

Having Success with Live Music at Your Bar or Restaurant

So, you have decided to try live music in your bar-lounge or restaurant. As a singer/music contractor that has worked in numerous venues over the last twenty years that have included Chicago's only five star hotel "The Peninsula", quaint piano bars, old styled supper clubs, and more Italian restaurants than you could find even in Rome! (Well, not really) I have definite opinions on what works and what doesn't when it comes to live music. More important than my viewpoint as an entertainer is the perspective that comes from being the owner of a small business for the last seventeen years. These are my guidelines and business procedures for success and hence profitability for hiring live music for bars and restaurants.

I am not aware of any book or manual that states specific rules on hiring musicians. There are many misconceptions regarding hosting live music, as proven by the way in which business is typically done. ***Consequently poor standards have been adopted and have led to what I believe is the horrible state of music in most establishments.***

The first step in assuring financial success with live music is to have a clear understanding that, ***music is an investment.*** Whether or not music is a good investment for your venue will depend on a number of factors. These are the four major principles that I would like to highlight.

To be a worthwhile investment, you must invest in a high quality music product. You must market the product. You must be consistent. You must be committed to all of the above.

Investing in a high quality music product is perhaps the area most subjected to diverse opinion. Naturally everyone has their own musical preferences, and the key here is to ***select a genre and stick with it***. Give it a chance to succeed. Without a musical direction, with a lack of vision (like most venues) you are thinking in the short term. ***Short term thinking will hurt you***. If you feature a 1960's R&B group one Friday and an acoustic pop duo the following Friday you are confusing and perhaps worse, upsetting your client base. A French bistro doesn't change to a Mandarin Chinese restaurant from one week to the next. In this sense, ***thinking that variety is a good thing is absolute hogwash!*** Variety within a genre (new and old selections), variety within a 50 minute music set (fast, slow tempos) is essential but, ***haphazardly mixing genres from one week to the next is wishy-washy and will likely lead to financial failure***. Another important rule must be ***"Hire the highest caliber, most polished band you can find"***. There are some indicators of a band's desire to stand out from the rest of the pack. Aside from a quality demo and hearing them live, perhaps the next most important qualifier is their sound system. I will tell you right now that ***most clubs and most bands have a poor sound system***. When I say poor I mean, not capable of reproducing the accurate sound of the vocals, the instruments, having distortion, being too loud etc. ***It's hard to find an excellent quality speaker under \$800.00***. Ditto for the P.A. ***It really requires a substantial outlay of cash for a quality sound system, despite what the kid at Guitar Center says.***

Serious musicians will have already figured this out.

Each year I have also found that more and more **people listen with their eyes**. A great visual presentation is crucial. Therefore the proper lighting is essential. Red, blue, and white stage lights all have their place in a serious musical venue. As does a band that dresses consistent with the genre they are performing. A jazz trio should not come dressed as if they were auditioning for a slot on Hee Haw. **Music and bands are not interchangeable**. Better quality bands will draw and hold more people. Better quality bands that take care of business will cost more than those that do not. For those of you that hire karaoke singers or groups that primarily use backing tracks, “Shame on you!” Don’t do it. This is truly **“Music with no soul”**. People that “know” music understand that **most performers (but not all) that use the background tracks really scrape the bottom**. It is not live entertainment! It’s a bad trend and about as tasteless as it gets. It will be difficult to fill a room when the performer works this way. Pay the extra for real performing musicians or don’t have music. You will have a unique offering compared to most other venues that will lead to increased revenues. I’ll leave you with this thought, **“A poor music choice in your lounge is akin to having an outbreak of food poisoning in your restaurant”**. It will most likely be very damaging. **“Often the difference between spectacular and garbage is a few hundred bucks”**.

Now you are convinced that you will hire great quality bands. This leads us to the next and most neglected part of the success quotient, marketing. Unless you have a fabulous high traffic (Rush Street) location, you’ll need to market. How will people know that you have this wonderful music in your

lounge Telepathy? Word of mouth? (It's not enough!) The little sheet of paper taped to the door at the entrance? Perhaps ***“Live Band” on the marquee out front. That’ll really pack ‘em in!*** Give me a break! How vague and disrespectful to the entertainers and potential customers. Remember that bands are not interchangeable. If you are ashamed to display the band’s name, to be specific about the type of music you have, or lack confidence that displaying something other than “Live entertainment in our lounge” will be effective, then why are they there? Those are the most common marketing methods in use. Meaning, ***there is little or no marketing at 80% of venues.*** All of the available resources must be used by the sly marketer. Free insertions in entertainment newspapers, online event sites, prominent and detailed displays on your business website, table tents or some form of description of the band that builds value in the eyes of the patron. Sell, sell, and sell. If you have a niche type band you will probably need to draw from a larger geographic area. **Consider putting out the bucks for a display ad in a major newspaper.** It can payoff not only in immediate profits but if your service and food are “together”, also in residual business.

You know how important having consistent quality is to the food menu. Why would this be any different for the entertainment? Here’s a common scenario. A group of six diners go to an upper scale restaurant that has the appropriate décor, service, and menu. After eating they head to the lounge for an after dinner drink maybe a slow dance. And who’s in there?; Three guitar players ranging in age from 22-26 years with torn jeans and playing music that is completely out of context. There is ***Surf n’ turf in the restaurant and sloppy Joes in the bar.*** It’s incredible, yet so common. In

addition, the **Sports Bar Syndrome** is happening. There are four large screen televisions illuminating from every angle of the room. You ask “But what can I do? It’s playoff time. The same two customers come in every day, and want to watch the game.” **There’s always a playoff game or race cars or an important Chinese women’s badminton final to see.** Once the music begins, **let them go elsewhere to watch the game.** For success, I’m convinced that **it’s got to be either music or televisions**, not both. Televisions wreck the proposed atmosphere. It cheapens the entire establishment. I don’t care how much they cost! It’s dumb, and classless. Televisions are not conducive to conversations or socializing. Is that what you want? There is another all-important factor that merits a mention namely “professional service”. Professional bartenders and wait staff are a must. Bartenders, whose goal is to make money for the house and themselves, not to flirt with customers, not to have conversations on their cell phones or tell “cute” stories at the expense of ignoring the other patrons. You need to have bartenders that are able to mix, pour, and sell drinks. **A bartender worth his keep, toes the fine line between friendliness and aggressive yet responsible sales.** I understand that bad bartenders are just like bad music. **If the person doing the hiring was aware that the band sucked, he wouldn’t have hired them to begin with.** I’ll bet that most of us have had our share of atrocious bartenders; the kinds that leave you wondering what they are doing there in the first place. This may be typical of the caliber of employee available these days. Get rid of them! They are killing your business! Remember this: With all of the competition in today’s marketplace, **“Customers need a compelling reason to frequent one establishment over another, especially during a weekday.”** Your entire program has to be together

otherwise you'll be just like all the rest of the joints. To quote many a critic "the devil is in the details".

Finally these principles need to be applied and adhered to. They are not to be employed until business is good and then discarded. A commitment to quality music, an aggressive marketing plan, consistency of theme, atmosphere, food, and professional service will go far in helping guarantee profitability and success in hosting live music at your restaurant or lounge.

-Frank Lamphere

There is an art to good singing and entertaining. Frank Lamphere is one of the dominant remaining practitioners of this art. Unlike much of the market that uses D.J. type "pre-recorded" music, Rat Pack Jazz, as Lamphere bills his act, uses a live band filled with Chicago's most acclaimed musicians. But more than just a great singer with a superb band, as a music contractor, Frank and his company Rat Pack Enterprises LLC. have been meeting and exceeding the musical entertainment needs of clients for years. A diversified clientele that includes: Akzo Nobel, The Muscular Dystrophy Association, Western Illinois University, Geneva Concours d'Elegance, Radisson Hotels, Wells Fargo Bank, City of Oak Forest, YMCA of McDonough County, Iowa Wesleyan College, the Pfister Hotel and many others.

Frank Lamphere offers a selection of musical entertainment options that include: the "Frank Lamphere Presents Rat Pack Jazz" variety show and two artist-specific shows "Sinatra Spoken Here" and the unique "Dean Martin Tribute Show". Rather than cheap imitations of the real thing, these high caliber seventy-five minute shows capture the essence of the originals. They are available with 3-10 piece backing bands to accommodate various venues and budgets. All options feature high quality sound and lighting.

Frank Lamphere is the kind of old school singer-entertainer that can light up a room with the very first note he sings. To find out if Frank is available to entertain at your venue, phone (630) 202-4887. See website at www.RatPackJazz.com