



by Kell Houston

Casino Outdoor Concerts

Many casinos are stepping outside and doing special events and concerts. In many cases these concerts are being created in parking lots or other accessible areas close to the casino. Whether it's a classic car show, a motorcycle rally, a food oriented event and/or a concert, there are a lot of challenges that need to be met.

In the early stages of the planning for an outside event, an overall picture of what you want to accomplish is very important. Too often these types of events get caught up in the initial excitement of the idea and many important factors get overlooked.

A key challenge for any outdoor event is how to drive business to the gaming floor. Making access to your outside show only through the casino is always best. Ticket promotions, drawing and give aways inside the casino before and after the event work great too. Most casinos use match play on the actual event ticket. This always brings people inside.

Putting a concert outside has numerous extra or hidden costs you need to fully understand. To begin with, how much space will you need to secure for your event? If you are taking over part of your casino parking lot, you need to consider the impact to your regular customers. The space needed for a concert has to include the area for a stage, backstage area, port-a-potties, in addition to your general seating area, plus you need to have additional parking for the people coming to the show. You are basically moving your place of business outside for the event, which means your F&B people are involved. Security has to be expanded and the area you are using needs to be somewhat contained. Typically, portable event fencing works fine.

The stage minimum you will need for most low end to mid range national acts, is 32'x24'. This needs to be 3' to 4' high with stairs on both sides. Sound wings are typically an additional 8'x8' and would be the same height as the stage and located on either side of the stage. The sound wings will be where the sound system is stacked up. Any stage outside needs to be covered either with a load bearing roof or at the minimum a scrim. Is the stage well protected from the elements? (think wind-driven rain). Typically the bigger concerts acts will ask for a 40'x40' stage or more.

75– 100 feet in front of the stage will be the front of house (FOH) mix position. This will be an area typically 8'x12' and elevated on risers or stage pieces, 3-4 feet. This area will also need to be covered and protected. After the show starts, the cover can usually be removed to improve sight lines for your audience.

If your concert stage set up is close enough to a power drop or source, say from the backside of the casino, you can save the money you would have to spend for portable power. Power for a typical national act concert would require 2 generators. One sound generator capable of producing 200 amps 3 phase, typically a 125kva generator. This generator needs to be over-sized in order to handle the short-term peak loads that amplifiers require. Also one lighting generator capable of producing 400 amps 3 phase, typically a 250 kva generator. Occasionally both sound and lights can be fed from the same generator if the option for two is not possible. A very good connection to ground is imperative.

Consider the snake run to front of house (FOH) position. The snake is a protected collection of all the microphone sends from the stage to the mixing position FOH. Is it exposed to foot traffic? Is it a tripping hazard? Generally the snake runs straight out from the front of the stage 75'-100' to the mix position. On pavement it's protected with "yellow-jacket" cable ramp protectors. On grass, it's usually buried. Where in the audience area is the mix position going to go and how does it affect sight-lines? Is there adequate weather protection for the house and monitor mix positions? The engineers out front need to have a quick way to access the stage. What access is provided?

The sound and lights are determined by the artist's production rider. Each artist will have specific requirements that will need to be reviewed with your production company to reach a workable agreement/compromise. Depending on the capacity of the area you are using, the amount of sound gear will vary. Remember that outside areas take more sound gear than a contained inside venue. Keep in mind that many people make the mistake of looking for the lowest bid or cost for the production. It's not just about cost. An inexperienced production company can cost you a fortune in problems and have inadequate or outdated gear. Check for references and make sure the company you hire has done shows like this before with artists of the level you are booking.

The backstage area will need to have a couple of tents for dressing room and for catering/hospitality. Many casinos choose to bring in RV's or trailers for the dressing rooms. However, you will still need a covered area backstage. Additionally you will need port-a-potties that are for the artist and crew use only.

Finding the right group for an outside concert has some challenges. Not every artist likes to work outside. Many of the older/variety acts really don't work outside. Your outside

shows will attract a little younger audience. Keep that point in mind. Additionally by being outside you are competing with regional festivals, fairs and big concert shows held regionally. Choose your act carefully and try to get moving early on getting your act selected and confirmed. Summer touring season is when most acts make their bigger money and the tours are getting scheduled and routed for the summer season in late November – January. There are plenty of opportunities for you if you keep your dates flexible and if you look at the off days instead of just the weekends.

All the usual marketing and advertising costs will apply of course, just like any other event. This is an opportunity to go after new customers. Try and add some extras to catch people's interest. Make sure and have your players club involved and set up with a table outside.

Weather can be a major problem. Rain insurance is not very workable because unless you are situated on top of a rain reporting weather station, you could lose out. Rain insurance

covers a cancellation due to rain, but only if the rain is falling in adequate amounts at a reporting station, which could be too far away from your event. In the event of inclement weather, you will have to move your event inside, re-schedule, postpone, or cancel, in which case you will have to pay the act. So for those of you in rainy climates, an outside show may be problematic. Check out the *Farmer's Almanac* and find the historically best weather days. This source has been pretty accurate over the years. Have a backup plan.

Being outside in the summer creates a festival like atmosphere. An outside event for your casino is a great chance to attract new customers and brand your casino in your region. Your employees will be excited to participate and you will need them to work extra hours, so attitude is important. Bottom line is to make it special and have some fun. ♣

Kell Houston is owner of Houston Productions. He can be reached by calling (702) 254-0268 or email kell@houstonproductions.net.

V Annual
Native American
Economic
Development
Conference

IV Annual
Renewable Energy
Projects in
Indian Country
Conference

JUNE 20-22, 2011
Disneyland Hotel · Anaheim, California

www.nativenationevents.org