

Talent Buyers 101

A plain-English primer on talent buyers and promoters — who books the shows, how offers and deals actually work, and how a manager builds the relationships that keep an artist working.

Who Books the Shows

“Talent buyer” and “promoter” overlap, but it helps to separate the roles:

- **Talent buyer:** the person who decides *which artists play* and *what to pay them*. They evaluate draw, fit, and risk, then make offers. Buyers work for venues, clubs, promoters, festivals, or as part of a regional/national promotion company.
- **Promoter:** the entity that **puts on the show and takes the financial risk** — pays the guarantee, rents/operates the room, markets the event, sells tickets, and either profits or eats the loss. A promoter often *is* the talent buyer, or employs one.
- **Venue/in-house buyer:** many clubs and theaters have their own buyer who books their calendar directly.
- **Festival buyer / programmer:** curates lineups months ahead, balancing headliners, mid-card, and discovery slots within a budget.
- **Independent/regional promoters:** book multiple rooms across a market or region; great relationships for routing tours.
- **National promoters & agencies:** the big players who run tours, amphitheaters, and large festivals at scale.

For an early/developing artist, you’ll mostly deal with **club buyers and independent/regional promoters**. As the act grows, bigger promoters and festival buyers come into play (usually via an agent — see *Booking Agents 101*).

How Offers Work

An offer is the buyer’s proposed deal for a date. A typical offer includes:

- **Date, venue, city, capacity**
- **Billing/slot** (headline, direct support, support)
- **Set length and curfew**
- **The money** (see deal structures below)
- **Deposit terms** (often 50% in advance)
- **What the promoter provides** (sound, lights, hospitality, local marketing, backline)
- **Ticket price and on-sale plan**

Offers go back and forth. The manager (or agent) negotiates fee, billing, support, radius/exclusivity, and production before anyone signs. Once agreed, it's papered in a **performance/promoter agreement** and the date moves from a "hold" to "confirmed."

Holds: Buyers "hold" a date while deciding. A **first hold** has priority; a **second hold** is backup. Always confirm whether you're a 1st or 2nd hold, and get holds released or confirmed before routing around them.

Guarantees vs. Door Deals

The two building blocks of live deals — most real deals are a combination:

- 1. Guarantee (flat fee)** - The promoter pays a **fixed amount** regardless of how many tickets sell. - Best for the artist when the draw is unproven or the promoter is confident — the risk sits with the promoter. - Example: "\$2,500 guarantee" → artist gets \$2,500 whether 50 or 500 people show.
- 2. Door Deal / Percentage (backend)** - The artist gets a **percentage of ticket revenue**, often after show expenses. - **Straight door split:** e.g., 70/30 or 80/20 of the door to the artist after costs. Higher upside, higher risk. - Common at smaller rooms or for developing acts proving draw.
- 3. Guarantee vs. Percentage ("versus deal") — the standard for working acts** - **"\$X guarantee or Y% of net box office, whichever is greater."** - The artist is protected by the guarantee but shares the upside if the show overperforms. - Settlement at the end of the night reconciles which number won.
- 4. Plus bonuses / breakpoints** - "Guarantee + a bonus once paid attendance passes [#] tickets." Rewards a strong draw.

Net vs. gross matters: percentages are usually on **net** box office (gross minus agreed, capped show expenses — production, marketing, support, venue costs). Always know which expenses come off the top and cap them in writing. Demand a **certified box-office statement at settlement**.

How a Manager Builds Buyer Relationships

Before an artist has an agent, the manager *is* the booker. Even after, the manager nurtures buyer relationships that pay off for years.

- 1. Know your rooms and buyers.** Learn which buyer programs each club/market in your lane, what they pay, and what sells there. Keep a CRM: buyer name, venue(s), market, last contact, past deals, results.
- 2. Lead with draw, always.** Buyers book ticket-sellers. Bring hard numbers — past turnout in their market, local streaming, presale/list size. (See *Show Booking Email Template*.)
- 3. Be honest about draw.** Inflated numbers get exposed at the box office and end relationships permanently. A buyer who loses money on a lie won't rebook. Under-promise, over-deliver.

4. **Make the buyer money.** The whole game is helping the promoter have a profitable, smooth night. Work the date — push your audience, run a presale code, deliver on marketing commitments.
 5. **Run clean shows.** Show up on time, advance properly, settle fairly, and treat the venue staff well. Your reputation travels; buyers talk to each other.
 6. **Settle professionally.** Know your deal cold, count merch and tickets accurately, and handle settlement calmly. A fair, drama-free settlement is how you get the rebook.
 7. **Follow up and stay in touch.** Thank them after the show, share how it went on your side, and route back through. Today's small club date is tomorrow's theater — with the same buyer who grew with you.
 8. **Build a roster of go-to promoters.** A handful of reliable regional promoters who believe in the act can route an entire tour and grow the rooms with you over time.
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Quick Glossary

- **Avails:** the dates an artist is available to play.
- **Settlement:** the post-show reconciliation of tickets, expenses, splits, and merch, ending in the payout.
- **Walk-up:** tickets sold day-of at the door.
- **Comps:** complimentary tickets (guest list); usually capped and excluded from splits.
- **Radius clause:** a restriction on playing nearby within a window before/after the show.
- **Soft/hard ticket:** “hard ticket” = a standalone concert people specifically buy a ticket for (vs. a festival/club night where the act is part of a bigger bill).

Bottom line: buyers and promoters take the financial risk to put on shows; they book artists who sell tickets and make them money. Win by being honest about draw, delivering on the night, and treating every relationship as a multi-year investment.