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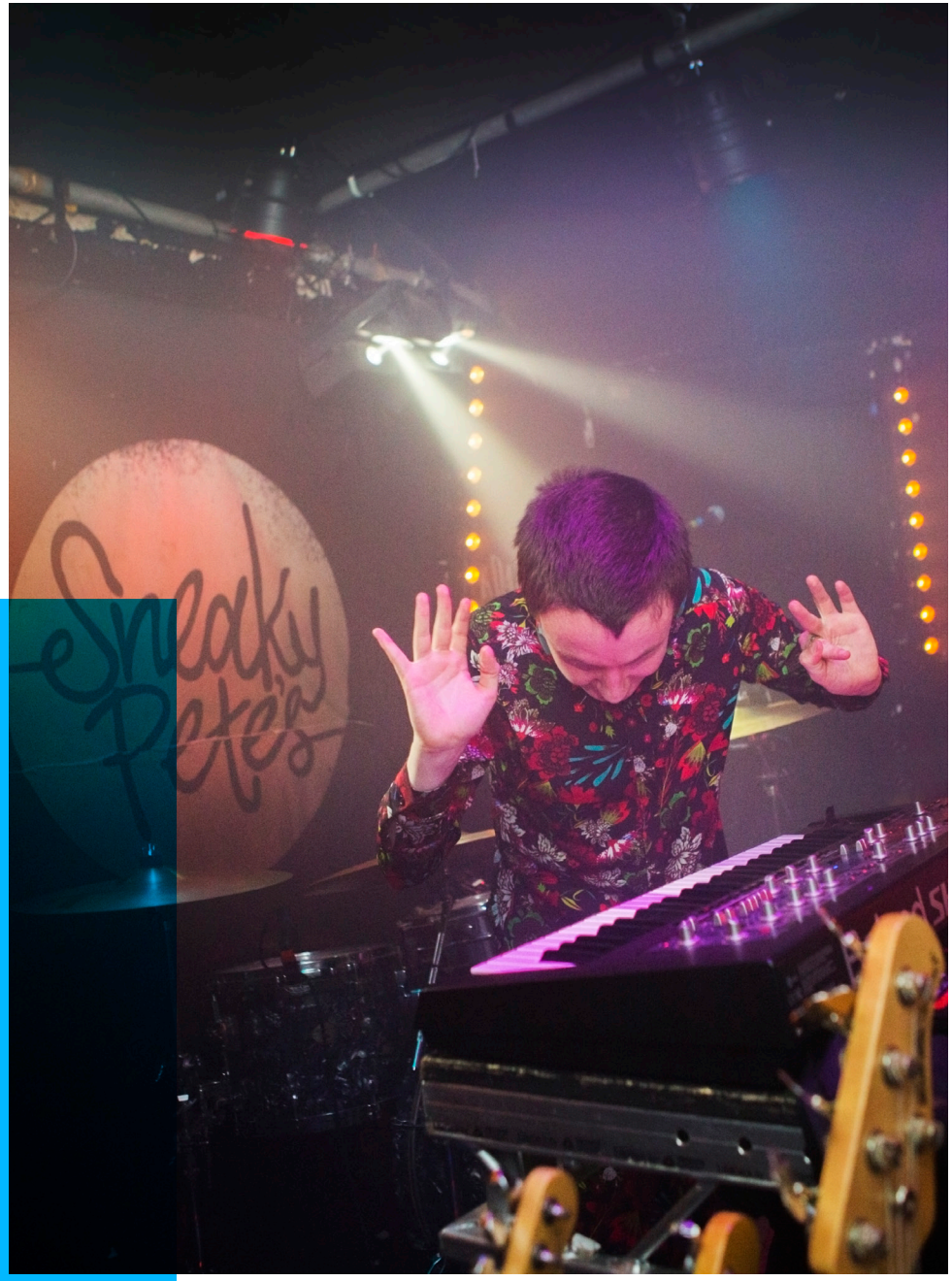


MVT
Music Venue Trust

Presents

HOW TO RUN A GRASSROOTS MUSIC VENUE

WORDS BY DAVID POLLOCK
PHOTOS BY JANNICA HONEY



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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The design and limited print run have been possible thanks to Ticketmaster, long-term supporters of MVT's work.

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: STOP AND LOOK AGAIN AT YOUR BUSINESS

We admit, it feels unusual telling an audience who have been running their respective music venues for some time already how to go about their business. Yet the purpose of this publication is absolutely not to try and pick holes in what you do, to tell you you've been getting it wrong all these years, or to demand that you throw any babies out with the bathwater.

In fact, if you read what we've written here and the vast majority of it seems like the clearest common sense to you and in line with what you do already, then so much the better. After all, the fact you're still here suggests you're bucking a trend in the life of small music venues across the UK; UK Music suggest that approximately 35% of the UK's venues have closed in the last decade. Even if you're fortunate enough to not feel threatened by the changing cultural landscape for music venues, we expect you'll have noticed its effect somehow.

Since 2014 Music Venue Trust (MVT) has existed to work for and advocate on behalf of Grassroots Music Venues (see the next chapter for what we mean by this). As well as helping to formalise links between venues across the UK and advocate on their behalf individually and collectively, it's also helped to gather a sense of what might be putting these venues under the most pressure.

Even if you don't recognise any of them as having an immediate effect on you, you should know that the following are all common reasons why many venues in your position are feeling as though they're struggling or under threat:

- Development – Or, as has been said before, "when the cranes go up in a city, you know it spells trouble for music venues". Does your venue, formerly in one of the roughest neighbourhoods in your town, now sit on prime development land? Is your landlord looking at closing you down and selling up as soon as possible?

- Noise and other disturbance complaints – These are nothing new for any venue, but the chances are your neighbourhood might not have changed much since you started, and you're still here because you've reached a comfortable understanding with those around you. Yet, aligned with the prospect of development, what happens when new blocks of flats are erected around you and the new residents in them don't like what they hear?

- Changing tastes in entertainment – We, you and all your regular customers know how rewarding, fulfilling and exciting a night of live music can be. But in an era of digital entertainment there are far more demands on the attention of your potential audience of an evening. What else can you do to help entice people through the door and make their night out a more unique experience?

- Rising costs and stagnating revenues – There's something of a perfect storm here. As business rates, the cost of supplies and the fees paid to bands have gone up, your ticket prices are roughly what they were in 1997. This is doubly frustrating when people will pay ten or twenty times that for a marquee arena show. How can you balance the books in other ways?

- Your venue not being set up as well as it could be. We'll go into into this in more detail.

Essentially, the first four of the above points are beyond your control, but you can tweak and change the emphasis of your business in order to mitigate for them. While the last point is and always has been in your control, it involves looking at things like the lease you hold on the venue (unless you own it outright), the structure of your business, the type of licences you have, the way your venue is laid out and the way you engage with those in your community.

The rest of this publication is adapted from a companion book, also created for MVT, entitled How to Open a Grassroots Music Venue. You've already got your music venue and you don't need to get it off the ground. But perhaps applying the same principles – and considering how you might have been able to improve things from scratch, or change them for the better starting now – might give you a new perspective on your own business.

The following has been written after engagement with MVT and nearly thirty music venue owners and managers from around the country, some of whom you'll find profiled within these pages. We expect you to find you know a lot of this already, and don't need to know much more of it. But if even one single paragraph offers a tip which allows you to improve and sustain what you do, then we reckon it's been worth it.



THE 100 CLUB
SOHO, LONDON

Founded: 1964 (although it's been a venue since 1942)
Capacity: 300
Staff: 3 full-time, 8 part-time
Events per year: 250

Jeff Horton, Owner:

"The 100 Club has been in my family since 1958. My grandmother bought a third of the shares in it after her boss, an accountant and fellow shareholder called Ted Morton, advised her to. The third shareholder sold up to my uncle in 1961, who sold his share to my father in 1964. Dad immediately changed the name to the 100 Club, after the location at 100 Oxford St, and the music policy away from jazz and to more eclectic bookings. **His biggest problem was getting a liquor licence, probably on the grounds of the licensing authority in Westminster assuming the club would be a den of iniquity;** and also - he found out later - because of an objection from the pub around the corner.

"I started working for him in September 1984. At the time I was putting bits of aeroplanes together at the British Aerospace factory at Hurn Airport in Dorset. My mum and dad had moved me down there from London in 1972, when I was 11. In the summer of 1984 British Aerospace suddenly announced they were closing down the entire factory, making 2,200 people redundant. That was when my dad approached me to come and work for him, and I've been here ever since.

"**The toughest part of running a venue is the punitive rent, rates and taxes.** We're on some of the most valuable real estate in the world here and the rent certainly reflects that, despite the building not actually being fit for purpose. If it rains heavily, the



dressing room and part of the storage area behind it floods. **Business rates are an absolute scandal. After last year's massive hike I'm now expected to pay over £1,400 per week, which I just can't.** And people wonder why the high street is slowly having the life squeezed out of it!

"I feel that Oxford Street has moved on from the 100 Club. It's changed radically over the last twenty years. There used to be the Astoria, the Metro, Madam Jojo's and the Embassy Rooms all nearby, as well as record shops, a cinema, book shops, toy shops and loads of independent traders. But we're the only venue left now. Now it's all about corporations, brands and elite housing, and the area's becoming sleek and homogenised. **The new entitled masses… London nowadays seems to think any noise is a crime if committed after midnight, which drives me nuts. London is supposed to be about fun.**

"It's very easy to attract bands though, because there's nowhere else here they can play. We're usually full, or at least 80% full, because we cater for just about everyone. A lot of people want to work at the 100 Club too. **We pay over the London Living Wage**

for part-time staff, which acts as an insurance policy, because you want your staff to feel valued and to turn up for work.

"I love this job because I get to meet my heroes. I have punk through me like a stick of rock. I've met Joe Strummer, John Lydon, Steve Ignorant, Paul Weller and Viv Albertine. I've met the Prodigy, Noel Gallagher, eaten with Thurston Moore and got to know Brix Smith, and the beautiful thing is, not one of them has let me down. **People say you shouldn't meet your heroes because you'll be disappointed, but not me. The best bits of this industry are the bands, the promoters and their reps** - I've rarely, if ever, had a bad experience with any of them. These people are the reason the industry works, not the agents or the majors."

www.the100club.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 in and the people who run them**, but they have far more in common than what separates them.

They're venues just like yours. The term GMV and all that comes with it makes clearer the precise make-up of these places, as well as the role that they play in their community and the wider music industry. 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' which was agreed at Venues Day 2015, based on extensive audits and surveys of UK music venues. It is comparable to the EU-wide definition of similar music venues used by the European network for live music Live DMA. Although there are different size categories of GMV, they're likely to be smaller than 1,000 capacity (see "MTV's Own Resources page of the website), employ anywhere between three and 20 paid staff, and host at least 72 live music events a year, with at least 108 bands appearing.

The 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), but there are six criteria which broadly define a GMV:

1. The 'elephant test'. That musicians and audiences in the town or city think of your venue as a Grassroots Music Venue; 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 GMV 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** and 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 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, while 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.

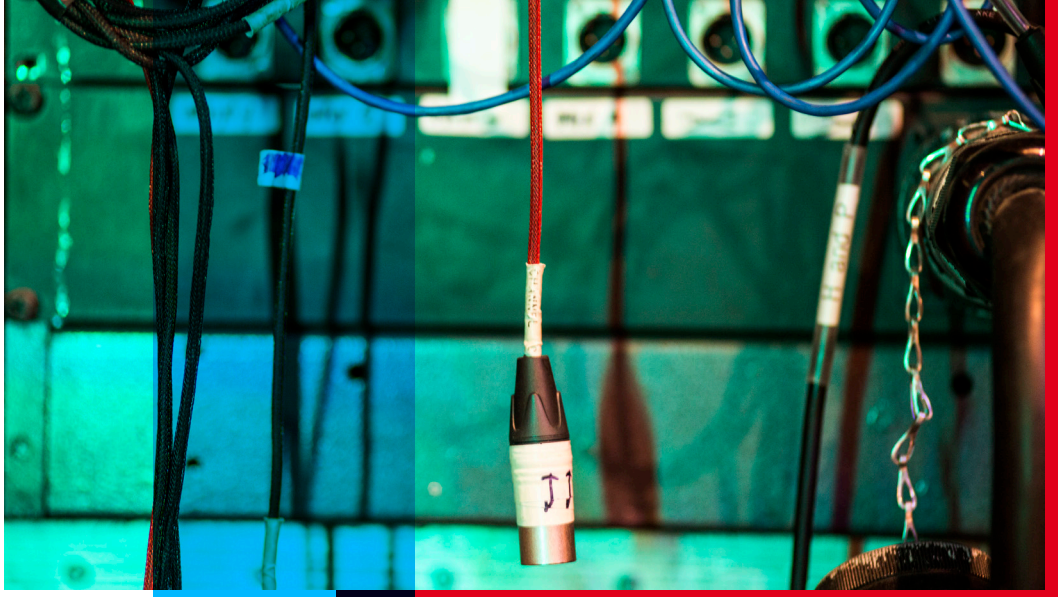
Barney Jeavons, Centre Director:

"I've always been the helpful person near a talented person, if that makes sense. I had a friend who used to put on punk shows, so I'd help him out. I did a bit of lighting, tour managing. I was a technical manager in a bigger venue - Guildford Civic Hall, it's not there anymore – and I was briefly the technical manager at the University of Surrey as well. I used to play in a band, that's what I was doing the first time I went to the Westie. I thought it was an amazing place, I wanted to be there all the time, and now my dream has come true!

"**I love putting on gigs, I love promoting. I used to run my own promotion company, but when we had children it wasn't really enough to keep going.** The Westie was one of the nine venues I used to hire, and it was my favourite. They had two jobs going, bar manager or arts development officer. They offered me whichever one I wanted and I picked arts development officer, because it sounded more interesting and it still left my evenings free for promoting. I did that for a bit, then they needed a booker so I took that on, then the boss left and someone persuaded me that I should give it a go. I first played there in about 1992, I started promoting there in '95, I started working there in '99 and I think I've been in charge for about 15 years. But it's all blurred into one.

"**What we try and do is anything that feels like it's trying to do something, if you know what I mean?** At the moment it's a really exciting time for comedy, for example, so we do a lot of stuff which is trying to turn the form around. **In terms of music, again it's people who are trying to express something, that's the important bit.** We've had some largish bands who have gone onto something big, like Foals and Biffy Clyro. **I prefer to see the young ones who are trying to make an impact. There's nothing better than seeing a band when it's just starting to sizzle for them, when it hasn't turned into a boring trudge yet.**

"It's always a struggle to get people in. Aldershot is one of the poorer towns in the area, very much an army town. It feels like a resurgence is starting now though. It was recently found to be the happiest town in Britain, which was



WEST END CENTRE, ALDERSHOT

Founded: 1975
Capacity: 200
Staff: 4 full-time, 30 part-time and casual, 30 volunteers
Events per year: 130

a surprise to everyone who lives here! It has a Dunkirk spirit to it. People are quite proud of what they've got, proud of the venue and their local bands. We've got a lot of support, which we might not have in a luckier area.

"**We do loads of community engagement**. We've just done a two-year engagement project with young people, some of them through college and some through a homeless charity. **We've done projects with the army, with different ethnic groups, with schools, we did a food festival last year, we do classes.** We have a big Nepali population, we do stuff with them. **We do an old people's coffee morning called Senior Moments, where they buy coffee from each other**

and have a lovely time. We do all this because we want to. We're part of an organisation called Hampshire Cultural Trust, and part of our aim as a trust is social impact. But the ethos of the venue comes from us, we want to do things which are exciting for everyone.

"**What live music is best at is bringing people together and creating a focus. What it's not good at, at our level, is making money.** We make a bit but it's everything together that keeps us going; it's the bar, it's funding, it's classes, it's all sorts of things that you have to pull together. We're lucky, we still get funding from our two county councils, but there are things we have to do because of that.

"**It's incredibly hard to find time to manage people, to stay on top of budgets**, to stay in touch with the larger organisation. It makes you tired. **I've been working sixty-hour weeks the last couple of weeks, that's taken its toll**. But the customers are great, the artists are mostly great, the only pressure is time and money, the same as anyone. **I love seeing everyone leave with a smile on their face, bands and customers, and I love the team spirit.** They're all experts - I'm the only one that isn't, that's a jack of all trades – and I'm very privileged that everyone I meet happens to be amazing at their job."

www.westendcentre.co.uk



03: THINK LIKE YOU'RE STARTING OUT ALL OVER AGAIN

Let's go back to when you first started running your music venue. In fact, let's stay in that mindset for the rest of this book. We know you'll have things which work for you and others which are a roaring success on their own terms. We aren't looking to change these, but rather examine all the other habits you've picked up along the way which can be amended.

Picture it this way – the day you picked up the keys to your venue was when you passed your driving test, but have you unlearned how to check your mirrors as often as you should since then?

If you've been in the job of venue owner for a while, you'll no doubt be aware that your fortune isn't here. 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, it's that **no-one recommends getting into the business because it's a money-spinner.**

This is a sector that's got fifty years of history of people not making much money, and if anyone ever imagined they might suddenly overturn all that because they have an idea that hasn't been done before, they're inevitably 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 you're recycling.

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."* (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)

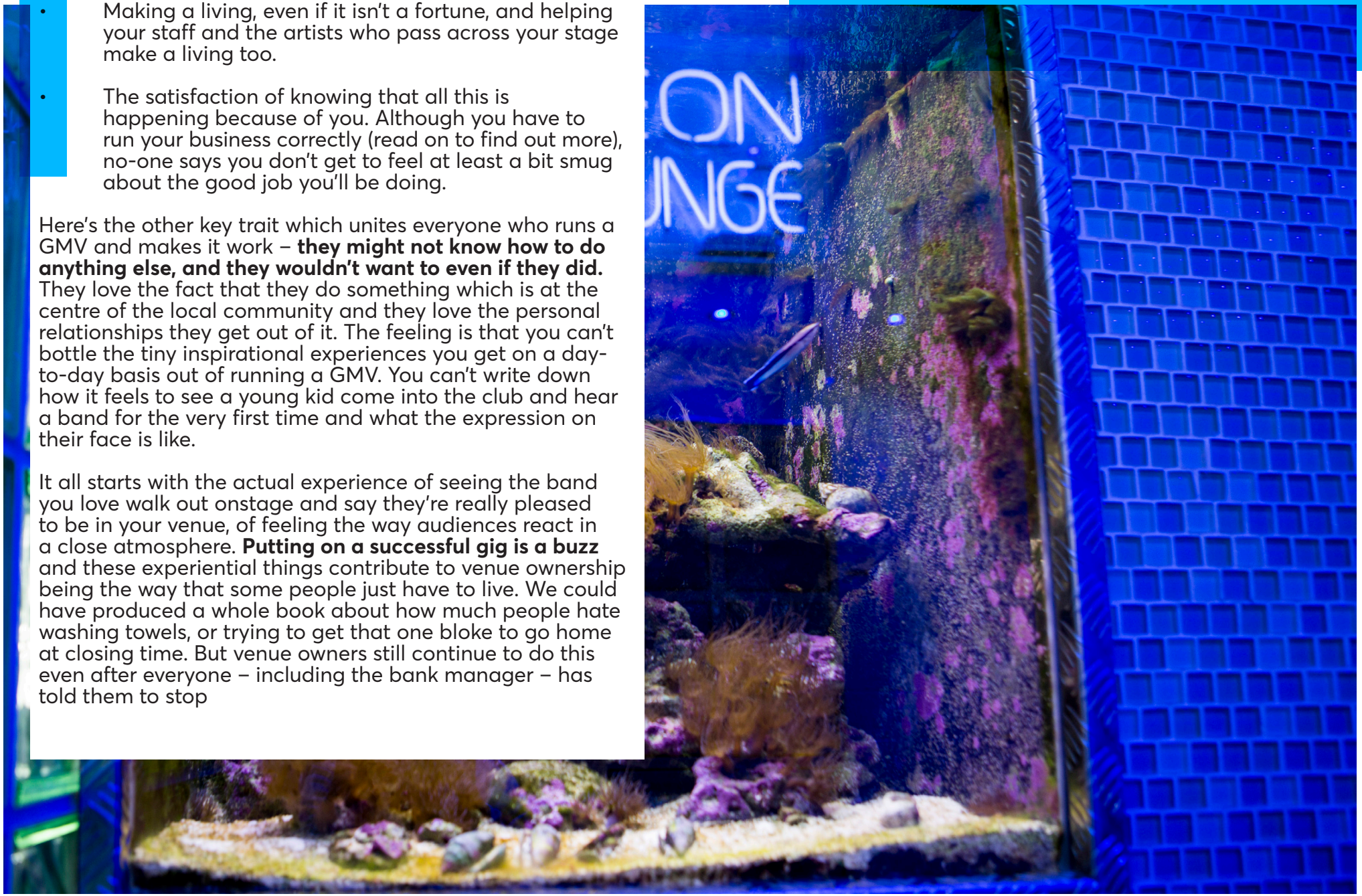
And here are some of the perks of the job which people enjoy:

- 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. 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 in general, 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 all this is happening 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 GMV 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 that you can't bottle the tiny inspirational experiences you get on a day-to-day basis out of running a GMV. 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.

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





NIGHT & DAY CAFÉ, MANCHESTER

Founded: 1991
Capacity: 260
Staff: N/A
Events per year: 400 gig and clubs

Jay Taylor, Promoter:

"**Our proprietor is Jan Oldenburg, it's fair to say he's a visionary. He bought a chip shop and slowly turned it into a rock 'n' roll venue. It was a café/eatery during the day which did gigs in the evening, then slowly but surely the PA got bigger, the stage got bigger and the lights got brighter.** He always aspired for it to be something else, something more. Even though it's in the city centre, in 1991 Oldham Street was sketchy and derelict. Until three businesses appeared and formed the whole neighbourhood around them, and to some degree the city.

"These businesses were Dry Bar, which was owned by Factory and next door to us, although it's closed now; Affleck's Palace, a giant, multi-floored indoor market full of second-hand goods and independent traders; and Night & Day. Those are the three businesses that set the template for the Northern Quarter, and Jan's ideas for what would work in this neighbourhood space predate a bunch of other people doing similar things.

"**The big, household name property developers came later on.** Like you see in a lot of those neighbourhoods that gentrify to a degree, or become more exciting or vibrant, those bigger developers tend not to be the one with the initial idea. **They're not the brave ones, or the ones with foresight – they wait until something interesting happens, then they come along later and develop around it**.

"I've been at Night & Day twice. I was the house promoter for four years a decade ago and then I came back a year and a half ago. I had a ten-year gap where I ran other venues and did other music things. Before that I was in bands, but even when we were self-sufficient and doing okay, and I could play guitar all day and not have to do anything else, there was a bit of me that knew I should feather my nest a little. I couldn't escape the thought, 'how many musicians end up strumming guitar forever?'

"So when I was next to a promoter I asked about their job; when I was in a recording studio I asked what that button does; when I met press officers or tour managers I asked how their thing worked. Promoting was the role which rose to the surface, I suppose – much like a lot of people in bands who realise they have to make a different choice, even though they want to stay within the industry they care about. **The most thrilling and life-affirming moments I've had have been in small music venues, they haven't been in arenas or large halls. The really exciting, extraordinary cultural moments have been in tiny spaces where the energy can't escape.**

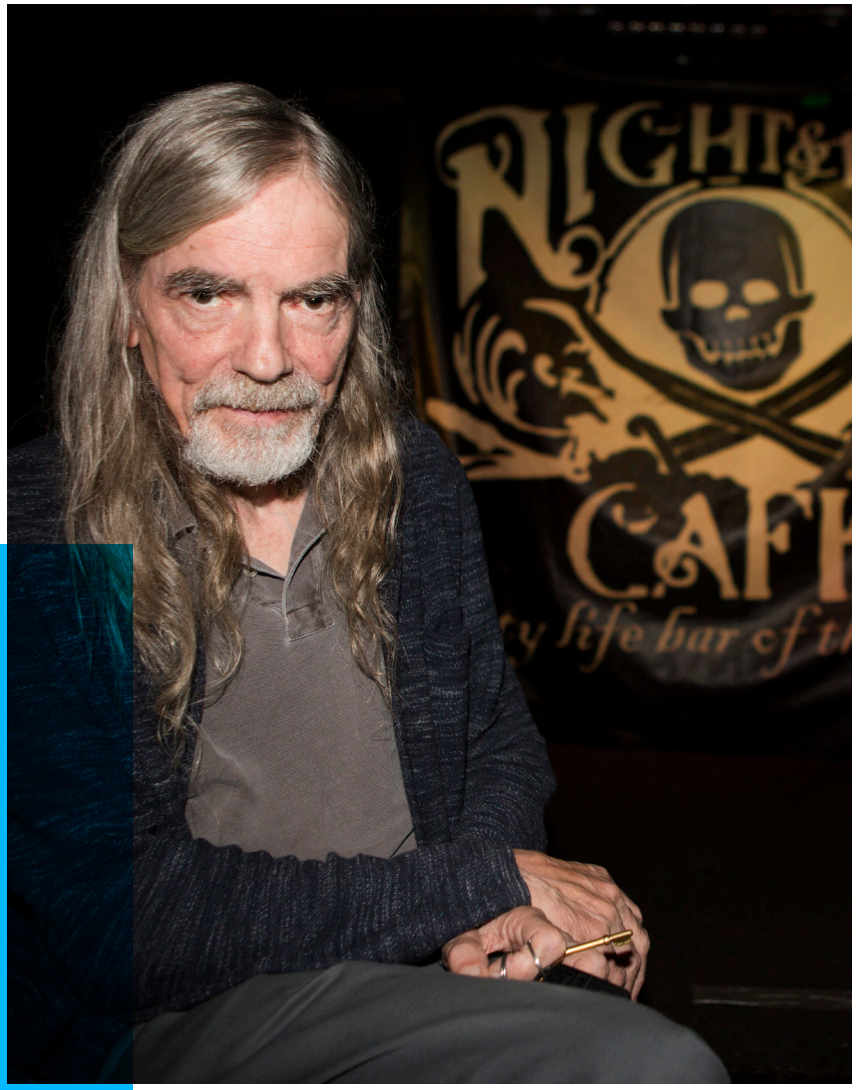
"**Things have changed around Night & Day, but for the better. The neighbourhood was derelict and nobody lived here and now lots of people do**. From where I'm standing I can see a second-hand record shop, a comic book shop, a barber's and a vintage clothes shop. **It's a young neighbourhood full of the things that audiences want; bars and music, comedy and theatre venues**. Manchester has a huge university population and the number of people who have bought in the city centre has exploded - and if people move to the city centre what they want is culture, things to do, places to eat.

"In Pygmalion, George Bernard Shaw writes "happy is the man who can make a living by his hobby". That's it for me. **I'm not saying it's without stresses and unusual hours, and it's a ton of work, but by lord, there are worse gigs than this.** And I've done some of them. Getting up, getting on a bus, not resenting where you're going and looking forward to your day – that's a gift.

"I had a colleague I used to work with, and he would say this thing… we'd have a show on, it would be busy, everyone was happy, they were taking a drink, the room felt amazing. He would turn to me and say, "Jay Taylor, tonight we're everything we're supposed to be". **That feeling, when you're standing at the back and everything is working perfectly… that's a good feeling, you know?**"

www.nightnday.org

Footnote: Sadly, Jan Oldenburg passed away in autumn 2018 but his venue lives on.



Jan Oldenburg

04: MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT LICENCE AND COMPLIANCE IN PLACE

Take out your licence and have a look at it, see what sort you have and what the terms are. Maybe you know all this already, but for years the plan for some music venue owners 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 in doing this was to try and get venues open and people have accepted the most extraordinary conditions on their licences. One well-known London venue even has stipulations on its elderly licence about the appropriate dress for customers to wear.

Now we're in 2018 and the whole industry has professionalised to the point that we're starting to get an idea of what a professionally-run GMV looks like. This means we can see how **getting the licensing and planning consent right from the outset can have a huge effect on why venues either succeed or fail**. If a venue is in a good location 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.

As a venue owner, you don't want to be constantly running around trying to deliver something you agreed to on your licence, purely because they were desperate to get your place open. We know that some of you will be all over the details of your licence, but that others might not have looked at it in years. Here are some reasons to check again:

- Are you doing anything which breaks the terms of it and might be a threat to your business?
- Do you have the potential to do more than you currently do, but just haven't realised it's allowed?
- Might you be able to change the terms of your licence or apply for a different one in order to expand?

Licensing 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. Here's a rough guide to the licence types available. 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 need the appropriate premises licence.
- **Entertainment Licence** – You may need one of these too, although 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 actually have 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 this case, a one-off Sale of Alcohol Licence won't be required, unless your business perhaps consists of infrequent pop-up gigs in different spaces around town and you have to reapply for an SoA Licence each time.

- **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.

- **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 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.

Your local authority's licensing board can also add 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. 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

Remember, **be honest with the council's licensing team** on any licence application. 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.

And remember, a licence isn't all you need to sort out. There are a number of other areas of compliance which you might or must have to deal with. Again, the following is good practise for any business. We won't go into them in detail, because there's plenty of advice available through HMRC, at www.greatbusiness.gov.uk, or 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. An accountant is highly recommended.

- **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** - see Chapter 05 for details.



KRAKATOA, ABERDEEN

Founded: 1992
Capacity: 200
Staff: 30 in the workers' collective, of which 6 have full-time commitments
Events per year: 150



Craig 'Flash' Adams, Custodian:

"The bar is located in Aberdeen city centre, right at the edge of the old red light district. **There's been a bar here for as long as anyone can recall.** The cellar was originally part of a 16th century coaching inn and the block dates back to 1870 - **there's been live music here on and off since 1965,** when it was the Moorings Bar. Back in 2002 we found an ancient PA system tucked away in the cellar, and that's not all we found. We're seriously haunted. We found a body buried in the cellar when we were installing a drain.

"**The place needed almost completely rebuilding, including a massive amount of soundproofing, because it was a terrible use of space.** Initially the capacity was only around 120 and perhaps 60 people could sort-of see the stage. There were people living upstairs, and a few of them set up a knocking shop for a while. Between this, drug dealers and noise abatement notices, I've ended up purchasing several flats too. **By 2015 half the city loved us and the other half were too scared to visit, so we changed the name to Krakatoa to ditch some of the other baggage**. It caused a massive stink at the time though. There are people who don't even come here anymore, yet who feel some weird entitlement over it because they frequented the place in their youth.

"I own the building and am a member of Black Cat, the worker collective that operates the business. A worker collective is a non-hierarchal worker co-op, meaning there's no management or bosses. Our goal is for everyone who works here to become a member, which also means serving as a director. Some, myself included, are unpaid volunteers, and every member volunteers to some extent. The minimum requirement is 40 hours per year, but most volunteer around 200 hundred hours or more. The position of Custodian is an elected one. It's the person entrusted to take low impact decisions so that the collective doesn't have to vote on everything. Any member can raise a motion to have me recalled from that position at any time.

"We're a destination venue as there's no passing trade in this neck of the woods. **Krakatoa is the only tiki dive bar in the city** and has no direct competition in that regard, **but there are other music venues. The more of those the merrier, from our perspective; accessible stages are the building blocks of the local music scene. Rather than squabbling over the cake, let's just bake ourselves a bigger one.**

"We have a zero tolerance policy on assholes, which makes for a very safe and friendly environment. The sign above the

entrance says '**Everyone here receives equal treatment regardless of who they (think they) are'. Not openly judging other people is part of the whole dive bar ethos, but the PA system is full Funktion One and end-to-end digita**l - so it's like being on Later with Jools Holland, except with the odd bit of vomit.

"I was already an alcoholic by the time I started here, and this was like pouring diesel on a train wreck. I was in very bad shape for a while, but I brought it under control in 2006. I didn't attend AA and I still drink, but my intake is down from 200 units a week to around 12. I'm OK unless I have a cider. The best thing about doing this is when I'm DJing after a successful gig, with a big jar of tiki, and have managed to maintain a busy dancefloor of happy customers who have had a great time and don't want to go home."

www.krakatoa.bar



05. CONSIDER SETTING UP A COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY (CIC)

If you're running a traditional business, you'll likely be using one of three options open to you in terms of the structure you use :

- **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 its 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.

- **Sole Trader**

Where you run your own business as an individual. You can keep all your business 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.

- **Business Partnership**

Where you and your business partner (or partners) share responsibility for your business. You can share all your business 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 MTV research suggests that music venues will spend more than 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 a strong suggestion for managing your company structure in light of this, direct from the MVT's own advice:

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."

The UK Government's website offers the following information about the process of setting up a CIC:

"A CIC is a special type of limited company which exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders.

"To set up a CIC, you need to apply to Companies House, and:

- include a 'community interest statement', explaining what your business plans to do.
- create an 'asset lock'- a legal promise stating that the company's assets will only be used for its social objectives, and setting limits to the money it can pay to shareholders.
- get your company approved by the community interest company regulator - your application will automatically be sent to them."

While there are other forms of social enterprise available, including co-operatives (which may be owned by their employees, their community or as a collaboration between business), the CIC is the recommended business structure for a GMV, as endorsed by MVT.





THE FORUM, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Founded: 1993
Capacity: 250
Staff: 25 (Mostly part-time and volunteers)
Events per year: 350

Jason Dormon, Director

"The reasons I do this can change hourly. **A beautiful community builds up around a music venue, but it takes a toll on your general mental state. Some days you dread the fight, but others you relish the chance to get on with it**. As a young musician travelling to the cities with friends to see bands back in the days of fanzines and cassettes, **we all decided to create a scene where those artists could come and visit our little town, which gave us a huge buzz from the sense of involvement.**

"**There was probably some political subversion involved too.** Tunbridge Wells is classic Tory Belt country, but it's also produced rebels like Shane McGowan, Sid Vicious, Anti-Nowhere League and more recently Slaves. Our biggest export is punk; not so much 'disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' as disgusting of Tunbridge Wells. **If there's something palpable to push against, sometimes it makes it easier to create and find purpose.**

"Tunbridge Wells is on the Kent/Sussex border, halfway between London and Brighton, but our regulars come from all over the South-East and if it's a band with a loyal following we might have guests from across the world. **We've been on the touring circuit for over 25 years and putting on shows since the age of 14, so I like to think we have a good reputation as a venue run by music enthusiasts.**

"The Forum was founded in 1993. We were running another venue over the road, putting on regular shows with the likes of Green Day, Suede and the Boo Radleys. But one day the owners of the building turned up without notice and we were kicked out as they had sold the site. What's now The Forum was a disused, council-owned toilet block on the common opposite, so we set about making immediate plans to move in and convert. **Blood, sweat and tears went into a three-week build to turn it into a purpose-built music venue, with getting licenses, insurance and agreed fire capacity all challenges on top of that.**

"We managed to purchase a long-lease virtual freehold in 1995. **With restricted cashflow and not many funding options for music venues, we haven't been able to invest in the infrastructure as much as we'd like, but every year we try and make an improvement to the space with locally-raised funds from generous individuals.** Our move to Community Interest Company status in recent years has helped us apply for funds to build disabled toilets and to

get some heating in, for example. Fortunately, we're in the middle of a common in an old part of town, which is a lovely area, and we're lucky not to be surrounded by residential properties. Despite this though, any noise will likely be put down to us – we've taken calls from people ten miles away telling us to turn the piano down!

"**The reward is the sense of community from collaborative endeavour, and seeing young people hearing a new band, full of smiles and the feeling that life is exciting.** We've all felt that, and us oldies also like to dance and feel young and get involved again. A Grassroots Music Venue is many things to many people, a rich, varied experience for everyone. **Music in an intimate space can't be matched, it creates a very real connection between audience and artist. These are places to feel truly inspired.**"

www.twforum.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 GMVs 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 being called 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 elements you should be looking to update. 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're in 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 come up with a creative solution, so much the better.

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

Make your bar the best it possibly can be

For a long time, the bulk sale of alcohol has essentially been propping up live music. But in 2018 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 that 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 place 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?

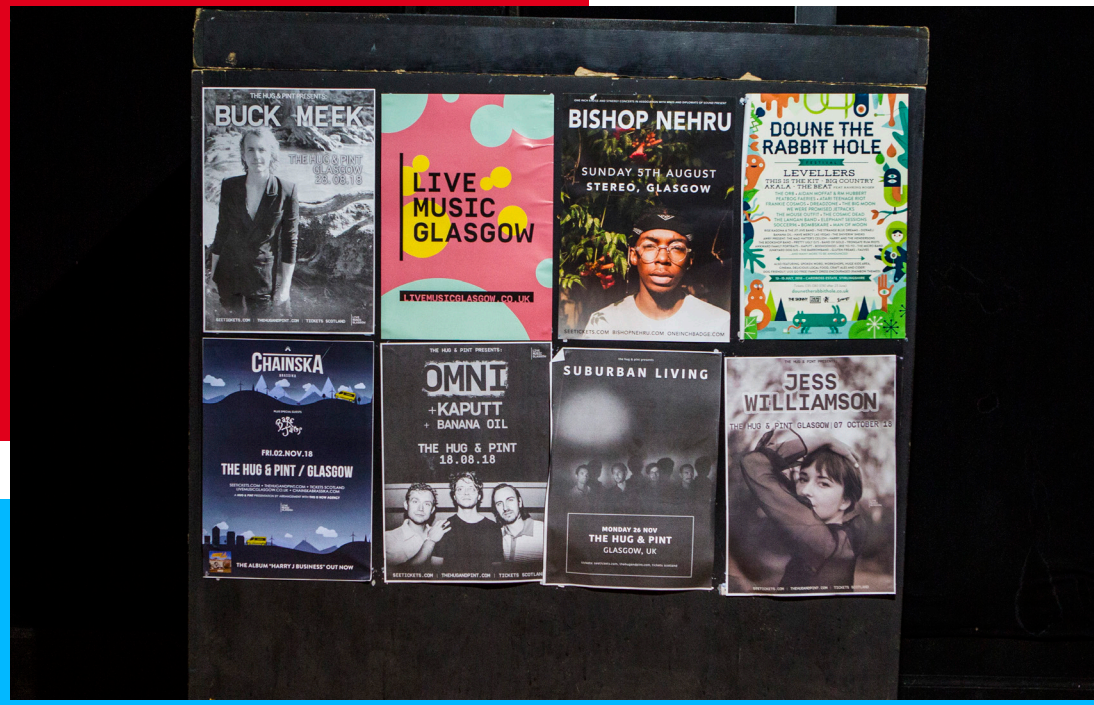
And don't forget...

Your venue will have 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 Wi-Fi for your audiences?



THE CELLAR, OXFORD

Founded: 1999
Capacity: 150
Staff: 2 full-time, 15 part-time and casual
Events per year: 150 gigs and 300 clubs



Tim Hopkins, Event Manager

"I was 19 when I took over the Cellar. It was a family-owned venue at the time, but more of a pub gig place, a rock venue, and I changed it into a student-friendly club with live music. My friends and I ran some club nights down there. We were all into music and DJing, and I had a bar job at the college so I had some experience there. **We did it up and jumped behind the bar, but it was all pretty early on for us. We definitely jumped in at the deep end.**

"Oxford's a funny place, **you have to find your niche**. We started off by taking out the stage and putting on club nights; we turned it into a cocktail bar, essentially. But then more promoters wanted to put on live music, so we had them playing on the flat, and after a few years we reinstated the stage and got a bigger soundsystem. It morphed back into what it was before, really. All the whitewashed cocktail bar walls got painted darker colours again. It was obviously what the place wanted to be.

"**We have a good mix of live music and student-led club nights during midweek, while they're here.** Dance music has gone more mainstream over the last few years and I'd say live music is also having a resurgence, so we've definitely gone from strength to strength. **On the live scene, I've got a really good local promoter who knows what bands to book and is great at getting people in. He's been making a lot of our gigs really busy.** We didn't have that knowledge when we started, so it's been a case of getting contacts like that along the way - that's the way it's worked for me, anyway.

"**I've learned a lot over the nineteen years I've been doing this.** I now have a really good database of students and a good network of promoters. There seems to be a lot more people promoting club nights these days, certainly students. I don't know if it's because of the digital age, that they don't have to build a record collection to play it out. They can just download, put it on and they're a DJ. **There are a lot more people out there wanting to put their own nights on.**

"**Constantly trying to keep the venue up to date and on top of renovations is tricky. It always needs repainting, the toilets always break, the seating often gets damaged.** That's the nature of the place. It's a late-night venue, not a pub where people would generally look after it! **Running a venue is quite a large workload for a small amount of people.** You have to do a lot of different things to get by. **You end up having to do admin when you'd rather be**

looking at the diary or making the place look nicer, but that's just part of the job.

"**We had the landlords come in and take over the lease.** Within that process they did a new fire risk assessment and found **a problem with the width of our fire exit,** so that's an ongoing problem at the moment. We've found somewhere we can put a new fire exit. We're getting the architect to draw up the plans, then **we've got to do a crowdfunder to pay for it and get it through planning.** It's basically a last-ditch attempt and if this doesn't work we're going to have to close.

"It's all very up in the air at the moment, **but if we stay open the future holds whatever we make it.** It's not like running a restaurant, where every day is the same and the menu changes a little bit every so often. **With a live music venue every night has got to be different, every one of them has to be programmed, so it's a hard, labour-intensive thing to get right. But if you have the right resources at hand, it can be really successful.** We're all set to thrive in the next year, if we get the chance.

"**I love going down and watching bands, especially when the room's full and you poke your head through the door to see everyone mesmerised, it's really rewarding.** I actually enjoy the design aspects of it, of **thinking what an area might look like and talking to artists about artwork that might go on the walls. And I know it sounds boring, but I find the maintenance enjoyable too.** Collaborating with your friends is also a lot of fun and when you get it right it's a great feeling."

www.cellaroxford.co.uk

Footnote: This interview took place in Autumn 2018. In March 2019, despite raising £92,000 in the Crowdfunding campaign, The Cellar closed its doors for the last time, issuing the following statement. "After crunching the numbers, a thousand times over, the Hopkins family, who have run the independent music venue, for nearly 40 years, have sadly come to conclusion that they cannot continue. After months of negotiations, we would have loved to have been able to take the landlord's final rent offer, but it came too late:"



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 venue 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 her. 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 try ing 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.





THE FORUM, DARLINGTON

Founded: 2004
Capacity: 200 (350 for the whole venue)
Staff: 6 full-time, 1 full-time apprentice, 2 part-time
Events per year: 150 gigs, 100 other events

Allison Mckay, Managing Director:

"Before I worked at The Forum I was based in London, working as a session stylist designing magazine covers, fashion pages and for film and media as part of a team. Then I moved back to Darlington, my hometown, because I had small children and just wanted to get out of the rat race, really. That's when I got involved with the Forum doing a bit of PR work.

"When I found out the venue was closing down I got involved with others in setting up Humantics, a Community Interest Company, to turn the building into a social enterprise for the benefit of the community. It was a difficult process - we set up the CIC in 2008, when they were very new on the scene, and had to develop a business plan that would warrant investment while the centre was going bankrupt, basically. We took over ownership and management in 2011.

"In London you feel like you're at the centre of everything, but I saw that this was a really great facility which the people in the local area loved. It brings a lot of colour to Darlington, and I firmly believed it needed to stay – not even from the perspective of a love of music or anything, it was the importance of the place to the community that I wanted to preserve.

"Darlington's a small town of around 200,000 population, with nowhere else to watch live music in a dedicated environment; so basically, nowhere that isn't a pub. **The Forum has band rehearsal rooms and recording studios, and all ages access it throughout the day and in the evening.** If I was going to live here I wanted Darlington to be as colourful as possible, and I think live music is so important to that, whether it's giving people a chance to socialise and enjoy it, or earn an income, or even to get inspired and learn it as a hobby.

"It's a Victorian school building, it was opened in 1879. It was used for some years by Durham music services and then it lay derelict for a long time, until the old owner took it over and invested a lot of money in creating what's here now; he never quite recovered from that investment, though. **When I took over, the business was losing £80,000 a year,** it was in a pretty bad state.

"**The first challenge was building it from the ground up; restructuring, looking at the pricing, getting the profit and loss all tidied up**. It's taken until now, and **we're still**

climbing that hill, still working to run as efficiently as we can while balancing the needs of the community. But we feel we're at the stage where we can take on investment now, where we couldn't have previously.

"The building itself is owned by the local authority, from whom we have a 25-year full repair and renewal lease; they have no commitment to it whatsoever. **The most challenging thing is not just paying the bills, but trying to put aside some profits so we can do work on the building itself.** The council recognise we're an asset to the town, but they're happy to let us get on with it ourselves - **standing on our own two feet is a good position to be in, rather than being reliant on public funds which can be taken away at any time.**

"**We need to cover each band's fees and then make a good amount of money on the bar and our remit means we have to respond to what the community wants, which dictates our schedule.** Darlington doesn't have a university or a particularly young crowd, so we get in really good quality tribute bands, because we know they're going to sell out. That's our bread and butter, and it also helps us put occasional nights of local new music on; **people may knock tribute bands, but those in them actually use the income to support their own original music.**

"The satisfaction of doing this is in hearing people say how much they enjoy it, and seeing the kids come in after school – **we do a lot of community education work and with specialist needs groups.** The live music and the bar is the commercial side, which subsidises everything else, but it's the impact work that really spurs you on. **I've seen young kids coming to music lessons, then when they're older they've formed a band and they're in the rehearsal rooms and the studio, and next thing they're playing a gig at the weekend**."

www.theforumonline.co.uk



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).

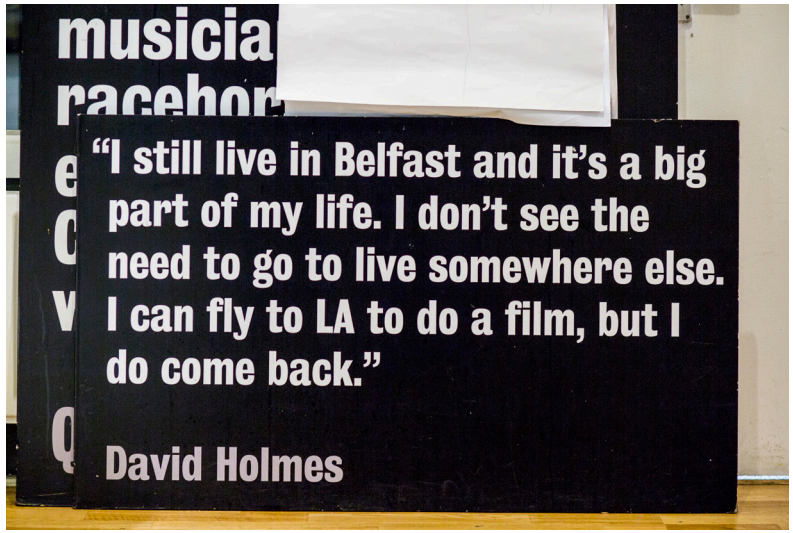
The simple fact is, you're all in it together. You want them to feel relaxed and looked after while they're at your venue and in your town, for them to put on a great show which draws a crowd and might do so again next time they come back, and for as much money to flow over the cash desk and the bar 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 artists 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 de signing 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.





THE TRADES CLUB, HEBDEN BRIDGE

Founded: 1982 (1924 as a social club)
Capacity: 200
Staff: 2 full-time, 1 part-time, 12 subcontracted
Events per year: 200

Mal Campbell, Promotions & Booking Manager:

"I look after the live music side of things at The Trades. I was a professional musician in a previous life, who moved to a town that had a music venue, although it had fallen on hard times. Hebden Bridge that had a music venue, although it had fallen on hard times. When the in-house promoter suddenly quit I was doing some volunteering here, then I got made redundant, so the timing was good to take over the job. I wasn't looking to work in a venue at all, but the place was very close to going bust and I like a challenge, and now **I feel very lucky to have found something that I'm good at and which is so rewarding.**

"Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire is a small mill town half-way between Leeds and Manchester, whose population is 4,500. We have people travelling to shows here from both cities, and from Halifax, Huddersfield and surrounding towns; Hebden's a beautiful place and often people stay and make a weekend of it. There are four venues in neighbouring towns that are in the same ball-park capacity-wise, which I think helps me keep my game up! **When I came here the club had no money, the sound and lighting equipment was archaic and the venue looked worn-out.** It took time to get things to a good standard. **When I first started booking I avoided loud bands, because they showed up how bad the club's PA system was!**

"For every band, our aim is to be the best show of their tour, that's the goal. I think most bands arrive a little warily. Remember, they don't know what we're going to be like but **I try and let them see as quickly as possible that we're going to look after them. I like a relaxed vibe; get some coffee on the go, have a bit of a chat, help them load in.** I love virtually every band we've booked. In six years only three people have been dicks - all white, male and over forty, funnily enough.

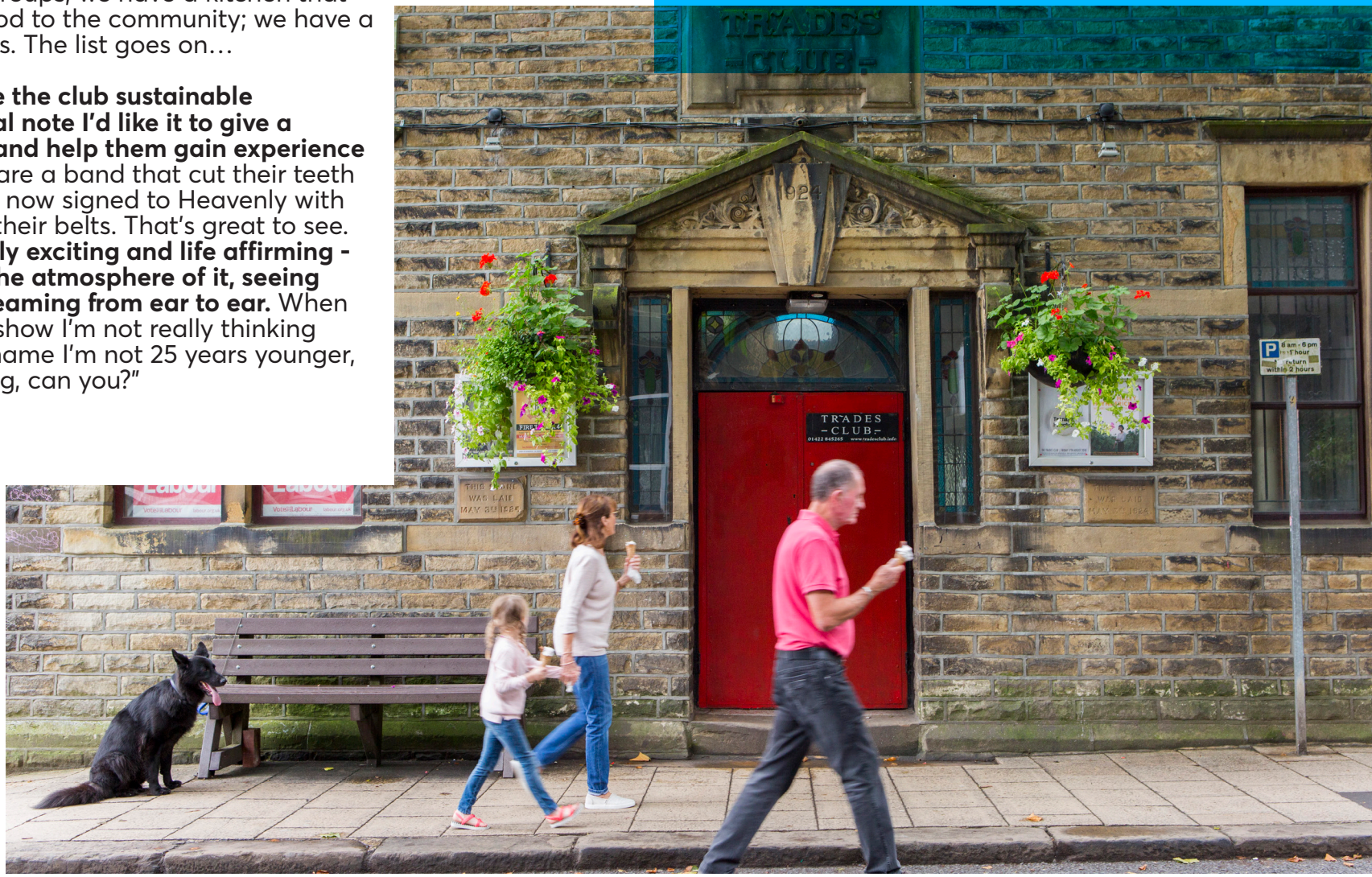
"The workload is insane. You only really stop at Christmas, when the emails slow to a trickle. I could have a full-time job just dealing with my inbox, but on top of that I'm stage managing shows, designing posters, writing listings, getting riders, cleaning the venue and so on. **This job has damaged my mental health, for sure, just the ongoing stress of it.** But I'm better at switching off now, and I also don't drink nearly as much as I used to, which helps.

"We're a socialist members' club, so it's not all about bums on seats for us. **The club is as much about social activism and community as it is about big headline bands.** We have a chess club that has run here for longer than anyone can remember; we have a guitar group that meet weekly, as

well as various community groups; we have a kitchen that serves quality, affordable food to the community; we have a monthly quiz; we screen films. The list goes on…

"We obviously want to make the club sustainable long-term, and on a personal note I'd like it to give a platform to younger bands and help them gain experience of playing live. The Orielles are a band that cut their teeth playing The Trades, who are now signed to Heavenly with a great debut album under their belts. That's great to see. **Doing this can be ridiculously exciting and life affirming - landing an amazing show, the atmosphere of it, seeing people leaving the venue beaming from ear to ear.** When I'm in the middle of a great show I'm not really thinking about anything else. It's a shame I'm not 25 years younger, but you can't have everything, can you?"

www.thetradesclub.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.

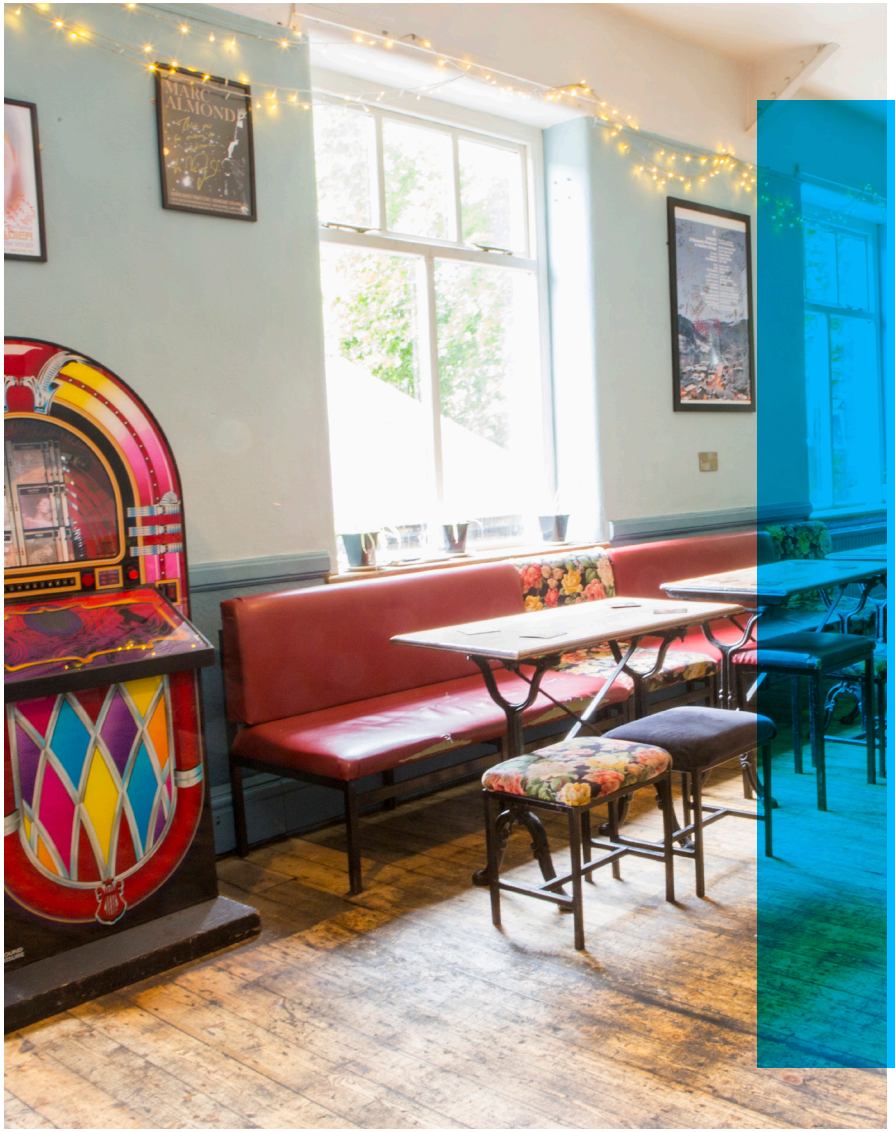
Mailing Lists
A simple but effective tool: gather the email addresses of everyone who purchases your tickets, enquires about your gigs or attends your shows and send them a regular news mailer with new on-sale dates, venue updates, promo offers, and so on. But not too regular, once a week is more than 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

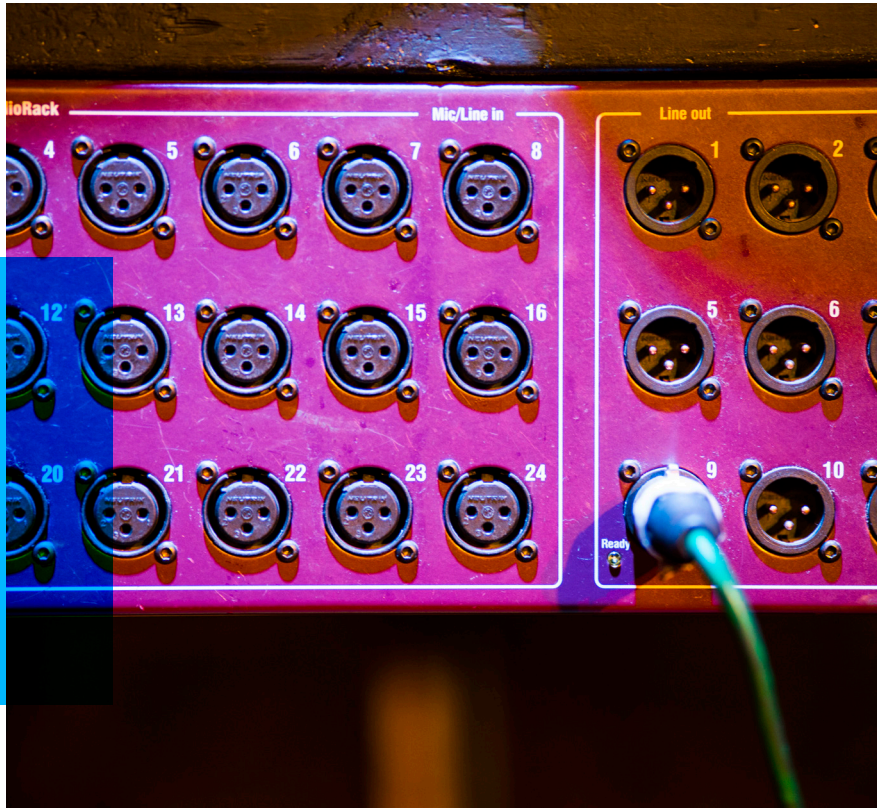
and review the show, these are standard methods within the industry of spreading the word about your venue and programming. So accept without complaint (although it's fair enough to withhold the +1, with apologies, if there's a huge de mand for the show) and make up your own mind about offering a free 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.





SNEAKY PETE'S, EDINBURGH

Founded: 2008
Capacity: 100
Staff: 2 full-time, 8 part-time and casual
Events per year: 250 gigs + 363 club nights

Nick Stewart, Owner:

"I started out as a chef, but when I finished that up I was young enough to go out on a limb and try putting on a few gigs. I came into the business as a promoter doing shows at other venues in Edinburgh. Through doing bar work I was given the chance to manage a place on the Cowgate which was then called Red Vodka Club. I managed to turn it round from losing a bunch of money to turning enough of a profit that the owner was willing to sell it. Very kindly he offered to sell it to me for a decent price, and I picked it up alongside a business partner.

"At the time it wasn't clear if we'd be able to run it as a music venue, it was just a bar. But to be honest, promoting was the only other thing I knew how to do, so I decided to try and put on as many gig and club nights as I could. I changed the name, because there was an older version of Sneaky Pete's dating back to the 1970s. We have strong quality control. **You can get live music for free entry elsewhere in Edinburgh, but at Sneaky's you get very high quality for a small ticket price. We put on music of any genre, as long as it's excellent.**

"I realised about two years into the venue that this was what I'd wanted to do when I was a teenager, but that I'd completely forgotten about it. My degree was in music and I thought I'd put that away in a box after I'd graduated, but life managed to bring it back up. **The highlight of doing this, for me, is the fact that we're still here after ten years. Not only that, but we're busier and putting on more shows than we ever have.** And some of the most special moments for me have come with each realisation that we've moved closer to becoming an actual music venue, for example when we first moved the floor show onto a stage.

"It's also nice to think that we've actually done something for the city and for Edinburgh's music scene. It's a scene which is vibrant at times, although it comes and goes; I'm not sure if this is the best time it's ever had, but I certainly know that if we weren't here things would be a lot worse. **The challenge in all venues, I think, but especially in Edinburgh, is audience development – trying to get more people out to shows.** Edinburgh's gig-going crowd is maybe older than in other cities, especially Glasgow. Our student population likes to go out, but it's harder to get them to bands which aren't big name, or to credible club nights. It's a work in progress.

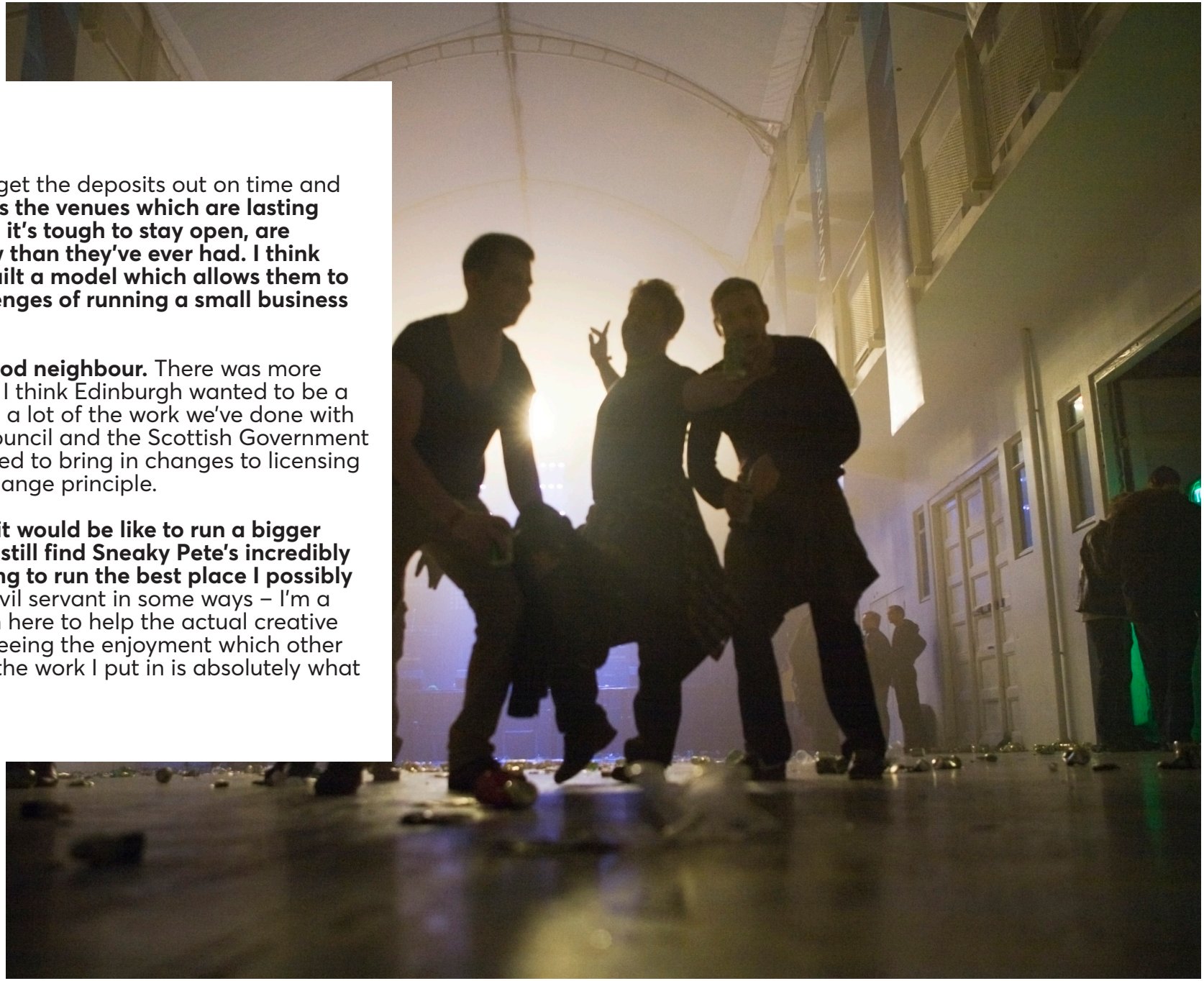
"Managing old buildings is also tough. We had a little problem with flooding the other day, for example. When you have a small staff who are trying to make things run,

it's tricky to book bands, get the deposits out on time and fix the toilets. **But it seems the venues which are lasting through this period when it's tough to stay open, are having more success now than they've ever had. I think that's because they've built a model which allows them to get through all the challenges of running a small business on lean margins.**

"It's important to be a good neighbour. There was more conflict in the past, when I think Edinburgh wanted to be a quieter town at night. But a lot of the work we've done with the MVT, talking to the council and the Scottish Government on a wider level, has helped to bring in changes to licensing laws and the Agent of Change principle.

"I sometimes think what it would be like to run a bigger venue, but to be honest I still find Sneaky Pete's incredibly satisfying, and enjoy trying to run the best place I possibly can. I feel almost like a civil servant in some ways – I'm a facilitator, a manager, I'm here to help the actual creative people do their job. But seeing the enjoyment which other people get as a result of the work I put in is absolutely what drives me."

www.sneakypetes.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.



Nik Sharpe, Owner:

"The venue started in the early noughties as a coffee shop and over the years it's expanded to three floors and a roof terrace. We don't have plans to extend any further but more space would be great. **I started working at The Cookie as the in-house booker when it opened in 2012. In 2018 I purchased the business and took over the lease on the venue.** While I was the booker I was instrumental in bringing big shows in - over the years we've had Royal Blood, Wolf Alice, George Ezra and Blossoms – so taking over was a no-brainer when the opportunity arose.

"Although we have over 200 music and comedy gigs a year, the business needs to survive outside of these shows, so we have club nights, an in-house Pieminister restaurant and a cocktail bar. Every week you come across unique problems in this job that only venue owners would know about, which present challenges we have to deal with on a regular basis. It can be anything from problems with the artists performing, beer suppliers or council issues… **every day is a completely new experience.**

"The worst thing that happened to the venue was back in

THE COOKIE, LEICESTER

Founded: 2012
Capacity: 150 standing, 100 seated
Staff: 2 full-time, 6 part-time
Events per year: 200+

2017, just before Leicester Comedy Festival - we host over 100 shows in 18 days, it's our busiest time of the year - when we suffered a flood in the basement venue and had to work around the clock to get it repaired and back open in a week. **We've been very fortunate so far in that we've had no issues regarding noise or licencing. But we're very aware of the potential problems a city centre-based venue can find, so we take measures to ensure we don't push the boundaries.**

"We're based on the High Street in Leicester city centre. The population is around 425,000, and we have the **most diverse and multi-cultural city in the UK.** Leicester has two universities and one in particular is very proactive in pushing the local music scene. We have several music venues, including an O2 Academy, **and due to the success of our own venue, we now promote across the majority of other venues in the city, all the way from 50 to 1,600 capacity.** We're surrounded by retail and a small amount of residential; the area is part of a regeneration scheme and is improving year-on-year.

"The live music touring landscape is always changing, so we need to keep moving forward with the latest trends and ensure we stay relevant. **Although it's much easier to attract bands to the venue now than it was when I first**



started five years ago, when Leicester had dropped off the touring circuit and we had to fight to get the city back on the map. **Rising ticket prices and purse strings getting tighter mean it's still hard to get people out on a regular basis.** The big shows will always do good numbers, but it can be hard to sell those emerging bands that you really believe in.

"We're in a good place at the moment, though, and we just need to continue the momentum moving forward. **The best part of this job is seeing people enjoy what we do, and being aware of how important the venue has become to the cultural landscape of the city.** Without us being here I would worry about emerging new bands coming to Leicester at all."

www.thecookieleicester.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?** If your venue is in a city centre, you're less likely to have residential neighbours than if you're located in the suburbs or in the middle of a housing estate. If you are in a residential area: what is the demographic? Are your neighbours students, young professionals, families with young children or retired? If you find that you can't answer this question, then you should be paying closer attention to the community around your venue.

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 is about noise, is it related to frequency, volume, or something else?

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.

HALF MOON, PUTNEY, LONDON

Founded: 1963
Capacity: 220 standing, 120 seated
Staff: 2 full-time, 10 part-time
Events per year: 400

Nina Jackson, Venue and Music Manager:

"The Half Moon almost closed in 2010, but a campaign to save it gathered thousands of signatures, including famous musicians. The former venue manager Carrie (Davies) bought the venue and then sold it to Geronimo Inns in 2012 on the proviso it would always be a music venue. She now manages a couple of the acts who play here. At the time I was a live booking agent, producer and recording studio manager, and like many of my friends I've been sadly watching the demise of our GMV for the past few years now. **When I saw an opportunity to work at a brilliant live venue I applied, and I'm very happy to say I got the job.**

"The Half Moon is also a gastro pub, and in the venue we host films, Q&As, band and theatre rehearsals, band video shoots, workshops, dance classes, baby comedy, business meetings and private dining during the daytime. **We diversified to offer more to the local community – and we have to balance our live music audience and our diners, making sure they're all content – but the space here has always been a pub and a separate venue.** We're celebrating 55 years as a live music venue this year and developing a Half Moon heritage archive; since the early 1960s the Half Moon has been regarded as one of London's most respected live music venues, which has hosted gigs including U2's first sell-out UK show, kd lang's first UK appearance and Kate Bush's first public show.



"We're also synonymous with a certain local band who used to play here, the Rolling Stones, whose most recent visit was a private event held in 2000. Other acts to appear include The Who, Van Morrison, John Martyn, Elvis Costello, Bo Didley, Nick Cave, Kasabian and Billy Connolly. **The toughest part of the job, though, is balancing putting on wonderful, eclectic music and still being able to pay the bills.** We also lost our licence to play live music after 8pm in the pub and garden (due to a noise complaint), but compromised on this so we can keep live music in the venue running until 11pm.

"Noise issues could have closed us, yet the majority of our community are very supportive, which is how we survived. We don't have much competition in Putney, which is great, but obviously we compete with the rest of London for shows, which affects who we can book. **We're inundated with enquiries from artists, so our task is to make**

sure they're right for our audience and demographic. We have regular customers and many of them are here every week, but we also have nights where we really have to work hard to attract audiences, especially for new or contemporary acts. We've been told, however, that the main booking agents only want to book acts into Central or East London venues.

"I hadn't realised how valuable a local grassroots venue is to the local community not only in terms of evening entertainment, but also in helping people connect more with their community in general. Acts want to play here because of our heritage and reputation, but our audience are mainly local unless we have a bigger act, and then people will travel from anywhere – we had people come from Argentina, Germany, the USA and all over the UK for our recent Nick Mason (of Pink Floyd) shows. **I feel the local council could protect the venue by making us a heritage site, and the industry could encourage their new acts and agents to use us more consistently, as well as attending more shows.** We have five new acts every Monday from all over the UK, who we programme ourselves with very little support from record labels, publishers or the media."

www.halfmoon.co.uk



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.

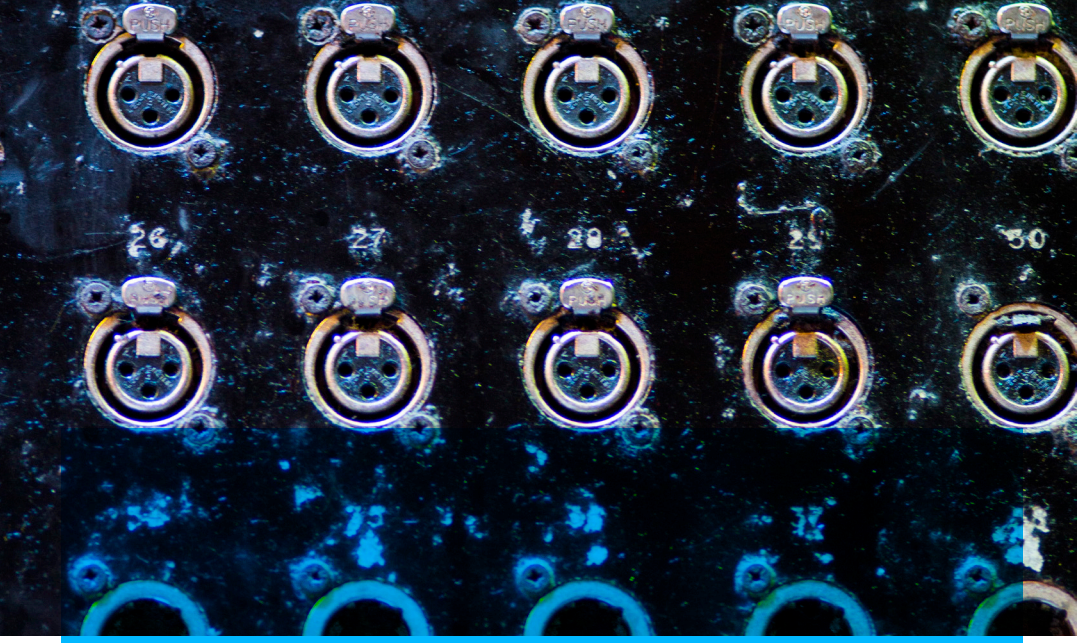
How can you rationalise the business?
'Rationalise' doesn't mean make cuts but rather, how can your make things as efficient as possible? Where is worth investing for the sake of efficiency? Maybe your bar service can be even faster and less labour-intensive if you spend on some of the new self-filling 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.





Chris Sharp, Owner/Director:

"I've been a musician all my life. I was 25 years singing in bars in Bristol, London, then Switzerland. In 2007 I joined my favourite band, the Blue Aeroplanes, as bass player. In 2009 I was flying to South By Southwest with our sound engineer, who was also the in-house sound engineer at the Fleece. **He was telling me all about how badly run it was because it was owned by Mitchells & Butler, who had 17,000 pubs and one music venue - they didn't know what they were doing.** From 2002 to 2009 it had been going downhill, so I said someone should buy it. He told me it had been on sale for a year and no-one was interested.

"When we got back to England I half-jokingly asked to take a look, expecting to be shown the door, but they asked me to come in and sit down. The premium on the lease was 50 grand, but the week before I went into the meeting they dropped it to a pound. I think the year it was on sale they'd lost something like 192 grand, so why bother waiting for 50 if you stand to lose all that in the meantime? **I got it in May 2010 and in the last eight and a half years we've turned it around and it's making quite a good profit.**

THE FLEECE, BRISTOL

Founded: 1982
Capacity: 200
Staff: 10 full-time, 20 part-time, 10 casual
Events per year: 400

"I'm just some guy with a credit card, I've never been a big businessman or had much money. **I just happened to be in the right place at the right time and I knew instinctively how to run the place. I'd spent my life booking gigs for myself, so I knew how to fill a calendar with gigs.** I just had to apply that principle on a larger level and let the bar manager worry about the beer and the cellars. I concentrate on the diary, and what people are paying to see every night.

"The Fleece is an old building, nearly 200 years old, right in the centre of Bristol. It used to be a sheep-trading market, hence the name. We've actually got offices above the venue, so we can't have any noise before 6pm, which is a pain for soundchecks, but we get around it. It's a big, open, square room with a long bar down the side, so it's always easy to get a drink. **Great views, great sightlines. It's a very well-loved venue. When we had our Save the Fleece campaign a couple of years ago we got 44,000 signatures in a week.**

"My biggest low was finding the notice on the lamppost outside which told us that the office next door was being turned into flats. That was a massive struggle which we've pretty much come through. They moved in last November and I said to the staff "hold your breath, wait 'til you've been through a summer with the windows open – if we've got no noise complaints, we're fine". Here we are in autumn, so I think we might have scraped our way through.

"It was a five-year battle though. The council were behind

us. They imposed stringent noise restrictions on the flats, which they managed to overturn, so I ended up going to a meeting with three MPs and the heads of the MVT and UK Music. **Within a month we had the national planning policy guidelines for permitted development rights changed. Now if you're going to convert an office into residential you have to take sound issues into account, although it was too late for us.** We're just lucky that we're quite well soundproofed and the flats aren't too bad. It's all studio flats so it's young people, not families with children.

"In the early days I was obsessed with in-house promotion, because I thought the money was on the door. But over time I realised that as a promoter you're like a punter in a bookmakers. The band wants X amount of money, they still get paid, and if you don't sell enough tickets you lose money. After going through that for a few **years I now encourage promoters to hire the venue, so they take the risk and we take the bar. I'd say 80% of our shows are now external hires,** although the average punter doesn't know the difference.

"When I took over I also banned tribute bands for the first two years, because the venue had a reputation as being a tacky, tribute-only venue. I**t nearly bankrupted us though, to be honest, so we run them again.** They're a necessary evil, because you'll take four or five times more at the bar for a tribute than a cool 6Music band, which is frustrating, but that's how it is. We put them on at the weekend and steer cool stuff towards midweek. We run club nights too.

"I love being my own boss and having the creative freedom to book who I like. It's rare, but sometimes I just put something on for me. When Rik Mayall died I had a night where I showed loads of his old Comic Strip and Young Ones shows. I'd do that if nobody else turned up, but as it happen a couple of hundred people agreed with me. **For five years we've lived with a massive cloud over our heads regarding the flats, but now that seems to be okay the future looks quite good, actually."**

www.thefleece.co.uk



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.





Guto Brychan, Chief Executive:

"Generations of people have their own stories about coming to Clwb for nights out. The venue was originally set up as a Welsh speakers' club in Cardiff, but it soon became obvious that this wasn't sustainable on its own, so the club would operate on the weekend and it would be hired out to external music promoters during the week. The business has developed along those lines as the original use has decreased, because now there are all sorts of organisations across Cardiff which cater to Welsh speakers. Ever since the 'Cool Cymru' years of the early '90s, Clwb has been a real fulcrum of events for Cardiff's alternative community.

"The venue had the same set of trustees for the first 30 years, until they wanted to retire, and if they weren't able to find anyone to take over they were going to have to sell it. I've been working behind the bar and promoting club nights at Clwb since 1993 and I became the full-time Entertainment Manager in 1999. I did that four years and went off to work for the Welsh Music Foundation, running a record label and organising Welsh language event. When the trustees retired in 2013 I came on board as chief executive.

CLWB IFOR BACH, CARDIFF

Founded: 1983
Capacity: Two rooms of 250 and 150
Staff: 10 full-time, 30 to 40 casual
Events per year: 200 gigs and 200 club nights, approx.

"One of the first things we did was look at changing from being an incorporated association to becoming a Community Interest Company. Through that we re-examined once again the aims and objectives of what we do. We were originally a not-for-profit business. Where I think other venues may have been set up to make money, we still reinvest all our money into the building. We're bang in the city centre. The castle is at one end of the street and the Millennium Stadium is at the other, so this lends itself to our being a late night economy space, especially with two floors inside the venue.

"The biggest change we've had in the last couple of years has been the Save Womanby Street campaign. There have always been a lot of live venues on our street, but within a short space of time three of them shut. Wetherspoon's across the road received permission to build a hotel upstairs and the derelict building next door to ours got planning permission to turn it into residential flats. We have an adjoining wall, so it became clear to us that this would have made it impossible for us to continue had it gone through.

"This resulted in a grassroots campaign, which very handily happened just before local elections, so politicians were out on the streets listening. The new council leader was very sympathetic. The council have offered to buy the building next door and rent it to us on a long-term lease. They've also engaged Sound Diplomacy to create a music

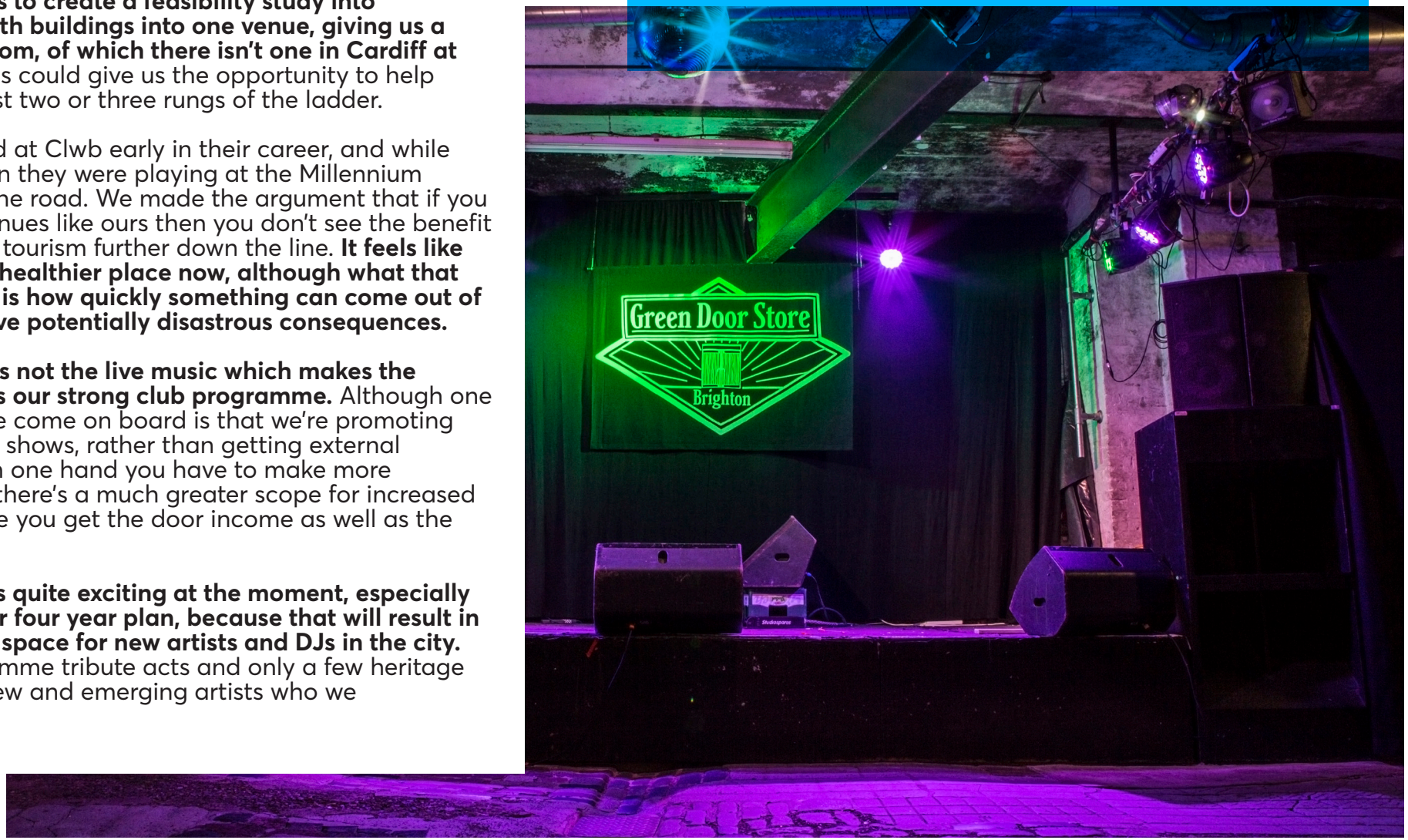
strategy for Cardiff. **We have money from the Arts Council of Wales to create a feasibility study into redeveloping both buildings into one venue, giving us a 500-capacity room, of which there isn't one in Cardiff at the moment.** This could give us the opportunity to help bands up the first two or three rungs of the ladder.

"Coldplay played at Clwb early in their career, and while this was going on they were playing at the Millennium Stadium along the road. We made the argument that if you don't support venues like ours then you don't see the benefit of all that music tourism further down the line. **It feels like we're in a much healthier place now, although what that period shows us is how quickly something can come out of the blue and have potentially disastrous consequences.**

"The reality is it's not the live music which makes the money for us, it's our strong club programme. Although one change since I've come on board is that we're promoting more of our own shows, rather than getting external promoters in. On one hand you have to make more investment, but there's a much greater scope for increased revenue, because you get the door income as well as the bar income.

"Everything feels quite exciting at the moment, especially with this three or four year plan, because that will result in a really exciting space for new artists and DJs in the city. We don't programme tribute acts and only a few heritage artists. It's the new and emerging artists who we concentrate on."

www.clwb.net



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 feelin 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.





Owners Paul Seivewright and Ambre France.

Toni Coe-Brooker, Production and Programming Manager:

"Brighton's historic train station is a beautiful piece of architecture with many visual stories in its wear and tear. The Green Door Store is in the arches underneath it. The owners Paul Seivewright and Ambre France, loved the space and invested a lot of love in restoring it to its former glory. With a passion for live music and having run successful bars before, they saw an opportunity for a unique indie venue. Before I came here I was working in programming community arts events and a youth-led music programme at the Boileroom in Guildford. I loved working there, but **my heart was set on working for Green Door Store and curating my own line-ups**.

"We're predominantly a punk, rock and metal venue, but we love a bit of everything. Our audience age range is huge, which I love. I haven't been to any venues in the UK that programme for the fifty-plus crowd. It's a unique space, industrial and not unlike underground Berlin nightclubs. There's no signage outside the venue so you

THE GREEN DOOR STORE, BRIGHTON

Founded: 2011
Capacity: 170 live gigs, 300 club nights
Staff: 5 full-time, 4 part-time
Events per year: 450

only know it's here by talking to locals. We've become a bit of a hotspot for video and photo shoots due to the raw brick and warehouse vibe.

"We host a number of LGBTQ nights, which we're stoked about due to their inclusivity and open-minded, warm crowd. This has happened organically and has helped us grow as a company. There's loads of competition in Brighton. It's full of quality music venues but this means it's full of quality bands as well. There are plenty of booking agencies, rehearsal spaces and recording studios too - and it's by the seaside. The competition is a challenge to always strive to do better.

"We try to provide a strong, diverse programme that's either free entry or inexpensive. We don't want money to be a barrier to accessing live music. I could talk about diversity for hours. **I have a keen interest in diverse line-ups, ensuring there is equal opportunity for all,** which means equality is always in the back of my mind when putting a show together. This is tangled up in my personal politics. I'm often discussing accountability regarding major festival line-ups and their lack of woman on panels, online or on the radio.

"We also run monthly nights called Rockhouse for people with additional needs in conjunction with a charity called Carousel. We're a fully accessible venue, and we offer free buddy tickets. We work with not-for-profit promoter

Femrock who provide a platform for LGBTQ musicians and create a safe space for musicians and audience members, and we have gender neutral toilets. **I'd like to look at diversifying our hire offers during the day, seeing whether we can become more of a community venue rather than a space that opens predominantly in the evening, which I think is paramount for all venues, really.**

"I'm not the owner, but I love working for a small, independent venue. **I love the access to work hands-on with new bands, helping them hone their craft and build their audience.** I love curating strong, well thought-out cultural events that support our local musicians and create a sense of community amongst young and more mature people. I love writing about and researching new bands, and **I LOVE striving to make the UK music industry a safer, more inclusive place for woman, gay, trans and non-binary people."**

www.thegreendoorstore.co.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)

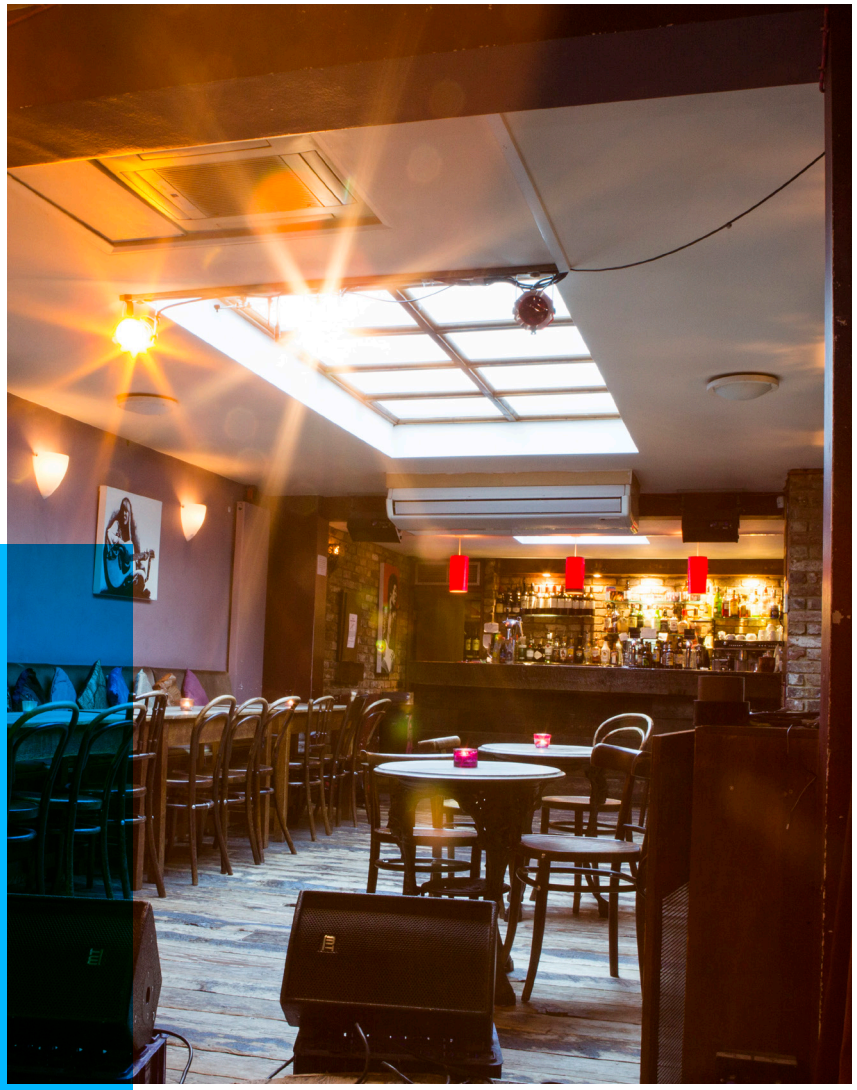
Founded in January 2015, the Music Venues Alliance (MVA) is a free-to-join, informal association of GMVs and other organisations and individuals who are passionate about this part of the music industry and have pledged their support to the work of the MVT. Joining the MVA makes you part of a network 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 run a Grassroots Music Venue, then this book is written to help you review the way your venue is run, suggest some things that might make it function better or more profitably, and inspire you to look again at some aspects of your operation. An accessible and practical manual, it covers everything that might be worth re-examining as well as stories from your peers to demonstrate the array of different models of GMVs that exist 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 Open a Grassroots Music Venue), created by **Music Venue Trust** with support from the **Mayor of London** and **Ticketmaster.**

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