

When I first opened a nightclub downtown, I thought I could get by without an entertainment agent. We had a great location, after all, and I knew a lot about music. It was a very fashionable part of downtown, and I knew there would be many local bands eager to play there. Entertainment agents, I figured, were a waste of time and money. After all, why couldn't I book my own bands? I knew a little about the going rate, and had contacts with some musicians, comedians, and other performers.

Within a month, however, I knew how crucial an entertainment agency could be. I was having no luck at all. Musicians can be pretty flaky people, and unless you have an ironclad contract it is difficult to get them to do what you want. I had bands flaking all the time, people not showing up, shows starting too late or ending too early - that sort of thing. That wasn't the only problem. A lot of the bands were pretty upstanding, but it was hard for me to find the real talent. I didn't know what would draw big crowds and what wouldn't. I had to rely on my own tastes which, sadly enough, are not always in sync with what is popular.

When I hired an entertainment agent, however, things suddenly turned around quite quickly. I was really surprised. I didn't really think about it, but entertainment agents have some advantages over the rest of us. They are people who spend all their time becoming immersed in the local scene. As such, anywhere they go, they have a lot of contacts. He was booking bands that I had never even heard of, so at first I was skeptical. When they brought in full house crowds, however, I knew that the money I had invested was worth it. Sometimes, all you need is to know someone who is in the know.

Finding the right booking agent can be tricky. I got lucky. I had a friend who recommended the entertainment agent, but I know other people who have had much harder times. My advice to you is this: if you don't trust someone, then trust your instincts. If you do find an entertainment agent who seems to get the job done, keep him no matter what the cost. Having the right bands, comedic acts, and other shows come through can mean life or death to a bar.