BOOKING YOUR OWN GIG

A DIY guide to booking a show for your band

This was written by Exchange in Bristol, but is hopefully helpful everywhere.

If you'd like to ask any questions send us a message
bookings@exchangebristol.com

WHY SHOULD I BOOK MY OWN GIG?

Great question! Booking a show takes time and work, but if you're able to do it then it's probably the best way to go about getting your band gigs when you're just starting out.

Booking a show for yourself means you're able to decide how your band is presented, what kinds of bands you want to play with and how you showcase your music.

Another way of looking at it - if you don't want to book your band, why would someone else want to?

BUT HOW DO I BOOK MY OWN SHOW?

CHOOSING A DATE

Decide on a month, a couple of weeks or even a handful of specific dates that you could do. It's best to be flexible as you will have a better chance of getting a show in.

Local band shows often sell more tickets on Sunday-Thursday nights as there is less competition - so don't assume that weekends are always the best way to go!

CHOOSING A VENUE

Choose a venue that you think would be suitable for your band. Maybe because you've been to a show there, or maybe you've played there as a support band. Most venues would be happy to show you around in the days if you want to get more of a feel for the space.

Remember to be aware of what the capacity of the space is - a show that sells out or comes close to doing so will almost always have a

better vibe than playing in a bigger room when it isn't that full.

Exchange's basement stage is designed with local DIY shows in mind, you can find the info for that space here, but there are lots of other great spaces in Bristol and beyond.

BOOKING A VENUE

Email is usually the easiest way to book a venue - you can almost always find a contact on the venue's website. For Exchange, the email you want is bookings@exchangebristol.com.

Tell the venue that you'd like to book a date and ask for a venue spec and hire card if you don't already have it. Tell them who your band is, what kind of music you play, and maybe a couple of lines about why you think this is the right venue. Let them know what your ideal date would be, and if you have alternative dates then send those too just in case your first choice is not available.

Most venues will allow you to pencil a date, or several dates, while you get confirmation that you definitely want to go ahead with the booking. Once you have that, you can let the venue know that you want to confirm your show.

Lots of venues, including Exchange, use pencil and challenge systems. The way this works is that if a date is available and you pencil it, then you have the first pencil on that date. If a date already has a pencil, you are still able to add a "second" pencil. If you hold the second pencil and are in a position to confirm your hold, you are able to issue a 'challenge' to the first pencil. They will then usually have 24 hours (not including weekends) to either confirm their show, or release their hold to you to confirm yours.

BOOKING OTHER BANDS TO PLAY

You might know other bands personally who would work well on a lineup with you, you might have played a show with them before, or you might just have seen them play a great set. Remember, you don't necessarily have to headline the show. Three band bills are usually a good idea to help ensure the best turnout for your gig.

Don't be embarrassed to ask bands - the worst they can say is no! If you don't know them personally then you can usually find their contact information through their social media. Make sure yours is available on your socials for the same reason!

ARTWORK

Nice artwork is always a good idea to help people notice your show! You can just use a photo of your band, but if you are able to create a poster or other type of artwork then that's even better. Remember to include date and venue on your poster. You can also include

information like ticket price and venue address, but you don't have to - people will work it out!

If you want to do a poster run then there are lots of options for printing and distribution in Bristol. If your show is at Exchange we can organise print and distribution of 50 colour A3 posters for £40. Some other venues might be able to support you with this too, just ask.

Do have a think about how this money is best spent to help people find out about your show - quite often for local band gigs, spending money on online ads can go further than doing a poster run.

TICKETS

It's always a good idea to sell tickets in advance for your show. If your show is in Bristol then we wholeheartedly recommend using Headfirst as they have the lowest booking fees, the best local marketing for your show, the best support team, and they're just a great local ethical ticketing company who reinvest big chunks of their profits back into Bristol's creative community.

If you're booking your show at Exchange we can do all this for you, just send us an email with the info. Some other venues may offer this, but you might need to do it yourself. Just send the venue a message to ask, or they might already have that information on their venue spec.

ANNOUNCING YOUR SHOW

Announcing your show at least a couple of months in advance usually gives you the best opportunity for sales. Make sure to let the venue and other bands know when you are going to announce so you can do it simultaneously and create as much buzz as possible. Sometimes it can also be a good idea to hold off on announcing support acts as announcing this later can be an organic way to keep reminding people that your show is coming up.

If you have a mailing list for your band then this is a great chance to tell people you're playing.

PROMOTING YOUR SHOW

The absolute best way to promote your show is to TELL YOUR FRIENDS! When you're just starting out, getting friends and family down to support you is the easiest way to get a busy show.

Mailing lists are great if you have one, posters and flyers can be helpful, and the world of social media is ever-changing, but lots of people are likely to see it on there.

ADVANCING YOUR SHOW

Here's a checklist of things to remember

- Send all the bands' tech specs to the venue. If you don't have a tech spec for your band then a simple one will do, just letting the venue know what your setup is - e.g. 2x guitar, bass, drums, 2x vocals at the front.
- Decide what backline (drums, cabs or amps etc) you are using and who is sharing what. Some venues will have a backline you can use to save you bringing your own. Exchange has a full kit, guitar amps and a bass amp. If you're booking elsewhere then just send the venue a message to ask.
- Decide on set times and communicate these with all the bands and the venue, and decide if you want to post them online in advance. Make absolutely sure what the door time and venue curfew are first! Try to put in at least 15 minute changeovers between bands, with more time if backline is not being shared.
- Make sure you and all the bands know what time load-in is, and make sure to be on time!
- Find out if you need to run your own door or if the venue will do this on your behalf. At Exchange we'll run the door for you.

SETTLING UP

Some venues will want you to pay in full in advance, some venues will ask for a deposit, some venues will offer to sell tickets on your behalf in lieu of this. We're flexible at Exchange with what you want to do and will discuss this with you, but if you're booking elsewhere then check with the venue.

If there is anything to settle up after the show then some venues will want to do this immediately following the gig, some venues will be happy to do it the following day. Make sure you know what to expect so you're ready to settle up when you need to.

Playing shows is fun.
You can do this yourself.
If you want to book a show at Exchange, or if you just want to chat about something or ask a question, then get in touch - bookings@exchangebristol.com

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