



The New VIP Experience: The Challenge for Casino Operators to Accommodate Artists' Superfans

by Kell Houston

There is a growing trend in the concert industry business impacting tribal casinos. The “VIP experience” is an add-on service that many artists have begun providing to enhance the concert experience for fans and fan clubs in order to increase their fan base and enhance their own revenue stream. To further complicate things, this type of add-on “enhanced or elevated fan experience” is usually handled directly by the group’s management, an outside company, or the artists’ agency. What this means is, you may find yourself with an additional entity in your mix to manage.

Most casinos offer their own VIPs (players and shareholders) a meet and greet and perhaps some additional swag. However, this new elevated fan experience is geared for the artists’ superfans and they are most likely not your VIPs.

Here are some challenges for casino resorts:

- How many prime seats do you need to surrender and how does this impact your overall ticket sales and marketing?
- How do you manage these separate events as not to confuse your own VIPs or cut into your own schedule?
- What if your own VIPs want the same enhanced experience?
- What if concert goers have a poor experience?
- How can you profit from these VIP experiences?

Here is an example of an enhanced or elevated fan experience request:

- One premium reserved ticket in the first 20 rows
- Invitation to artist’s lounge before the show featuring:
 - Two song acoustic pre-show performance by artist
 - Complimentary snacks and a cash bar
- One exclusive artist VIP merchandise gift
- One commemorative laminate concert badge
- On-site concert concierge

How do you manage these separate events so as not to confuse your own VIPs or cut into your own schedule?

Included in almost all of these packages is a meet-n-greet with the artist. The artist may want to do this Fan

Club/VIP meet-n-greet along with your casino meet-n-greet (that you’ve negotiated), so keep in mind this can become a little lengthy and confusing. Sometimes it will require finding a separate room that they can set up in as well. In most of these packages, the “fan” will receive some merchandise from the artist. This merchandise is often shipped in separately. Be aware that if the merchandise never arrives, people who paid extra for this will likely be quite upset and potentially push blame to the casino.

How many prime seats do you need to surrender and how does this impact your overall ticket sales and marketing?

The packages vary greatly, but the bottom line is, the artist representative may get involved with your ticket sales and ask for you to hold your announcement on sale dates to coordinate with their client’s (artist) fan club. They may ask you to hold a certain number of your prime seating tickets for them to sell and include in their enhanced experience for fans or customers that want more than just a ticket to the show. Depending on your marketing region, the number they ask for can be as many as 50 tickets or more. They should pay for those tickets at your listed cost, as they sell their packages, but oftentimes they want those prime seats held up until very close to the actual show date. Typically, these prime tickets are already being held for your own VIPs and tribal members, so that is how it becomes an issue.

One recommendation is to limit the number of tickets you will hold in your best seating sections. For example, hold ten tickets initially and then if those are sold, open up another ten tickets. Holding the large number some of these people request is ridiculous.

How can you profit from these VIP experiences?

As mentioned above, these “resellers” pay retail for these prime tickets, so overall, this does help your ticket sales. One of the big questions floating around is should this be a revenue share situation similar to selling artist merchandise at your concert. That remains to be determined, but initially there is a push back from these companies and artists regarding any revenue split.

What if your VIPs want the same enhanced experience?

You can always offer this to your own VIPs, by directing them to the outside people, or you can cut your own deal with the outside company to buy a certain number of these tickets

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for your VIPs, giving them that extra special experience. There are a lot of creative options available for you to consider.

What if concertgoers have a poor experience?

With regard to poor experiences – you need to make sure you manage these outside services onsite and online. The resellers actions and way of doing business directly impact your casino image and brand. These outside companies or “add-on” services need to be held accountable. Be very clear about what you will do, how it will be managed and what your expectations are. Make sure you have a direct contact person and a paper

trail. Get everything in writing and make sure they understand how your casino does business.

Keep in mind that everyone is trying to create good partnerships and successful events. Your customer is also a fan, in most cases. So, it is important that your customer is pleased with their experience, since it reflects directly on your casino. ♣

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