



Don't Forget the Personal Touch

by Kell Houston

In today's fast paced, technological world, it's easy to forget that people used to actually have to speak to each other to communicate. In the past, many predicted technology would do away with the paperwork and paper trails everyone used in order to keep track of business deals and conversations. Today, the reality is everyone still uses paper and anyone with a computer or smartphone is now inundated by e-mails, spam, social media notifications, text messages, instant messaging... life used to be so simple.

On the entertainment side of the casino business, technology has helped speed up the process of booking entertainment acts. Offers, contracts and advances with artists are all now done electronically. It is easier to accurately keep track of what was communicated and agreed upon, which used to be handled by the post office, UPS and FedEx, and so there was always a delay. Today an agreement can be in the other person's hands (or at least on their screen) in seconds. Anyone around the world with a telephone or Internet connection can be communicated with. E-mail, text messages, images and even documents can be transferred immediately.

Entertainment organizers today access everything from artist websites to sites such as Pollstar.com in order to find out information about an artist, including appearances dating back ten years. Pollstar.com can also show average ticket sales and generate complete artist ticket sales reports. Other sites such as CelebrityAccess.com have in depth artist information and Billboard.com has information on released songs, albums, radio play charts, etc. With YouTube and other streaming video sites, it is now possible to see clips and full-length videos of performances. Also, the vast majority of artists have Facebook and Twitter accounts where it is easy to get an understanding of their fanbase.

Ultimately, this technology and electronic interconnectivity can foster an impersonal ecosystem. It helps connect us and delivers information very quickly, but what is missing so often, is the personal touch. Many fall into the pattern of avoiding phone calls, instead relying on e-mail, social media or texting. While that strategy can often save time and seem more efficient, the nuances in a phone call or a face-to-face meeting are missed in addition to the impromptu, evolving nature of a phone conversation. In electronic communication, misinterpretation can be especially widespread. This can create a lot of issues when it comes to entertainment. Some may argue that more is getting done and electronic paper trails are efficient and advantageous. This is true, but what

about just picking up the phone to get things clarified? Most successful businesspeople would argue they have created and developed far better relationships through phone calls and meetings than via e-mail. Yes, it takes a little more time, but this kind of communication is very important for nurturing and developing relationships. And, aren't relationships really what everything is about?

How exactly does this apply to the casino entertainment business? Everything about booking a concert depends on communication. One missed detail can snowball into a myriad of issues and problems. The importance of keeping a paper trail to support the details can't be overstated. Of course there is also "Murphy's Law" to keep in mind – Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong. Knowing that ahead of time will help those planning for an entertainment event be prepared for any scenario.

After the initial internal entertainment meetings at the casino, the real work starts. First there's the artist's agent to deal with for the specific region. Send an e-mail and load them up with specifics such as dates, budget, etc., then follow up with a phone call. This opens up the human element, while the e-mail communicates the facts. This is a very efficient way to do business. With the artist, proceed the same way. The tour manager and production manager get a communication with the needs and details of the casino, and then a follow up call. Everyone is busy, and very few people have the time to ramble on about things. This is a systematic way to manage an event.

One of the biggest complaints from agents, managers and casino buyers is that the person they are trying to get a hold of does not return calls in a timely manner, if ever. Remember, many use e-mail and texting in place of an actual phone call. But everyone has experienced e-mails that have vanished into thin air, so don't assume e-mails are getting delivered and seen. Pick up the phone.

Today's electronic communication tools enhance our productivity, and should certainly be utilized, but don't forget the personal approach. Speaking of which, a personal note in the mail to thank someone or recognize them can be amazing in developing a good relationship. Respond to e-mails and return phone calls. Make sure you are building your communication with a personal touch. ♣

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