noise complaints and the like. **A suggested approach to dealing with complaints is included at the end of this chapter.**

- Find out where your local community councils are (or any similar representative bodies) are and get onto them. These are invariably bodies of concerned residents; people who take pride in their neighbourhood but who have enough collective influence to make things difficult if they take against you. So, get involved, be there to listen to them and to show you're ready to act on concerns – after all, how many hot-button issues in your local area can you think of which have been blown up from a storm in a teacup? This can help quell rumours and gripes before they even begin. If people have an axe to grind, then grind your own axe a bit more in return.

- Be charitable. Agree to hold meetings in the bar for local groups and clubs, free of charge, ideally. That disposes them well towards you, means they get to know you, your venue and your staff, and you should still make some bar take.

Local businesses

All of the above advice about getting to know your neighbours and keeping them informed applies, because local businesses can also make complaints if what you and they do operates at cross-purposes; often in regard to disruptions caused during the day. For example with vehicular access or the noise from soundchecks. Yet more than that, the businesses around you can be important allies if you have some of the same issues, or you're able to pull together and help one another's business out. Here are some areas to think about:

- Is there an association for local traders in your area? If so, much like your community council (or similar body). Get involved with it and pool together. This means you get your voice heard if anyone has concerns about your venue, but it also means you can act collectively on issues which affect you all, from business rates to refuse collection.

- And also, get involved with local licensed trade bodies, because there are very specific issues which you can share information and solidarity on, from collectively barring people who are known to make trouble, to collectively representing on everything from licensing to enforcement.

- Think about who benefits from your venue, and who you might benefit from. Make connections with restaurants where your audience might be going for a meal beforehand, kebab shops or chippies where they might be stopping on the way home, taxi companies they might be using, and so on. See if there might be an opportunity for some cross-advertising between you, or even a tie-in pre-gig meal deal at restaurants if people show a ticket for your show that night, for example.

Councillors and politicians
Politicians, to put it bluntly, can make things happen for people in your neighbourhood – and they can make things stop happening, as well, including your business. They're here to represent everyone, including the people who might complain about a GMV and the owners of the venue itself. Some of them may have their own personal interests to follow, whether they're a keen music fan or a more puritanical sort. But the majority are likely to be swayed by the loudest collective public voices they hear. Often that can mean the people who want to complain about your GMV, because after all, how many people write to the people in charge when they want to say they're happy and everything's fine?

Here's who you want to be getting to know:

- **Local councillors** – The elected officials who run your local council, and who legislate on your area. That means they often have the final say, for example, on whether that housing development next door gets planning permission, or whether noise or licensing regulations in your area are relaxed or tightened up, which will most likely affect you directly.

- **Council officers** – The ordinary, salaried civil servants who enforce the rules on licensing, planning, noise and so on. If they're called out to a complaint about your venue, hopefully you'll find them to be fair and equitable (although it's not always the case), but remember they're just doing their job as the rules dictate. Think the rules are unfair? Then get onto your councillor or MP and campaign to have them changed.

- **MPs** – Members of Parliament, your local area's representative at Westminster. In the devolved administrations, Members of Scottish Parliament, Welsh or Northern Irish Assembly Members, as well as the Mayor and their staff in any city or town which has one. These aren't the people to go to for day-to-day issues (that's your councillor), but they all have a broader strategic remit which can directly affect your industry over the long-term, for example with the Agent of Change campaign.

- **Community councillors (Scotland and Wales)** – Elected heads of groups of concerned locals. They aren't official representatives and can't effect any legal change, but they represent the most involved members of your community and can steer debate through appearing in local press and so on. They're good people to have on your side, if you can.

And here are ways in which you can get your elected officials onside and working for you:

- Invite them to the venue. Show them what you do. Find out which bands they like and invite them to shows they might enjoy, or welcome them warmly when they stop by for a coffee during the day. Personalise the relationship and let them know you're not running a place the neighbourhood should be scared of.

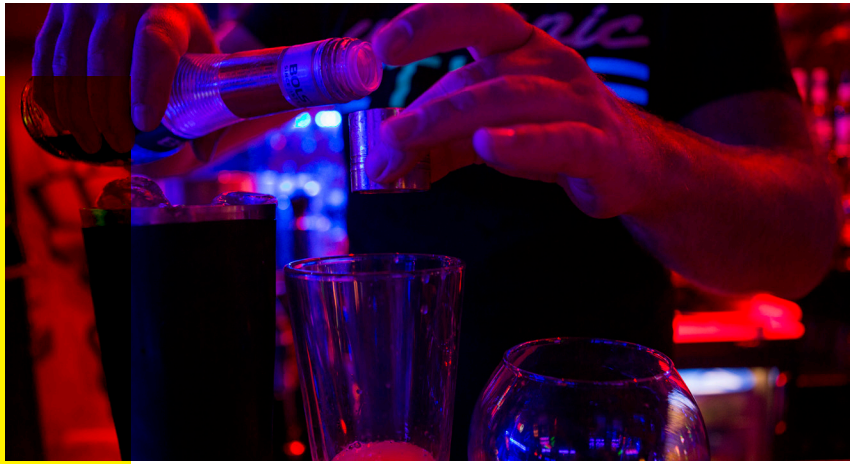
- Mobilise your customers. It's tricky to encourage people to get passionate about saying they're happy and everything's fine. But if you find yourself threatened in a way that's within politicians' power to deal with – a new housing development or a noise complaint, for example – you might be surprised by how quickly a well-run and much-loved GMV can gather support. Ask your customers to write to your (and their) elected representatives and be vocal on social media. See how quickly they take notice.

- Make good arguments about your value to the community, and keep making them. Think about the number of people you bring to the area and

the business impact on local buses, taxis, bars, restaurants, hotels and so on. Try and record as much of this as you can, even just the headline attendance figures. Get them out there as often as you can. Explicitly show politicians and everyone else the good you do and the benefit you bring

Just remember, **you have a right to be here as well.** If your venue is well-run, it will bring much to the area. These days, a successful GMV is a real asset, and we know that socialising is good for people's mental health. You need to be confident enough to say, "I am bringing you an incredibly important cultural asset, and it's a real privilege to have one of these in our town or area. It makes a real difference to the cultural activity here, which is a boost to the town's economy, and to communities, business networks and social lives." You should be given every support to successfully run one.

If all of the above boils down to just one emphatic suggestion, it's this: **make good relationships**, with customers, neighbours, fellow businesses and your political representatives and you and they will start to feel like part of a community with one another.



How to deal with a complaint
Never ignore a noise complaint – it will not magically disappear.

Try to make contact with the author (if they have provided contact details). A conversation may allow you to obtain more details of the complaint, opening more options for resolution.

Prepare a written response – either accepting the problem and outlining the action you will take, or politely explaining why you cannot take the action requested.

Don't become defensive if they are upset about the situation.

Remain calm and focus on the problem at hand.

Investigate the nature of the problem – if it's about noise, is it related to frequency, volume, or something else?

If it's from a responsible authority, ask them for advice on how to resolve the problem.

Find out if there is room to negotiate.

Try to distinguish between past incidents and future action.

Ask them what they would do if they were in your shoes.



BAND ON THE WALL, MANCHESTER

Founded: 1806
Capacity: 340
Staff: 13 full-time (3 on the venue), 17 casual, plus freelance
Events per year: 280

Gavin Sharp, Chief Executive of Inner City Music, Director of Band on the Wall Trading:

"Inner City Music is the charity which owns Band on the Wall Trading, which is the separate company that runs the venue. Band on the Wall is a very different kind of venue. It's nearly 200 years old and the first written account of it being called by this name was in the 1930s. At some point in the '20s or '30s the landlord got a 24-hour licence on condition he had a band playing, but he wanted to fit in as many drinkers as possible, so he literally put the band up on the wall, so he had more space.

"We get 90-year-old drinkers who used to come in as a kid who've always known it as Band on the Wall. The band is no longer on the wall, although we're in the middle of a capital fundraising project, so we might kind of be able to put them back up there. At least it will be an illusion that they are.

"I started learning an instrument at school, a rough council estate school, but I had a great music teacher. I was brought up in Blackpool, so really early on I got into promoting shows round bars and hotels. Then I went to music college and started as a professional touring musician soon after. I played with a reggae band called Edward II, who were signed to Cooking Vinyl at the time. We got in the Guinness Book of Records as the busiest band in the world. During the '90s we did well over 200 shows a year on the world music circuit. In one year we did almost 30 countries.

"The guys in the band were all Rastafarians, so they were heading back to Ethiopia before the world ended in 2000. I left in '98 and my first job was at Band on the Wall in programming and marketing. Then I went to the Brewery Arts Centre in Kendal for five years to build an international events programme. Then I moved to Liverpool Philharmonic as a programme manager through the Capital of Culture year. After that it was Band on the Wall in 2008. I've promoted shows since I was about 14.

"We're on the Inner Ring Road so we have high visibility, tens of thousands of cars pass us every day. Between that and our history, **Mancunians just know us, and a lot of the businesses around us mention how close we are in their advertising – we're a landmark**. Although until the regeneration success story of the Northern Quarter, we were on the wrong side of quite a derelict area. I was at the meeting 20 years ago where all the businesses voted to use the name 'the Northern Quarter'. Now they're throwing everything at the New Cross area across the road, so very soon we won't be on the edge at all, we'll be embedded amid all this.

"I can't complain about where we are, other venues are in the middle of nowhere. **Of course, with regeneration comes all the other problems. Flats are being built straight over**

the road. But we have such strong political links with the city. I have an annual meeting with the leader of the city council and I know Andy Burnham pretty well. That means any developer is going to have to take into account that we're there.

"Our remit is specialist music, it's not all about mainstream pop and rock at all. That's why we're a non-profit. That's why we get funding from the Arts Council. Although sometimes those audiences can be fickle, there's something that's in fashion and you get strong audiences, or it's out of fashion and you don't. But right now I think we're in a good place – our audience figures are amazing, and I think a lot of it's down to Music Venue Trust has been doing over the last few years. **Small venues really have become part of the social mix in Manchester, the same as going to the cinema or for a meal.**

"We're an organisation that happens to own a venue. We do learning programmes, we encourage involvement in international music that isn't just white British rock. We've got a website called guidetotheworldofmusic.com, which is designed as a teaching aid from GCSE through to degree level. We aren't your typical small venue, although we fit in that bracket and we're part of the conversation. Lots of people are interested in our (charitable) structure, but I always ask them if they own their building because if you go down the charitable route, you might lose your assets to the charity.

"I strongly believe that small music venues should get more funding from other areas like the Arts Council, but that has to go hand in hand with getting everything about your governance right. **I'm committed to the power of music**, I suppose, and what it means to people. I've done shows all over the world, on the banks of the Amazon, on Gorky Park and in the depths of India. Everywhere you go you meet people who make music. There's a commonality there – it doesn't necessarily put food on the table, but it's something humans do all over the world and it brings us together."

www.bandonthewall.org



12. FOLLOW THE MONEY

Follow your own money, that is. Where does it come from? Where does it go? Each one of us who is self-employed knows it can be a mind-numbing task, but it's also hugely important to any functioning business. Do your accounts. Keep your receipts. Make a ledger or a spreadsheet as you go. As people who have been interviewed for this book confirm – hiring an accountant, keeping them updated and making regular use of their advice is an advantage which can't be underestimated.

An accountant knows how businesses work, what leads to them not working (they aren't your business adviser, but you'll pick up best practice tips from a good one by osmosis over time) and how to keep your tax responsibilities right. Yet if you really want to do the best by your venue, financially, you'll want to go one better than that. You'll want to know exactly which parts of your business make money and which don't so you can react accordingly.

Break it down
Think of each aspect of your venue as a department. One is the bar, one is the kitchen, one is the cloakroom, one is the tech crew, and so on. One is even the live music element - the ticket sales versus the cost of putting the band on – although research seen by MVT suggests that this is the part of the business which almost certainly won't be making you money. This might be a surprise to many aspiring venue owners and managers, but it makes sense in a venue operating at a GMV's scale. When the band is taking a set fee plus a percentage of the take, and you have fixed overhead costs on the night (staff, security, PRS, and so on), it's no wonder when you account for the income and outgoings involved.

Use this knowledge to your advantage
If you're surprised by the lack of money in selling tickets alone, taking control of your own sense of financial awareness about the business will reveal more hidden secrets. For example, maybe you have a professional sound and lighting crew, but your bar staff are mostly volunteers, as happens in some venues. In which case, your outlay on technical staff is probably relatively substantial, even though their department makes no income. Whereas your bar, which makes the vast majority of your income on the night, is run on a shoestring.

Of course, we're not suggesting here that you make your well-trained tech crew volunteers, quite the opposite. If your bar is staffed by volunteers, how good is the service? Are there enough of them to keep people being served quickly, or are there long queues? Do you notice people stepping out of them before they buy that pint? Would you be able to serve everyone who wants served, and quickly, if you professionalise the bar staff and employ more of them? These are the kind of options you can consider if you have all the figures recorded in frot of you.

How can you rationalise the business?
'Rationalise' doesn't mean make cuts but rather, how can your make things as efficient as possible? Where is worth investing for the sake of efficiency? Maybe your bar service can be even faster and less labour-intensive if you spend on some of the new self-filling beer dispensers, which fill pints automatically from the bottom. Will installing a loading ramp mean your crew's equipment get-in takes substantially less time than it does now? Is your cloakroom making enough to justify keeping it open, or might the space be put to better use with a bar or some extra capacity in there? How long does it take people to get their ticket checked and get in the door? If they're waiting outside for an hour, then that's an hour they aren't spending at your bar.

Always remember – this is your business, not your hobby. Even if you enjoy it.

Essentially, **there's a real need for music venues to address how and where they're making their money.** It comes back to the point about artists' riders – it may say on there that they want a pair of socks to be provided, but is it really up to you to get them that pair of socks? And who pays for those socks? Or in the case of an agent asking for an inflated fee for a band, you know how it will sell and how much you can charge. If you have a record of sales, prices, fees and so on for similar past gigs, you can put your case with even greater authority.

Even if you're running your venue as a not-for-profit, you're still running a business. Knowing where all the money is and what the demands on that money are from people is something a lot of venues could do more effectively. Most important of all, this is action they can take to improve their own situation substantially in the longer term, without having to worry about outside influence. You can't control what the public spend their money on, but you have a degree of control over where your own money goes.



THE HUG AND PINT, GLASGOW

Founded: 2015
Capacity: 108 (200 including the bar space)
Staff: 5 full-time, 11 part-time
Events per year: 350



Brian Reynolds, Owner:

"I think I do this because I've got a bit of a personality disorder which gives me a problem with authority. Seriously - my pal told me he'd been in therapy about it, and that made a lot of sense to me when I applied it to myself. I was a venue booker for many years, first at the old Barfly chain then at the Arches in Glasgow, and I was pretty good at it, and really into the music. I was resilient too. Whenever anything bad happened I was still excited to get on with it. I loved the space at the Arches, but I just couldn't get into the culture. **It's a thing about a lot of entrepreneurs, I think, that they feel they're on the outside a bit, and really can't handle being told what to do**. I was probably a complete nightmare to manage.

"Nobody teaches you how to be able to do this, there's no training course you can take. It's a journey you just have to set out on. The safest way to get out of the environment I was in and into working for myself seemed to be by opening a venue, certainly safer than becoming a promoter, although I originally tried to put this venue together somewhere else and was screwed over on the premises. I learned about it the day after I finished on a huge high at the Arches, having done a big Africa Express show and all of a sudden I was five grand in the hole, with no income and a bunch of bookings to honour.

"So I dusted off my wife's old iMac and got to work booking those shows in around the city. Two years later a friend texted me to say that all the staff at a bar called the Roxy had been sent home, so we found out who they owners were and the next day we were in a meeting with them. We got lucky. They were legit, they liked what we were doing and we were able to knock down some walls in the basement to make a nice venue.

"It's taken us time to build up an audience though, to the point where I think the venue has only just reached and reunited sustainability fairly recently. I remember one of our earliest gigs was Julia Holter, a real marquee show for a venue this size, and the audience marched straight in and then right out again without hanging around for a pint. **It was our big night and we lost a load of money; I learned that you really do have to work hard at building up your customer base, and find other things to do which make money and buy you breathing space to do that.**

"We're in a nice spot, because Great Western Road is a main thoroughfare close to Glasgow city centre, but it's also a residential area, so there are plenty of people around who just want to nip out for a pint. Also, the vegan food in our bar is terrific. It's a mainstay of what we do and the bands really love it. **Everything about the place – the programming, the food, the look, the style of it – is a reflection of the passion of the people who are involved in our venue and that's the most important thing about what we do."**

www.thehugandpint.com



13. THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE

This speaks to the heart of the point we're trying to get across with this publication. For many people there might exist a historic romantic idea that a music venue is a ramshackle hole in the wall with dodgy wiring and sweaty walls, where the magic just happens because some old punk or hippy with a dream willed it into existence.

That kind of spirit persists in a clubland culture of unlicensed warehouse afterparties but – we hate to bring you boringly back down to earth here – if you run a GMV like that, it will be closed before you know it. About as long as it takes for the landlord to pay a visit or HMRC to ask what you did with all those wads of fivers you stuffed in a sack.

It's simple: **if you want to run a music venue in the present, you've got to do all of those tedious compliance things.** These days attention to detail over such things is increasingly important. Have you discovered a problem because you don't have the correct planning consent? In all honesty, you shouldn't be surprised to be told by the local authority that they don't have the correct planning, because you should know what consent you have for the venue.

Take regular stock of where you are

Good practise suggests you have an annual process. Whereby you know that's going to come up. Whether it will be a problem. What sort of things are we talking about? Here are a few ideas:

- Are you planning any renovations or to open a new space within your venue? Anything which might require planning consent? In which case, get looking at the planning consent you already have for the place and the planning regulations for your area. And whatever you do, don't just build it - get a planning application in if you need one, or you'll be taking it right back down again.
- Have any new planning applications been submitted for buildings uncomfortably close to you? You should be able to check for these through your local council's planning portal. Find out about them and get on the front foot, objecting if you need to, before that new block of flats is built and its residents are complaining about the noise.
- Do you need any licences or certificates renewed? If so, do it in plenty of time.
- Is any of your equipment or your premises in need of replacement or maintenance? Start thinking about it now, and not when it breaks down.

And there's one good housekeeping rule which supersedes all others, even though you have to pay attention to the lot:

Always Pay Your Bills

To, in no particular order, but the ones at the top are particularly important:

- HMRC
- Your landlord
- Your staff
- The artists who play and are promoted by you, or their agents. This includes the supports
- Your suppliers, of everything from beer and food to equipment and posters
- PRS and all such professional costs of the business you're in
- Charitable donations you've said you're going to make.

And when you're just starting out, in those very earliest days when you've started enthusiastically thinking about all the bands you want to book but don't quite know where to do it, here's another crucial point:

Don't be too desperate to get the venue open
Breathe in. Step back before you open the doors. Don't reconsider doing it, of course, but you might find giving it an extra month just to get everything correct helps. Don't let the fact you're really excited to have booked a band to play in your town stop you from paying attention to the fact that you don't have the right lease, licence or equipment in place yet. We don't want to drum the enthusiasm out of you, but to direct you towards getting things right and staying on top of them so they're always right. And when you're confident in this, then you can:

Think about your potential
Don't be content just to do things the way you've seen them done elsewhere, or even to stick to your own ideas if you realise they weren't ambitious enough. We're not talking about overstretching yourself, but if you can make more capacity to deal with demand, market yourself to new and different audiences, or diversify here or there, whether it's food, merchandise or community events, put a strong plan in place and go for it.





Paper Dress Vintage, Hackney, London

Founded: 2011 (shop founded in 2007)
Capacity: 180
Staff: 5 full-time, 10 casual
Events per year: 150 + 100 other comedy and fashion events

Steve Dix, Owner and Booker:

"My background is in artist management which I got into it around 2005. I work for a company called Liquid Management and manage bands including Public Service Broadcasting and Flamingods. When I met my now-wife Hannah she was running a vintage clothing shop in Shoreditch and when the recession hit in 2008, she started looking at other ways to make money. I booked in the odd band for small parties there, just four or five a year, then when we got an alcohol licence we started doing a lot more.

"I guess I always had some sort of interest in running a venue, but the way it happened was just down to circumstance and necessity. It grew organically from the fact my wife had a space and the job I was doing at the time. Put them together, and sell booze alongside them. People might spend less on clothes in a recession, but they still want to drink. Doing that got us out of trouble, and we realised we were onto something. **People enjoy the fact we're not a straightforward venue. You can buy clothes through the course of the evening. We do yoga next door as well.**

"We care a lot about the shows we put on and the quality of what we do. We like to curate the bills we put on, and our audiences appreciate that. I think we've also got a reputation for treating artists well, because I know the business from all sides and I know what artists look for in a venue. **We're welcoming, we have good equipment and good sound in the venue. We're all over what we do and we have good attention to detail.**

"We were moved out of our initial space by redevelopment, gentrification, whatever you want to call it, **and moved to our current space in Hackney. The venue had changed to much more of a joint venture by this point, so we were able to adapt the new venue accordingly, as a clothes shop and a gig venue.** Hackney's brilliant, a very vibrant, up-and coming area with a big concentration of people who love music and culture, and there are a lot of musicians in the neighbourhood.

"Although in ten years' time it will be like Shoreditch is now, I think. That would be my number one concern, keeping hold of the venue. Prices make it prohibitive to buy a property, so we're dependant on the whims of landlords and because of this, a property developer can take over any venue at any time if the right offer is made.

"Doing what we do, we're probably going to play a part in our own demise (through improving the area). I'll be surprised if we're in the same premises in ten years' time, but hopefully our landlords see that we contribute something positive to the neighbourhood. I'm sure there'll be a hotel stuck where we are before long, though, and **when that happens, we'll take the same brand and values with us, and move out another postcode again.**

"Running a venue isn't a stable occupation - it's very much a passion, a labour of love. But being in charge of your own destiny and able to create something that people enjoy is a big part of the appeal. And every day is different, across 250 different events, which mean you get to meet all sorts of creative people with new ideas. It's really energising and good fun as well."

www.paperdressvintage.co.uk



14. MAKE YOUR VENUE UNIQUE, AND OTHER GOOD IDEAS

Do you want people to identify with your GMV? To buy into it not just as a place they occasionally go to see music, but as a social hub, a place where they feel at home and want to spend a chunk of their lives? Then there's one simple test you have to consider:

Do your customers want to buy the T-shirt?
It might not be the thing which pays all your bills, but many venues manage a nice little side-earner in merchandise; T-shirts, tote bags, lighters and the like. But whether your patrons want to buy these from you says so much more about your venue than whether or not you have an eye for making a little bit extra on the side.

Why do people buy branded T-shirts, who from, and why do they wear them proudly? They buy them from bands, from football teams, and occasionally from brands which have a strong image and sense of customer identification (a beer line, for example). They wear T-shirts with images of their favourite movie poster or kitsch character from their youth, or they sport items of clothing because of the label which made it.

In other words, people buy and wear branded items because they speak strongly to their sense of identity and that's what you have to do as well. Be yourself, but also be attentive to the hopes and aspirations of your customers. The music industry, the music it plays and the people who play it have changed greatly in the last five decades. But one aspect remains unchanged. People listen to music because it means something to them, and if you want them to buy into your venue, you have to mean something to them as well.

We've spoken about some of the following already, but let's raise them again to demonstrate how they don't just make good business sense, but rather tell your customers exactly who you are and what you care about.

Show you care about ethical issues
Some hot-button topics are ever-changing and some are ever-present, but it's up to you to remain aware of what good practise is in relation to them. Many of these should be obvious, and the kind of thing you do automatically, but let's break it down:

- **Don't discriminate against anyone**

Your venue is for everyone, and it's also illegal to discriminate. It's up to you to know about all the groups and sub-groups who might be discriminated against. Broadly, you need to be aware of and sensitive to the needs and expectations of a multiracial community, to LGBT+ people, to those with disabilities or additional needs, and to women (and yes, to straight men as well, because it's possible to include everyone without excluding anyone).

- **Be proactive on environmental issues**

Use paper straws, not plastic ones. Don't use plastic or disposable plates, cups or packaging for your food and drink, or at least use fully compostable materials if you want to do takeaway food or can't/don't want to use glasses during a gig. Use a green energy supplier, if you can. Try to only use locally sourced and sustainable produce in the kitchen, where possible, or perhaps even consider joining the growing number of good-quality vegan/vegetarian restaurants. As environmental awareness grows, so do the number of people who genuinely care about these things and any

venue which obviously doesn't care leaves a sour taste in the mouth.

Show you care about the music

- **Organise events with the bands you put on**

Link up with your local record shop for an instore gig and/or a signing in the afternoon of the show, for example. Make a point of free and unhurried access for merch sales and signings after the show. In fact you might even designate a quiet corner to set up a table and let the band get on with it. It all adds to your customers' special experience.

- **Treat the bands well**

We've mentioned this before, but think about how it reflects well on you. You may haggle over the cost of the rider with their agent or tour manager, but as long as you treat the bands like valued professionals and give them the gift of good kit and capable, helpful staff, then you'll build a reputation which will spread through the industry.

- **Make music a part of everything you do**

Have the best and most diverse jukebox in town. Run a regular music pub quiz. Host listening parties, album launch parties, vinyl swapmeets, record fairs. Whatever fits, licence permitting.

Make your venue truly accessible

- **Deal with the obvious issues**

Do you have non-step access for customers, staff and bands with additional needs? Do you have a disabled toilet? A viewing position where customers can sit if need be? Are your doors wide enough and suitable for wheelchair access? Do you have a safe wheelchair store and handrails on the stairs? Will you designate a member of staff to be on hand for assistance and make special arrangements for customers, e.g. clearing a wheelchair space in the front row? How close is parking, and is it free or paying?

- **…and the not so obvious ones**

Not every disability is a visible one. What about a hearing induction loop at the box office? A warning that strobe lights will be in use? Braille-printed menus? Every customer, whether they have a disability or not, has one important thing in common; their money is all the same colour. If you're in the lucky position to be starting a venue from scratch, you have the perfect opportunity to design everyone's new favourite place to go.

- **Even if you can't do any of the above, you can still be accessible**

Accessibility isn't a question of fitting ramps and feeling good about yourself, it's about letting every customer – but especially those with additional needs – know what they can and can't expect when they arrive. Are you down in the basement and unable to fit an elevator or ramp due to planning restrictions? There's nothing you can do about that, but you can let customers know in advance what to expect. Your website should detail what kind of accessibility your venue can and can't offer. In this case, the worst thing you can do is sell someone a ticket for a show it turns out they can't attend. And if you can solve any of the accessibility issues you have in a creative way, so much the better. The UK experts on access in music are Attitude is Everything so check out their website for advice, from an online Access Statement to other measures you could work towards: www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/resources

Bear in mind: "What would social media say?"

Wiser heads are coming around to the fact that not every statement posted on the internet is a statement of verifiable truth, but you should still run your business with an awareness that people will vent in public if they feel they need to. Your customer service and your policies on

discrimination, accessibility and good ethical practice should be robust, as should the channels you have for dealing with complaints, although sometimes you just need to remember that people have high expectations. They might go along to a much larger venue and pay £7 for a pint of lager, just be annoyed about it and do nothing. But if you charge them £7 for a pint of lager in your GMV, expect to hear about it on social media.



CAFÉ INDIEPENDENT, SCUNTHORPE

Founded: 2014
Capacity: 220
Staff: 5 full-time, 4 part-time and up to 30 volunteers
Events per year: 150



David Plumtree, Managing Director:

"I've been a Youth and Community Development Worker in the local area for over ten years, supporting young people to develop and deliver projects. They were expressing a desire for somewhere to go and something to do and they also wanted an opportunity to gain work experience in a structured, supportive environment. So I put that into the mixer with my personal background in music promotion and running cafes and bars and came up with the concept for Café INDIEpendent.

"It's a coffee and music house, like any other high street cafe - with morals - by day and an arts venue focusing on live music in the evening. We cover theatre, comedy, art exhibitions and film screenings. We host all manner of community groups during the day - in part to be nice, but also because it brings people through the door. **The music element is a personal passion for the core team though, because the idea of going out in Scunthorpe to shitty bars selling cheap vodka fills us with dread. We wanted to create something that catered for people like us, and if no-one else was going to do it, we felt we had to.**

"Underpinning all of this, Café INDIEpendent is an employability project for young people. The beautiful thing about solving social issues, of course, is that it opens up funding opportunities which can help get your ideas off the ground, which we found via the Big Lottery. **Our choice of venue – an enormous, dilapidated building – was partly because we believe in the value of historic buildings and their community footprint, and partly because we knew if there was a lot of work to do we could engage the community from the outset.** They helped us out with a lot, which meant they were engaged in the journey. They could see everything we were doing to provide and felt a part of it.

"We worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week for five months just to open. Then in 2016 we gave the place away as a co-op, so now we truly are a community venue, and this place belongs to its customers. Scunthorpe - Sunny Scunny - is a steel town, founded on a declining industry, and that has a massive impact on the place. We see high levels of deprivation, no university and brain drain, all the usual battles of a working class northern town, but the people here are passionate about music and their sense

of community. It wasn't easy to book bands at first, but as our reputation has grown alongside our relationships with agents, it's become easier.

"We've gathered a reputation for looking after bands properly, for having lively crowds and being pretty nice! We do lots of different things here, so there are lots of reasons to come, although sometimes - bizarrely - it's hard to engage with the younger audience, who are resistant to ticket prices and too keen to rely on digital recordings. We've launched several initiatives to combat this and had some success. **We take an informal, light-hearted approach to social media. Basically we dick about and hope it keeps us present in people's minds. People grow tired of relentless gig promotion.**

"I love the buzz when you get home at 5am after a sell-out gig and reflect on the evening on how many people had an amazing time and saw something that will never be repeated. **The bands are generally great, from the minute they walk in they seem to get the place. Most are really grateful for little luxuries, like a proper flat white on arrival. The thing about creative people is, they like creative places."**

www.cafeindiependent.org.uk



15. JOIN THE GRASSROOTS MUSIC VENUE COMMUNITY

Up until recently, a lot of the issues facing what we now know as GMVs haven't been helped by the fact that each has worked in isolation. Venues in larger cities and towns have created informal local networks between them, of course, and it's always advisable to join local trade groups which can lobby collectively, whether they're in the licensed trade or just businesses in your area.

Since the formation of **Music Venue Trust** in 2014, however, the UK music industry now has a charitable trade body which seeks to organise, campaign and lobby on behalf of GMVs across the country, with the expectation that joined-up thinking in terms of changing governmental policy, taking collective action and defining best practice for GMVs – whether during normal business, or if they find themselves threatened by external forces – can help better preserve and develop the sector. It has a strong presence in the press, parliament and around the country, and has received support from musicians including Paul McCartney, Frank Turner, Ellie Rowsell of Wolf Alice, Jeremy Pritchard of Everything Everything, KT Tunstall, Madness, Billy Bragg, Savages, Slaves and many more.

Here are some of the initiatives the MVT runs:

Music Venues Alliance (MVA)

Founded in January 2015, the Music Venues Alliance (MVA) is a free-to-join, informal association of GMVs and other organisations and individuals who are passionate about this part of the music industry and have pledged their support to the work of the MVT. Joining the MVA makes you part of a network of venues across the whole of the UK, and with over 500 members (as of February 2019) the MVA represents a significant proportion of UK GMVs, so can speak with authority on behalf of the sector. It regularly consults with members to inform them of MVT's lobbying and fundraising work, share information and resources, and connect people. More info at www.musicvenuetrust.com/music-venues-alliance/

Emergency Response Service
An online service where every venue in the country can access free legal and expert advice on licensing, planning, development, noise and tenancy issues. MVT don't want you to deal with any of those issues on your own, so has assembled a team of professionals to give you initial advice for free. The trust's belief is that the single biggest cause, eventually, of venue closures is that the first response was poor, wrong or just didn't happen. Upon application, advice will be sent to you within 72 hours and, wherever possible, it will result in a letter dealing with the issue for you, or an objection to an application or a complaint that's rigorous, factual and correct. More info at www.musicvenuetrust.com/venue-emergency-response/

Fightback
The public-facing fundraising arm of MVT. Money raised from gigs, T-shirts and branding (which you can host or sell in your venue) funds the Emergency Response Team. More info at www.mvtfightback.com/

Venues Day
The only annual national networking event organised specifically for the people who run GMVs. Held in October each year with 500 delegates, the one-day event offers panel discussions, networking with other venues and music industry professionals, and access to new products and expert advice. MVA members are offered one free ticket to attend (subject to availability), and MVA membership also offers free access to smaller regional meetings around the country, as well as training events and local meetings.

Nearly everything we've told you in this publication comes as a result of the pooling together of knowledge from GMVs around the country, meaning they can improve their own situation and show the way where others can follow. The industry may be in a state of flux at the moment but, as one of our interviewees observed during the course of researching this book, those venues which are adapting to the changes and tailoring their business for the needs of their audience and their own ambitions seem to be doing better than they have done in a long time.



GUIDANCE

Licensing	
Attribute	**Requirements and descriptions**
Premises licence	Authorises all Licensable activities. Sale/supply of alcohol, regulated entertainment: recorded music, live music, films, plays, performance of dance, indoor sporting events, boxing or wrestling and late-night refreshment (the sale of hot food or drink after 23:00) Is there a premises licence already in effect at the venue? If already licensed, is the licence appropriate for your proposed use? Check the permitted hours and activities. Does the licence have restrictive conditions? Is the associated layout plan correct? Even if it looks fit for purpose, it is essential that you contact the local licensing service to check for any outstanding issues or concerns. This is equally important for existing licence holders as well as persons looking at new premises.
Licence holder	The premises licence is held by a legal entity or applied for by a legal entity, individual, company, CIC. A licence can be transferred between entities for a small fee, it is a simple process and only the Police have the authority to object if there are any serious crime and disorder grounds. The licence lapses in the case of death, incapacity or insolvency of the holder. You have 28 days to transfer to a new entity in these circumstances.
Designated premises supervisor / Personal licence holder	The Premises Licence requires that the venue appoints a Designated Premises Supervisor. This person acts as primary contact for local government and the police. They must understand the social issues and potential problems associated with the sale of alcohol, and also have a good understanding of the business itself. While they need not be on site at all times, they are expected to be involved enough with the business to be able to act as its representative, and they must be contactable at all times. A Personal Licence must be held by any person wishing to act as the Designated Premises Supervisor. The personal licence is designed to ensure that anybody running or managing a business that sells or supplies alcohol will do so in a professional fashion. Once you receive your personal licence, you can act as the designated premises supervisor for any business that sells or supplies alcohol. A Personal Licence holder must have completed a one-day course and not hold any unspent convictions for any relevant offence. The DPS is responsible for all sales of alcohol under a Premises Licence. A venue can have multiple personal licence holders but only one DPS.
Application process	When applying for a new premises licence, there is a 28-day consultation period once the application is received by the Local Authority. This period is for organisations such as Council, Fire Brigade and Police plus local residents to comment on the contents of the application. The application must be advertised, have a completed operating schedule and be accompanied by a layout plan. **Advertising.** Public notice must be displayed in window of premises for the duration of the consultation period; and Public Notice must be advertised in the appropriate local press. If there are no outstanding representations at end of consultation, the application is granted on the terms detailed within the operating schedule. If there are outstanding representations at the end of consultation, a **Licensing Committee Hearing** will be held within 28 days of the last date for application. A decision on the application will be delivered at the hearing and will take immediate effect: the decision can be appealed within 21 days of Notice of the Decision being served on the applicant.

Layout plan	Any premises licence application made under the Licensing Act 2003 must include a layout plan. The plan should be in the standard scale 1:100 and show the location or locations at the premises which are to be used for the consumption of alcohol; fixed structures (including furniture) or similar objects temporarily in a fixed location (but not furniture) which may impact on the ability of individuals on the premises to use exits or escape routes without impediment; in a case where the premises includes a stage or raised area, the location and height of each stage or area relative to the floor; The plan must also include any steps, stairs, elevators or lifts, all toilets; the location and type of any fire safety and other safety equipment; and the location of a kitchen, if any, on the premises.
Operating schedule	The operating schedule for the premises should include steps on how the premises deal with alcohol sales and ID verification, including reference to policies on managing bar staff, dealing and recording any accidents and emergencies (log books), the use of CCTV, SIA registered security staff and security polices, crowd management (ingress / egress / and general crowd flow inside your venue, dispersal policies, crime scene preservation and noise management. Sample documents are available to MVA members on request.
Licensing Hearings	**The Licensing Sub Committee hearing** - This is not a Court of law. It falls within the scope of the hearing regulations. The Committee sets and control its own procedures. The procedure is informal, is intended to be fair and offers an equal opportunity to all parties to present their case, assisting the Licensing Committee understand the relevant issues of each case.

Appeals	**Appeals to Magistrates' Court** - Suspends the effect of the Committee decision. The Council who made the decision is always a respondent Sometimes there is the opportunity to negotiate – consider prospect of upholding decision in light of e.g. new evidence, and mediation. The whole process can be very time consuming and expensive, as solicitors and barristers can be expensive. If you lose appeal you could also be liable to the paying Council costs, and vice versa, if you win you might recover some or all of your costs.
Live Music: deregulation	**Live Music: Act** - no licence required for live music if: unamplified and takes place between 08:00 and 23:00 anywhere, audience unlimited. Amplified music between 08:00 and 23:00hrs and audience less than 500 for any premises authorised for the sale of alcohol. Recorded Music: No licence required for recorded music if: Played within a premises authorised for the sale of alcohol; Takes place between 08:00 and 23:00; and the audience is less than 500. Note: Both can be made licensable upon a successful review application sought on the basis of Public Nuisance linked to Noise from a licensed premise. Plays: No licence required for the performance of a play if: it takes place between 08:00 and 23:00; and the audience is less than 500.
Planning consent	Planning consent for a premise determines both its current permitted use and the hours of operation. If the proposed use sits outside of the current planning authorisation, does the current use qualify for an appropriate permitted development change? Appropriate planning consent is generally expected to be in place when seeking an alcohol and regulated entertainment licence. Examples of planning use class as set out below.

	A3 - Food & Drink, such as cafés and restaurants A4 - Drinking Establishments, such as public houses and bars D1 – Public Services, such as public or exhibition halls D2 - Entertainment & Leisure, such as concert halls and cinemas Sui Generis – such as theatres and night clubs
Health and Safety / Operating policies	
Venue design	A new venue should have enough flexibility to allow other uses as well as live music, such as theatre or dance, lectures, meetings spaces, and film presentations. It should also be designed to allow for back of House: areas off stage including the wings and cross-overs, secure dressing rooms; showers and W/C provision.
Location	The premises should be arranged to minimise the risk of nuisance to nearby properties, but should also be located with good transport links, and footfall for your potential customers. The premises should also be arranged to maximise the multi-use potential of the space, a ground floor aspect means for greater scope for daytime and other ancillary uses for a space to subsidies the night time cultural, arts or music functions. Basement premises for instance might be beneficial acoustically but are also notoriously hard to use during daylight hours.
Occupancy	Determining the capacity of buildings can be complex. Useful occupancy figures are given within ***"Fire Safety legislation, Building Regulations, Part B, Table C1: 'Floor Space Factors', and the Technical Standards for Place of Public Entertainment "*** Small to medium live music venues capacities are determined by the available floor space for audience,

	ventilation, number of toilets, numbers of exits and the available exit widths for patrons. For example, in respect of floor space, a venue should allow between 0.3 to 0.45m^2 per person for standing patrons watching performances, based on a risk assessment of the available space. To determine whether a space factor of 0.3m2 may be achieved, a risk assessment should be conducted to identify that there are ancillary locations inside the event that a person could move to in an emergency situation. Other factors such as travel distances to exits and staircases need to be factors into the calculations, but this is set in detail in the guidance.
Fire Safety requirements	Before holding any live music event, it is vital that you cover the basics; that you know the capacity of the venue and stick to it, make sure any material you are using is flame retardant (water-based fire proofing spray is freely available and cheap to purchase) and ensure that the way you set out the venue doesn't block any exit routes. The HM Governments guidance "Fire safety risk assessment: small and medium places of assembly" is essential reading. Fire Safety in the UK is covered by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, this requires that there is a nominated person at any public place who is the "responsible person". This person's specific duties are to ensure that a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) is carried out; that the control measures identified in the FRA are in effect; and perform an annual review including updates as necessary to reflect any changes. A capacity should be documented for the premises overall and for individual rooms if relevant. The FRA should consider factors such as floor space, numbers of toilets, potential queuing time, fire safety equipment and available fire exits. A policy to manage the capacity should be adopted to

	prevent overcrowding and localised overcrowding. Basic inspection of the fire safety equipment at the venue: If fire extinguishers are covered in dust, they are almost certainly out of date. All fire safety equipment has a date label that shows when it was last checked, this should be done annually. Check the fire alarm panel isn't showing a fault, that all the exit routes are clear from obstruction and that emergency lighting is working (there should be a green indicator light visible). Following these basic rules will be a good starting point to help you put on a safe event.
Fire Risk Assessment	A live music venue must by law have a written Fire Risk Assessment. The Fire Risk Assessment will state the maximum capacity for the venue and/or room being used for your performance. The Fire Risk Assessment should identify methods of removing or reducing the risk of fire. This is broken down as: sources of ignition (i.e. flame, candles / special effects, faulty electrics); sources of fuel (i.e. non fire proof drapes, damaged upholstery) and; sources of oxygen. The fire risk assessment should also identify the control measures that ensure people are able to safely evacuate the premises in the event of a fire. These measures would include: limiting capacity of the venue to numbers that can exit safely in an emergency; ensuring all the fire exits are kept clear, such as eliminating trip hazards (e.g. ripped carpets, items being stored); appropriate emergency lighting and signage that clearly direct persons to a place of safety in an emergency; appropriate firefighting equipment is available at the venue and is fully serviced and operational; appropriate fire alarm and/or fire detection equipment is in place and is fully functional and operational; and any other measures appropriate to the venue.

Service access	Avoid designing areas that are not visible to the bar staff unless there is a significant number of other walking staff. If there are separated areas, mezzanines or rooms the use of CCTV is sensible. Design should be undertaken to ensure sound baffling where services pass through adjacent spaces to reduce the risk of acoustic breakout, to meet overall acoustic criteria.
Waste management	Waste and recycling storage access requirements: refer to local authority guidance and requirements. Generally bottling out and waste collect should not take place between 11pm – 7am, or on Sundays.
Transport	Drop off; pick up and drop off facilities close to the principal entrance suitable for taxis (with appropriate kerbs). Public transport options preferred, and available on website and in the venue: bus, train routes, cycle parking, car parking, arrangement for Taxi collections and pick-ups. Transport provisions should be detailed in the dispersal policy for the premises.
Acoustics	Room size, design and building materials can all have a significant effect on the sound levels within a space. Other factors include the range and style of music (particularly rock and pop) and the number of performers, and any other performance noise sources (for example, pyrotechnics or cannons). Regular check of sound systems to ensure balance. Reduce the noise levels away from the dance floor or performance area. Directional speakers can be helpful to focus sound away from sensitive areas to where it is wanted, for example over the dance floor using loudspeakers mounted in the ceiling and facing downwards. Increase the number of directional speakers to avoid 'hot-spots', install vibration isolation mounts to loudspeakers to prevent noise entering the building structure.

	Avoid peripheral loudspeakers or reduce their volume if they cannot be avoided. Room Insulation: Intruding sound can interfere with rehearsals and performances, all sound leaks should be eliminated, mass absorption in the wall construction is vital, as is the specification of any doors or windows into the space. Acoustic entrance lobbies should be provided. Isolation can be enhanced through 'box within box' construction of independent performance space construction supported on foot isolators.
Staff Welfare noise	Control, quiet areas provided. Staff rotation between quiet and noisy areas, staff trained in noise risks and protective measures, staff considered to be particularly at risk identified and provided with ear plugs, health surveillance, including hearing tests, for 'at risk' staff. The following techniques help separate staff from the music; position bars away from the dance floor and performance areas; provide staff off-duty areas with noise levels below 80 dB; locate bars in quiet areas or 'chill-out' rooms where the noise levels are preferably below 80 dB. Acoustic screening can be helpful to protect specific workers and locations from direct noise sources. Spatial Layout; position loudspeakers to avoid excessive volume for the staff (and for the public close by).
Noise Management	Whenever you host live music or play recorded music you need to be mindful of the many legal provisions which aim to combat noise nuisance. These still apply despite the Live Music Act and the Legislative Reform (Entertainment Licensing) Order. In particular, Local Authorities have powers to immediately deal with excessive noise coming from licensed premises, during night hours – between 11pm and 7am. Local residents can make complaints against outlets which can be acted on immediately. Before 11pm music noise from a venue can still be deemed a nuisance if Council Officers consider that nearby residents are suffering intrusive noise

	from any entertainment. A noise management policy should be in place that sets out sound attenuation measures to prevent or control music, singing and speech noise breakout from the premises The policy should ideally be based on the findings of a trained persons in noise or acoustics; and all staff should be trained on the content of the policy to ensure a commitment to good noise management. A record should be kept of the date and name of person trained and made available for inspection by the licensing authority or environmental health responsible authority. Event promoters should be made aware of the policy in advance of any performance. Windows and doors should be kept closed whilst entertainment is being provided to prevent noise breakout. Ventilation should ideally be provided by mechanical means, and all the premises windows should be sound insulated; emergency exits should be sealed acoustic doors. A lobbied area should be provided at the entrance and exit to the premises; and doors should be fitted with self-closing devices. Locate entertainment facilities such as DJ booth, stage and loud speakers away from doors and windows. Rubber speaker mounts can be used to minimise structure borne noise.
Limiters	Although not generally suitable for use within Grassroots Music Venues it may be deemed appropriate to consider the installation of a Sound Limiting Device. Employ the services of a recognised acoustic consultant to make the appropriate assessments, determine the correct equipment (a cut-out limiter can really ruin a performance) and set maximum levels of sound. Association of Noise Consultants (ANC) and Institute of Acoustics (IOA) have on-line search tools that can be used to find a local consultant. The sound limiting device should be used at all times that relevant regulated entertainment is taking place, including all externally promoted events.

	Only the premises licence holder or a nominated deputy and the designated premises supervisor should have access to the sound limiting device.
Methods for monitoring noise	Methods for monitoring noise should be included in a noise management policy/plan. Methods could range from simple perimeter checks and listening tests by the licence holder/staff to a detailed measurement taken by a qualified consultant using sound measuring equipment. Also closing down policy where by music is gradually reduced for last 30 minutes, in order to minimise disturbance from customers on exit. Noise monitoring should actively be carried out on a regular basis and in particular when a new form of entertainment is introduced at the premises, when alterations are made to the premises or when a complaint is made directly to the venue.
Access advice	All new developments are required to be Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Compliant. Prior to opening, it is recommended that the premises shall prepare a dedicated Access Information page on your website and have it clearly linked to from your main page as a button or in a pull down menu, rather than hidden away. The Information shall be clear and concise but detailed and available to download. As wheelchair users make up 8% of the UK's disabled population, even the most physically inaccessible venues still have an obligation to provide detailed access information. Knowing whether there is a small step, 3 steps or a flight of steps, or whether there is seating or a hearing loop available, could be the deciding factor for someone considering whether or not to buy tickets. Personal assistant's tickets could be made available at no additional cost. Websites should ideally describe how and when to apply for personal assistant's tickets, what evidence is needed and whether they are sent out or collected on site.

	Viewing areas could be set aside on request Accessible toilets- Locations, are RADAR locks used, are they accessed by a steward. Assistance dogs- Have a policy on assistance dogs, area provided for toileting / drinking? Strobe lighting - General warning if it's going to be used, information about how and when warnings will be given during / before performances. Alternative formats available - Large print as a minimum, braille and audio upon request
Management standards	Licence holders should have a comprehensive knowledge of best practice and be able to implement any advice given by the responsible authorities. They are able to understand verbal and written advice and legal requirements. Can demonstrate knowledge of the licensing objectives, relevant parts of the Licensing Policy and their responsibilities under the Licensing Act 2003. Are able to run their businesses lawfully and in accordance with good business practices. Can demonstrate a track record of compliance with legal requirements. Have a good standard and record of staff training on all aspects of venue operation.
First aid	First aid boxes should be available at the premises and maintained with sufficient in date stock. At least one member of staff with a recognised qualification in first aid should be on duty when the premises licence is in use (this can be done on a risk assessed basis).

Staff training	It is very important that policies around the sales of alcohol to minors and intoxicated persons are provided to all staff to give them the knowledge and confidence to deal with difficult situations. Staff should be trained in recognising and challenging people who look to be under the age of 25 years. A record should be kept of the date and name of person trained. Refresher training should be available and given to all staff on induction and refreshed annually. Records should be made available for inspection by the police or licensing authority.
Accidents and emergencies	A written policy to deal with all types of accidents & emergency incidents should be in place at the premises. The policy should be based on risk assessments and include matters such as emergency management, contingency planning and evacuation procedures in the event of fire, bomb threats or suspect packages and when to contact emergency services. Evacuation responsibilities and roles should be clearly communicated to staff, routes and exits should be well defined and evacuation plans exercised regularly. Conduct evacuation drills every six months. A copy of the fire risk assessment should be kept at the premises and made available for inspection by the fire authority and licensing authority. A fire detection system should be in place at the premises and should be fully functional at all times. The system should be tested regularly with records kept and made available for inspection. Means of escape in case of any emergency must be clearly visible, unobstructed and well maintained including areas outside exits leading to a place of ultimate safety such as the street. Checks should be carried out before opening each day to ensure that exits are unlocked and unobstructed.

	Equipment should be checked and maintained regularly with a record kept of the date and findings of the checks. Staff training in fire safety and any premises safety policy should be provided for all staff to give them the knowledge and confidence to deal with emergency situations, including location of equipment, utilities, services and layout of premises. Training should include how to use fire extinguishers.
CCTV	The presence of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras both inside and immediately outside the premises can actively deter disorder, nuisance, anti-social behaviour and crime generally. The local Police licensing team will also certainly have required that you have cameras on your premises for the prevention of crime directed against the business itself, its staff, or its customers. This is also likely to be enforced by way of a formal licence condition, that requires you to keep images for a certain number of days, usually a month, and provide images on request. Licence holders are required to regularly check the CCTV at a premises is working, the most common Police closure notice or review issued a premises are being the CCTV was working when images are requested. Checking the CCTV should form part of the opening procedure for any premises, it is also important that at least one member of staff during a shift is trained to operate the CCTV system.
Security policies	Door supervisors working at a venue are required to be registered with the Security Industry Authority ("SIA"). Any person performing the role of a door supervisor must be licensed with the Security Industry Authority (SIA) and SIA badges must be clearly displayed whilst working. Door staff should be easily identifiable by wearing clearly visible identification such as arm bands. Door staff should sign into a register detailing their full SIA licence number, their name, contact details and the time

	and date their duty commenced and concluded at the end of each time they work. Stewards and other staff at the premises should also be easily identifiable. Stewards must not be used for supervision of the door. Again security policies and samples are available from MVT.
Crime scene prevention	When a crime occurs at a venue the information gathered and the preservation of the scene will be vital in helping the Police with their inquiries. It is therefore very important that all staff are aware of their responsibilities should a crime occur. Failure to secure a crime scene is a common reason for a Police review of your licence, and could result in criminal prosecution to anyone involved. A sample policy is made available by MVT
Safeguarding	It is good practice for venues to creating a safe and secure environment for everyone, including safeguards to mitigate against sexual harassment and the protection of young adults in licensed venues. Whilst aiming to create safe and secure environment for everyone working and socialising in in venues, MVT encourage premises licence holders to consider arrangements that could be put in place to manage the risk of any harassment and to protect young adults. Venues are therefore encouraged to have safeguarding measures in their operating policies and are encouraged to consider adopting the following measures as appropriate: Promoting 'ASK ANGELA' signing up to 'GOOD NIGHT OUT', displaying posters which discourage harassment and encourage reporting to staff/managers. Take every report of harassment seriously and take appropriate action, take steps to support persons who report sexual harassment, train and support staff implementing venue policies, take proactive measures to ensure women leave venues safely. Risk assessment should be considered for events that attract a broader younger clientele (under 25 year olds)

	Consideration should be given to preventing the possibility of drink spiking by offering various anti drink spiking products to customers. If a customer suspects that their drink has been spiked, venues should report it to the police immediately. A process for this should be clearly set out in a premises duty of care policy.
Underage shows	Music Venue Trust supports the provision of licensed events and venues specifically for children and young people, however it also recognises that children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society and that additional safeguarding and general safety measures may need to be put on place. Where appropriate, underage shows are expected to have management arrangements in place to safeguard children which may include a safeguarding children policy, limiting the hours when children may be present, restricting access to specific parts of the premises, requiring proof of age on admission, limiting unobserved contact between employees and children, increased staffing ratios, and Disclosure and Barring Service checks. The reality for grassroots music venues that survive financially on bar take is that the risk / reward balance for under age shows can make them difficult to host. A sample under age policy is available from MVT
Enforcement	Police and Licensing should in general, seek to achieve compliance with the licensing objectives and requirements of the Licensing Act 2003 through providing advice & guidance. The range of enforcement actions available to officers includes verbal advice, written advice (e-mail or letter), verbal warning, written warning and (with some authorities) Action Plans. The primary objective of all authority enforcement should be to achieve compliance. Local Authorities and Police should approach enforcement in this order, premises should not receive threatening letters out of the blue, and if this type of correspondence is received it is likely the authority is not following their enforcement policy and you should contact the MVT Emergency Response Team immediately.

Licensing visits	Persons visiting your venue for a licensing check should identify themselves and make contact with the nominated person in charge at the time. They should also advise you why they visiting, i.e. routine inspection, or investigating an incident or a complaint. The reason for conducting a Licensing Visit is to establish if the premises is working to their license conditions, or if it is breaching one or more of the terms or conditions of the licence. They must make a formal record of the visit, which can be made available on request. Common breaches of the premises licence are; incidents not recorded within the 'Incidents and refusals' register, CCTV either not working or staff present are unable to work it or download it if required for police investigating incidents or crime, the Premises Licence Summary not be visible to customers within the licensed premises, venue not able to provide the officer with a full copy of the conditions of the Premises Licence, staff not knowing the conditions of their licence ; noise conditions, age verification procedures, numbers of SIA door staff , Designated Premises Supervisor (DPS) no longer at the premises, record checking such as staff training and refusal logs, and venue trading for longer hours than permitted.
Enforcement options / notices	Closures – LA 2003 S160 & Closure Notice – Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 S76 Prosecution and / or Civil Actions (Applications to Review a Premises Licence) The submission of an Application to Review the Premises Licence to the Local Authority, which will be completed in compliance with the Premises Licence Review Protocol. Reviews can be applied for by any Responsible Authority or interested party.

Reviews	The premises licences for your venue may be reviewed at any stage if a person with relevant concerns submits a formal review application. Relevant concerns relate to one or more of the Licensing Objectives of the prevention of crime and disorder, the prevention of public nuisance, public safety and protecting children from harm. On hearing a review, the Council can impose additional conditions, modify the licence, for example by reducing the permitted hours, suspend the licence for up to three months, remove the DPS or revoke the premises licence. The Council can also decide to take no action. It is therefore strongly recommended to avoid a situation where your Premises Licence is reviewed
Residential complaints	A person who puts their concerns in writing is often highly motivated to take action, and licence holders should treat a written complaint as preliminary action to a more formal complaint. The recommended process for responding to a written complaint is similar to the process for a verbal complaint, with some additional steps: Acknowledge the letter of complaint promptly. This can be done with a phone call, an email or a letter. You don't need to commit to taking any action, you just need to confirm the complaint has been received and noted.

EXACTLY THE GUIDE YOU NEED

If you aspire to running your own Grassroots Music Venue, then this book will provide you with all the knowledge you need to get started. An accessible and practical manual, it covers everything you need to consider in terms of your responsibilities, as well as providing inspiration from some of the people who run successful venues across the UK. The book cross-references with online resources on Music Venue Trust's website: www.musicvenuetrust.com

This guide is one of a pair (read more in How to Run a Grassroots Music Venue) created by **Music Venue Trust** with support from the **Mayor of London** and **Ticketmaster.**

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Designed by Charlotte Michelle Simonsen