

Popcorn, anyone?

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We all know that my column is more often than not an attempt at humor. Today's column isn't a humorous story, it's a cautionary tale about the vagaries of the promoting business and festivals. I am now going to issue the disclaimer that opinions expressed here are strictly my own and not necessarily those of management â but then again management can kiss my ass!

Almost everyone reading this has either been involved in or attended a festival here in Texas. Festival season is a great deal of fun that allows the public to see several good bands for one reasonable price as they get their shine on, expose body parts (well some do) and sing and dance to their personal favorite bands. These festivals are held all over the state during the spring, summer and fall of each year. Most festivals take at least 6 months to plan and there are very strict guidelines you use if you want to be able to feed your children for the rest of the year. There is careful planning to be done and everything you do should be done with a methodical precision, dotting all I's and crossing all t's.

My fictional tale begins with a festival being held for three days in a DRY county â !hmmm, there is problem number one in my book. Who in the hell had THAT bright idea? Everyone knows that if you are coming to a festival, you are planning on having fun and usually that involves a beer or ten. A roster is selected and in this instance posted everywhere before contracts are done, oops problem number two has just reared its ugly head. I am fairly sure that your butt can be sued if you are promoting a show that hasn't been confirmed by contracts. Sponsors are found and promised certain things in writing for their sponsorship. Oh dear, problem number three has just arisen! If you don't follow through on these certain things then a breach of contract can ensue and you can end up letting a judge decide who is at fault. Additionally, these sponsors can pull the plug on things at any point if you don't have it in writing that they are locked in and in this fictional instance, they did. Let me now introduce you to the star of this fictional tale, the promoter whom I shall fondly call Mr. Snail Trail. Mr. Trail has slimed his way through the industry using everyone and everything to his advantage. He makes promises he has no intention of keeping, he throws up a screen of smoke and mirrors to divert you from facts and will cry foul if you so much as query him about the accounting for a show. If you question him on any detail he feigns righteous indignation and resorts to the juvenile tactics of name calling, slurs, slander and rumors that are calculated to divert attention (once again) from the real source of the problem. Why yes, that would be Mr. Snail Trail. Mr. Trail now has to figure out a way to soothe the sponsors and keep them on board. He scrambles to rectify what is taking place but his reputation has preceded him and he is met with stone faces and requests for return of sponsorship funds (which he has been living on thinking that he would make it up in pre sales.) Oh, did I forget to mention that this type of guy doesn't have a pot to piss in so he isn't really worried about losing on the show? Of course he isn't, it's other people's money that he uses so he has absolutely nothing to lose! When the show fails he finds a way to assess blame on anyone and anything but his poor planning or blatant thievery.

Mr. Trail and his brethren feed off the innocent and honorable people, with no moral compass like the one most of us have in our heads that tells us â SNo, you cannot take advantage of that person. It would be ethically the wrong thing to do. â • They are also the ones who make this business a sleazy undertaking at best. Don't get me wrong, I have met some GREAT promoters and I have a feeling that the analogy my grandmother used can be trotted out here: one bad apple spoils the whole barrel. Promoters need to be policing themselves and weeding out the slime balls that pervade the industry, after all it's their reputations that are at stake.

The bottom line is that if a promoter approaches you to invest in a show make certain that you know the individual very well, that he has a business plan and that he is presenting you with a written contract specifying return of your investment through advertising, promotion or monetary compensation. For those of you that play in these festivals, when a guy asks you to play for nothing the correct response is NO. Trust me, he is just filling space with your warm body in the hope that you will bring your own crowd in (and yes, of course he expects them to be lining his pockets with money they paid to come see you.) Yes, I know he told you that this would be great exposure for you, that NEXT time he will move you further up the roster and that it will help your career. Guess what? He lies, his entire concern is that you are there to help offset the cost of the big boy talent because he has yet to figure out the way to screw them out of money. Thank God for big boy management companies because they take care of their talent!

In this story, Mr. Snail Trail doesn't get to pull this off. Musicians decide that playing for nothing is not in their best interest, that the stench of being associated with a slime ball isn't worth it and sponsors start clamoring for return of their money. Mr. Trail finally gets to meet the karma train - head on. He is bound to the tracks by all the misdealings, financial malfeasance, lies, slander and libel as the train bears down on him gathering speed as it heads his way. You can hear the gnashing of teeth as he wrings his hands at the injustice of it all and those of us that have watched him abuse others are pulling up our lawn chairs and popping some popcorn for the show. I just love a happy ending! Popcorn, anyone?

[Submitted by Radical Red]