



FAN CLUB MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES

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Establishing a solid connection with fans is essential for acts looking to build and maintain a lasting career, especially on the road. To engage new and existing concertgoers, many artists have tapped into subscription-based fan clubs, which offer extra perks to die-hard followers for a price tag of between \$30 to several hundred dollars per year.

"Fans want access to the artist, and the clubs are the gateway to that," says Mark Montgomery, co-founder/CEO of echomusic, a Web entertainment marketing company that manages online fan clubs for Keith Urban, Kanye West, Rascal Flatts, Korn and Dierks Bentley, among others. "It's about creating a connection between the artist and their audience."

Presale ticketing is a key driver of fan club memberships, but "the name of the game here is not selling more tickets," says Jim Kingdon, executive VP of corporate strategy at Musictoday, a merchandising, ticketing and artist e-commerce and fulfillment firm with more than 500 clients. "It's about providing a better fan-to-artist experience so that fans have a positive relationship they build on, which translates into buying merchandise at the show or building excitement about a new album."

Following are four ways to effectively capitalize on tours using artist fan clubs.

Exclusive concerts

Before the Police opened its massive reunion tour last May at the GM Arena in Vancouver, "we only let in a few thousand fan club members to see the show before anybody else," says Larry Peryer, president at UltraStar, which oversees the band's fan club. To offset the cost of facility rental fees and security, fan club members paid a reduced ticket cost of about \$50. "They saw the run-through and got to see the band in a looser setting where they might have been more off the cuff," he says.

Similarly, randomly chosen members of Urban's Monkeyville fan club were given the opportunity to see the country singer perform "a private show before the show" on every date of a recent outing, echomusic's Montgomery says. "If you create the right strategy, what you end up with are consumers working on your behalf, telling others how great you are," he says.

Presale ticketing

All Access Today CEO Chris Guggenheim says ticketing is by far "the biggest success of the fan clubs." For Beyoncé's recent worldwide tour, he estimates that between 10,000 and 15,000 online fan club memberships were generated from presale ticket demand. "We had all of our fan club allotments [about 10% of the house] sell out in Japan, Australia, Europe and the U.S.," Guggenheim says, noting that an annual

membership costs \$30. Naveen Jain, CEO at Sparkart, whose fan club client list includes Linkin Park and Alicia Keys, warns that artists must be upfront about how many presale tickets are available. "You don't ever want people to feel like they're buying into something that is a scam," Jain says. "You could very well join the fan club only to find out that all the tickets are sold out."

Contests/giveaways

Fans love a little face time with their favorite artists. For the Rolling Stones' 2002 Licks tour, UltraStar sent a fan club contest winner on a two-city plane ride with the band. "Keith [Richards] and Ronnie [Wood] waited on her on the plane," Peryer says. The winner also got front-row concert tickets.

More recently, a police officer from Florida won the "Roadie for a Day" contest hosted by Little Big Town's fan club. "We flew him up to a show in Virginia, and we literally had him backstage working as a roadie," MusicToday VP/GM of fan communities Evan Cooper says.

Exclusive contests are "a big part of the marketing outreach to attract new fans and to help build their e-mail database," Peryer says. "Oftentimes you'll be able to put together a nice marketing and media program around events because they're unique and involve the artist."

Utilize downtime on the road

Many bands are using the spare tour bus hours to connect with fans. Along with special meet-and-greets, soundcheck parties and Q&A sessions between shows, some acts will write fan club-only blog entries. Others even place phone calls to subscribers. "We're starting to do birthday calls," says Mark Weiss, founder/CEO of ArtistArena, fan club manager for Fall Out Boy, Death Cab for Cutie, Hinder, Chiodos, Paramore, Killswitch Engage, 3 Doors Down and others.

Weiss also encourages each band member to engage with fan club members—not just lead singers. "We're getting a lot of drummers and guitar players who are really excited about the fan club, because all of a sudden they can adopt a personality," he says. "We have bands that call us up all the time, saying, 'I want to talk to the fans, I have five minutes, set up a chat.' These are fans who want to talk to all of the band members and develop a friendship through the fan club."