



## The Celebrity Draw



*A Step-by-Step Guide to Booking Celebrities for Shopping Center Events*

By **Joshua Gair**, president, Impact Entertainment Services

Nothing draws attention like celebrities. They are perhaps the most powerful marketing force in popular culture. Whether it is gossip about them in the media or a great concert they put on, they are sure to generate buzz anywhere they go. As a shopping center marketer, using a live celebrity performance can produce a lot of benefits, including attracting local media attention, encouraging word-of-mouth marketing, making lasting impressions on consumers, and more. But signing a celebrity requires careful and elaborate planning.

Let's say you've decided to host a live celebrity concert. You'll need to look at a number of issues to make sure the event is a success and provides a good return on investment. So here's what you do:

### Choose the Celebrity Act Wisely

You have to properly assess your target audience. Are you looking to attract teens, families or Baby Boomers? For example, let's pretend you want to bring lots of families to your shopping center. When choosing your celebrity, you'd naturally look at a celebrity who has a wholesome image, is not too controversial, has clean lyrics and, most importantly, would be entertaining to families—The Jonas Brothers, Taylor Swift and Jason Derulo come to

mind. Some older celebrity acts can also be a great way to attract families; talent such as The Beach Boys, Chicago, The B-52s, or KC and the Sunshine Band, to name a few.

This does not always mean that the act has to be popular currently and climbing the radio charts, although that does help. Up-and-coming country artists, pop groups and dance artists can be great too. You should also look to book an act that has not played in your market recently as this makes it more of a draw than if it had just played the local arena in the previous six months.

Once you have your target market set (it is okay to have more than one; you will just need to book a celebrity with broad appeal) and you have a short-list of potential acts, you need to set a realistic budget for the concert event.

### Money Talks

It is best to budget a minimum of \$50,000 because you will need to factor in not just the cost of the celebrity (that

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may be only \$30,000), but also the cost of producing the concert, which will include such things as the stage, lighting, sound and security.

Pricing for celebrity bookings is based on a number of factors, most importantly how popular the acts are and how in demand they are when you're trying hire them. Other factors include record sales, awards, touring schedule, where the event takes place, and more. So there is, in fact, a wide range in pricing.

The bottom line is that a celebrity with a current hit album, tracks topping the radio charts and a tour is going to cost anywhere from \$75,000 to \$250,000. For mega stars like Taylor Swift or Justin Bieber, the fees can easily fall in the \$400,000 to \$900,000 range because of their drawing power and popularity. Generally speaking, the price range within which you'd want to stay for a shopping center event would be the \$75,000 to \$250,000 range because this provides the best chances of you making a profit from the concert.

Once you have your budget set and some potential talent ideas, you will need to approach the celebrities to secure a firm contract.

### Sealing the Deal

Celebrities hire agents who book them for live shows, so the latter are the ones you will need to contact. These agents generally work for large talent agencies in showbiz communities like Hollywood. They typically get 10 percent of the fee that the artist is paid, so agents work hard to get the highest fee possible so their commission is high as well.

The major agencies are William Morris and Creative Artists Agency. They represent the lion's share of celebrity talent in the world. If you decide to go the do-it-yourself route instead of going through a booking service, you will need to contact the agency that represents the act you are looking to book, present your event and e-mail all its details.

### The Not So Easy Rider

When chasing a booking, be sure to ask for the artist's rider. It's the list of things celebrities require for their performances. This includes everything from first-class travel and catering at the venue to a certain type of staging. It's an important list to review early in the booking process because you'll be required to pay for the items in the rider, in addition to the artist's fee.

Some items in a rider can be negotiated, like the food or backline. Once you have read and understood the rider and are ready to book, the agent will e-mail you an offer form. This is where you fill out your event details and make an offer to the artist. For example, if the agent quotes you \$100,000, you may submit an offer for \$95,000. Once the agent gets the offer, he or she will take it to the celebrity, who will either accept or decline it.

A celebrity may decline an offer even if the money is good because they may not have faith that the planner knows how to produce a celebrity concert, especially if the planner is a newbie. Celebrities won't want to perform at an event where something might go wrong due to a planner's inexperience.

If the offer is accepted, a 50-percent deposit is due immediately and the remaining 50-percent is due before the event. If you choose to avoid the do-it-yourself route and you wish to hire a talent-buying agency, you will have much less worries and legal obligations.

### The Third-Party Route

A talent-buying agency is basically an agency that does not represent any talent, but instead works with end clients like shopping centers to help them book any celebrity they want. They will take care of an artist's rider, which can be very long and detailed, negotiate a good price for the talent, help you choose the right act and, most importantly, provide talent ideas and pricing for any act you may be considering. Buying agencies are experts in booking celebrity talent and will save you a ton of time and money in the long run.



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Make sure you ask how much the talent-buying agency is charging you for its services, as normal fees are 10 percent on top of the talent fee. Whether you choose to do it yourself or go with a talent-buying agency, be sure to read the entire celebrity-booking contract.

### The Fine Print

There are many issues in a celebrity contract that you need to be aware of, ranging from giving the artist a certain number of free tickets for your event to allowing the artist to cancel should a movie deal come up. These are things that the talent-buying agency should make sure you are aware of and negotiate for you. If you do it yourself, have a lawyer look over the contract before signing anything. Better to be safe than sorry.

### Creating the Buzz

Market your celebrity concert; that is a huge part of the puzzle to make the event successful. There are a number of free ways to do it.

If you booked a celebrity that has radio hits, then whenever the song is played on a local station the show hosts should remind the listeners of your event. But this only works if you actually have a full campaign going on to support it. You should also alert every local media outlet within 100 miles of your shopping center. That includes all newspapers, radio stations, magazines, TV stations and online media outlets that are popular with your audience.

Many media outlets will plug your concert simply because it is a local event with a celebrity, so strive to receive as much free publicity as you can. You should also list the event in the community sections of newspapers and magazines, as this is usually free. The radio is also a great place to buy ads during rush-hour segments because you'll be reaching your prime listeners—music lovers—while you have their attention in the car. If possible, you should also look to integrate a tie-in with your shopping center tenants.

### The Big Picture

Perhaps you could run a special promotion where attendees would get a discount coupon good at center stores, but only for one week after the concert event or even good just for that day to really drive sales. The more you can include the celebrity into your existing center marketing campaign, the better.

If there is a store that sells celebrity-branded merchandise, be sure to get their input on running a special sale or promotional giveaway. The celebrity event can also help to cement a center-branding message.

For example, if you wish to make your center the place in which teens will want to hang out, then having a celebrity pop star concert event and including it in all your marketing is a great way to brand the property as the cool place in which to be seen in town. That's what one of our clients, The Mall at Millenia, did.

When this high-end Orlando center held its annual Millenia Fashion Show, we booked Giuliana Rancic from TV's E! News to host the event. She was a great fit because she not only attracted fashion-forward people, but her fans are also very fashion-oriented. The fact that she was a reporter meant that we were able to garner lots of local media attention in magazines and other outlets as well. Remember, equally as important as which celebrity you choose is how you market your event.

Here are some tips and ideas when booking celebrities for your center events:

- o Don't make promises you can't keep. You will pay in the end, with legal troubles.
- o Always do your homework with regard to choosing your celebrity. Just because an artist is popular does not mean she or he is right for your event.
- o Plan about five months in advance. This will give you time to market the event properly, as well as avoid scheduling conflicts.

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- o Tie the celebrity in with a shopping center promotion or retail offer to maximize the event's effectiveness.
- o Don't charge for concert tickets and avoid giving people any reason not to attend. The money and ROI will come from what people spend while at the center.
- o If you do choose to work with a talent-buying agency, keep it as a long-term partner. It can be very helpful in planning your events because it will know your market and the center's past successes.
- o Celebrity concerts are not your only options. You should also look into hosting sports legends, reality TV stars and other high-profile personalities. Celebrity events do not always have to involve performers, so be open to creative ideas.

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