



Artist Development or Tour Marketing

Madelyn Scarpulla

This section discusses the functions of a record label artist development / tour marketing department. At this point, you may also want to review the StarPolish dedicated section on [Performance Marketing / Tour Support](#) for more details and do-it-yourself tour marketing tips.

Some labels refer to product management or marketing as “artist development” (which sounds nicer than “product management”), but at most labels artist development is the touring department. This area not only deals with touring, but also non-recoupable performances like promotional tours, special artist appearances and label events and presentations.

First off, if you don't already have a booking agent, the artist development department can undoubtedly help you find one. There is a finite number of major booking agents in the country, and major- label touring departments maintain excellent relationships with all of them. If you need an agent, your artist development representative can help you find the right match.

Once you are paired up with your ideal agent, Artist Development can also help you find your ideal touring situation. The label's muscle and promise of marketing support will help you to secure a good tour. If you're up for an opening slot, other agents, headline acts and venues all want to know that their opening artist will have label funds behind them to support the tour with advertising, promotion and visibility to help sell tickets.

Tour Support - The Budget

The main order of business for Artist Development is approving your tour budget. Your recoupable tour support amount is pre-determined in your contract. However, this does not mean that the touring department just writes a check for that amount and sends you on your way. Even though tour support is recoupable and you are ultimately responsible for that money, it is not yours upon demand. You might think, “Hey, it's *my* money, let me have it!” But the sad truth is that in most cases, the label does not recoup tour support money from its developing acts. The label, therefore, considers this money an investment in marketing, and will allot it to you, like any other marketing expense, in a responsible way.

Therefore, you can't just point to your tour support figure in your contract and demand a check -- your manager will have to submit an extremely detailed budget for every tour that you propose to go on. Artist Development will review the budget with a fine-tooth comb and cut back as much as possible, sometimes to a seemingly unmanageably low number. It's a frustrating process for both parties, but at some point you will reach an agreement. To make this process as painless as possible, be sure your manager submits a smart, realistic and humble budget with minimal padding. Artist Development knows how much it costs to rent a van and how much contingency money you will need. Be reasonable in your requests to ensure the tour support approval process goes smoothly.

Tour Support – The Tour

The label wants to make the most out of your tour as much as you do. There are countless ways to promote and market a tour that involve virtually every department in the label. The artist development department fields all requests and works with the tour manager to accommodate as much as possible.

Let's look at a specific example of an alternative band on a club tour to support their debut album, and how each department has a specific need or request:

- **Promotion:** The local promotion rep would like the band to visit two commercial radio stations while they are in town. One station has requested an on-air acoustic performance. The rep just wants to bring the band by to meet the program director of the other station. Also, the college promotion guy wants the band to swing by the college station and do an interview.

- **Video Promotion:** The video promotion manager would like the band to stop by the local cable video show studios for an on-air interview and possible performance.
- **Publicity:** A local writer is reviewing the show and would like to interview the singer at soundcheck. Additionally, there are two phoners (phone interviews) scheduled for the singer to do in the morning for an upcoming show in another market.
- **Sales:** The sales regional would like the band to do an in-store performance at Tower Records. The branch has also requested the band come by for a meet-and-greet and lunchtime visit in their conference room, with possible acoustic performance.
- **Online Marketing:** The online marketing department has set up a live webcast of the show and needs the band to do a half hour pre-show live chat to help promote it.

You can see by the above examples that there is just not enough time in the day to accommodate every single one of these requests. The artist development point person at the label works with each department, the product manager and the band's manager to prioritize all the requests and decide which ones will be accommodated. A well-organized itinerary of all activities is then generated.

If you're curious about the example above, this is what I bet would happen:

1. The in-store performance at Tower would happen.
2. Instead of getting the band to perform on-air, that radio station would do a "remote" from the event (broadcast live from the store). The local promotion rep would take the program director from the other station to see the show. The college station programmers would also come out to see the show.
3. The singer would get both phoners done in the morning, and also do the soundcheck interview. Two other band members would do the pre-show online chat.
4. The branch employees would all come to see the show and meet the band afterwards. The branch might host a dinner near the venue before the show, and some band members would stop by to say hello.
5. The local cable TV show would also probably come to the show, but would not get the on-air interview/performance on this visit.

Tour Support - Marketing

Other stuff the label does to ensure a successful tour include the following:

- **Advertising:** Print advertising runs in each tour market and is placed by the sales regional or the product manager, *not* artist development. Ads run in the weekly entertainment papers, and "tag" the show and a retail account as well (to garner sale pricing). Remember, it is the label's job to *sell* albums, not tickets. The promoter will also advertise, and your agent can give you specifics about that.
- **Promotion:** Ticket giveaways and other special promotions run in a market preceding tour dates. These promotions are set up by the product manager on a national basis, or locally by the regionals, the branch marketing people or local radio promotion reps.
- **Merchandise:** When you arrive at a club for soundcheck, do not *expect* to see your posters hanging up. Artist Development will always send promotional materials (posters, photos, bios, CDs) to a venue before a show, and it is a rare occasion that they get used. Unfortunately, poster tubes often sit in club offices unopened. If a club is active enough to hang up their own posters, they are usually ripped down well before your show anyway.

You *can*, however, expect the field marketing reps and the college reps to merchandise clubs the night of the show. They usually will arrive just before doors open, but again, within minutes after the club is open, the posters get ripped down. That's not a wholly bad thing, as it may be a good indicator of fan support—you want your fans to tear down your posters and hang them up on their walls at home. But when you disappear after soundcheck for dinner and come back to play your set, if you don't see posters up it doesn't mean they weren't there. So it's very helpful to get 200-500 posters from the label to keep in your bus or van to augment the efforts of the label.

For more details and a wealth of do-it-yourself tour marketing tips, see the StarPolish dedicated section on [Performance Marketing / Tour Support](#).

Other

There is a multitude of other special "one-off" performances that artists are asked to do on behalf of the label.

The cost of these promotional performances is not recoupable; it is purely at the label's marketing expense. The artist development department also deals with the logistics of these events from arranging artists' travel to hiring backline equipment and staging. These special events might include a label convention, special presentations at retail account meetings or award shows.