

ASSESSING THE COSTS OF A TYPICAL TOUR (written by Fish, the singer and songwriter)

What I am about to disclose is a picture of a typical tour costs assessment using an unnamed venue from the May tour with explanations where needed as to the figures and what they mean.

I am showing the costs from the promoter's perspective and where the money goes. This is a "typical" venue but sometimes there are variations which I'll point out and explain-

"Venue" - capacity 700 (on the tour we are playing venues from 400 capacity (x3) to 1200 (1); the rest average around 650-700)

Ticket price (all prices in pounds sterling) £22.50; net after VAT £18.75; net after PRS £18.19 (publishing on songs played during performance, takes over a year to come back minus percentages to the society)

Total receipts at Box office on capacity sell out - £12,731.25

EXPENDITURE

Support £50 (standard fee)

Catering £300 for 10 people [sandwiches, teas coffees, soft drinks, water, lunch, main meal at night (normally a £10 "buyout" = fend for yourselves), 6 bottles of wine + soft drinks, water and snacks for dressing room]

Venue Hire £1100, normally inclusive of PA and lights as most venues have their own installations. Also includes security, local crew ("humpers"), towels, etc. Cheapest venue hire is £250 but PA and security add on £950. Most expensive is £2250 (and that is a 400 capacity). Average is around £1500.

Rep £120 - this what we pay per show for the promoter's representative who liaises with the venue and ourselves and takes care of the fees due on the night of show.

Local/National press budget £700 - this is based on the total budget split between the 12 shows. The Gig Cartel are promoting for me. This covers ads and the cost of a press officer who deals with the tour in advance, setting up interviews and notifying local and national press.

Insurance £75 - the insurance the promoter takes out for cancellation/public liability, etc. again split across 12 shows. It does not cover me.

Ticketing as with most venues nowadays is outsourced to agencies who charge what I consider exorbitant fees and earn a tidy profit for very little in my opinion. A £4.50 charge in some cases to process a ticket plus postage which again appears more than enough to cover delivery. Just more middlemen eating the ever decreasing pie.

Total expenses for this example are £2245.

The Gig Cartel have dealt with my last couple of tours and they are easy guys to get on with and total pros, well versed at dealing with bands at this level. There are no hidden office expenses or extras that seep away at the expenditure. They guarantee a fee to Yatta and myself, cover their rep and like me hope that we "break percentage" on the show. That means we earn more money as we

pass the “break even” figure where all venue costs and expenditure is met. The guarantee is based on the number of tickets they expect to sell. It is in no one's interests for promoters to go out on a limb with unrealistic figures as that means busted promoters and busted promoters can mean derailed tours and other bands getting hit in the aftermath if they are going through the same promoter (as happened to me in 91 when I took a kicking on the Exile tour through a bankrupted company called Bandstand who'd booked me ,sold my tickets and lost the money before they went down through other busted tours just as I hit the road with my tour!. I took a £75,000 hit with no comeback available).

Yatta haggles over the guarantee as our costs have to be met within that but after all I have said above a realism has to exist on all sides. The percentage splits after the break work accordingly, usually 70-30 in favour of the artist with the Gig Cartel not making any money themselves until after the break even is hit.

My guarantee on every gig on this tour is £2250. The break even on this show requires 273 tickets to be sold.

COSTS (all minus VAT)

Band wages £750 - 5 musicians, I am not included in calculations for wages.

Crew wages £400 - 4 Sound tech, backline tech, video/light tech and Yatta. As with the musicians these are not top notch wages but what I can afford. I am lucky I have a great band and crew guys that have remained loyal.

Agency £113 This is Yatta's fee of 5% of the gig guarantee for setting up and booking the tour with the Gig Cartel, booking hotels, sorting out transport, organising and printing itineraries, phone bills, laminates and all the other work that goes into organising a tour before we go out. It can take months sometimes when dealing with European bus tours across a 6-7 week itinerary. The agency percentage also covers my side of earnings after we pass the “break even” point.

A mainline “London” booking agent can take between 10-20% of a show fee and they generally don't do anything apart from book the gig and only liaise with the band's production manager with regards to all the other details. Mainline agents (especially the good ones) are more in demand and more difficult to get than record deals these days as the live scene takes over as the artist's main income supplier from selling recorded product. The album sells the tour and not the other way around as it used to be years ago when I started in the business. I couldn't afford to deal with a mainline agent as it would mean it would be unlikely to get the numbers of gigs I do get as promoters either couldn't afford the fees (re read the busted promoters section above) or I couldn't fit the agent's percentage in my budget at the level I work on. (Add a managers 20% on top and you understand why I don't have management!).

Yatta and I have been around the block enough times to know a good selection of European promoters, the ones we trust, the ones we want and like to work with and who Yatta can pick up the phone and put together a tour with. By not having “London” representation we might lose out on some festivals and other gigs but we have our “meat and potatoes” and the lower costs mean we can work more often. With no major record company behind me and at 55 years old with the numbers I normally do it would be highly unlikely that either a mainline agent or decent manager would look at me anyway. I don't take it personally. I am just realistic which is why we operate as we do. Anyway back to the costs!

Hotel (4 twin and 2 single) £400 - ranges again from £280 up to £550. This UK tour is not on a sleeper bus. The journeys are only a matter of a couple of hours which would mean sleeping parked up outside venues. On European tours the distances are greater and we couldn't travel those hours on a gig day. On bus tours we get a hotel every 4 days unless there's horrendous travelling involved (as we have on a long section of the September tour with only a ferry cabin in 8 days). Bus tours can mean a day room on gig day where everyone showers etc unless there's facilities in the venue. Bus costs are around £450 a day for something not luxurious! This UK tour there has to be doubles which means sharing for the band and crew. Yatta and I have singles .. It's the only thing I "pull rank" on as I need my sleep to recover the voice and need the peace and quiet to chill and steady myself. Yatta deals with after show figures, advancing gigs, etc and also needs his own space. Not ideal but necessary as you'll see further down.

Insurance £42 - this is another of those figures split over 12 shows. This is my cover for public liability and canceled shows in the main. It only covers the guarantees not any potential percentage break no matter how many tickets are sold in advance. It doesn't cover merch loss or anything else. Only the costs I have incurred and lost through a "no show".. Luckily my history has been relatively clean in recent years so although I don't have a "no claims" bonus the premiums are not horrendous.

Splitter Van Hire £110 the new all singing and dancing "Clown Carrier" driven by Shaun the "FTC" who also, as most of you well know, is our sound tech. A 9 seater Merc van that also carries all our backline equipment and my merchandise. On a "big bus" tour it goes in a trailer behind the bus which is an additional cost, about the same as a splitter van hire!

Fuel Van £47 an average as you'd expect

Fuel Car £25 Yes you did the figures right! There's 10 in the party and a 9 seater Splitter van. This means yours truly will be following the Clown Carrier again driving to gigs with whatever passenger decides to join me. We haven't even registered a "hire" cost here!

Strings/Skins etc £42 Not drug paraphernalia but the "throwaways" the musos go through again averaged out over the 12 days. Drum skins, drum sticks, guitar strings, bass strings break, wear out and have to be replaced. It's a tour cost not an individual's. Normal procedure.

Catering – Breakfast £25 The only meal we pay for on gig days and days off. Sometimes inclusive in the hotel charge and sometimes not. Some of us do and some of us – mainly me – don't. Again an average.

Video Hire £75 This is for the equipment we use to provide the backscreen projections. I don't have the budgets to go for a "Porcupine Tree" visual extravaganza but we do what we can in the constraints to put something up to make more of the show. I use "in house" lighting techs on the night who are briefed on what we need from what we get provided with in the venue. There are some fine guys out there on the circuit and quite a few I would like to have kidnapped! Again at this level I can't afford a Lighting designer (LD) with another wage and another hotel room etc. I use "apps" in the form of the video operated by "Secret" on this tour. (he did 13th Star and is a talent!) Again this figure is averaged out over the 12 shows.

Merch facility fee £50 The fee we pay to venues to allow me to sell my merchandise. We get a space we need to set up a stall provided by the house and lighting. I can deal with that! I can't deal and refuse to deal with percentages of the revenue. My average take at a venue is £3 a head which means on average I sell £3 for every ticket holder. In a 400 crowd I therefore would take £1200 which includes VAT. Take off the VAT and it's £1000. T shirts have roughly a 35% profit margin so

that's 350 but as there's DVD's and albums with slightly bigger margins and I don't only sell T's say the take after VAT is £500. If the venue takes their 25% then it's off the £1200 figure. That's £300! Then they charge VAT at 20%. That's £360. Ok I can claim the VAT back my end but it means the venue makes more than me from my merch. Rough figures but you get the idea! If only I could get a percentage of the beer they sell to the audience I bring in? .2 pints on average each, 600 pints, 25% = 150 pints @ £3 each? If I had a separate merchandiser he'd be on £100 a show plus a hotel room/ breakfast so another £150 a night comes out the nett to give me £300 after the facility charge of 50. Once again I have to take the "guerilla" approach and Yatta will be handling the merch stall on this UK tour with the rest of us helping set ups.

Rehearsals £416 The average taken from 12 shows for just under 2 weeks full band rehearsals on half wages with a hotel room (I have 2 rooms here and potentially 3 are "out of towners" with Shaun up for the last few days) catering for the band and fuel to and from the farm. It comes in around 5k.

And that ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls is only the rough costing without any allowance for miscellaneous! It doesn't take into account the days off of which there are 3 that have no income but still have crew wages (the guys get paid by the week, the band by show), the hotels, the splitter van hire (it's out with us for the duration) the fuel, breakfasts coming in at around £1100. These all go into the overall tour budget! But I am getting slightly ahead of myself. Meanwhile back at the "venue" it's gig day so let's add up the Fishy costs!

In total the rough costs on my end are approximately £2496.

This gives me a loss of £246 on the guarantee but £254 ahead if I bring the merchandise into the equation!

It's not all doom and gloom though. Remember these figures are on the guarantee that requires 273 people to buy tickets out of a potential 700. For every extra 100 tickets I'd sell here I'd make another £1200 with a potential of £4800 if I sold it out! And there's extra heads buying merch? But realistically in both my eyes and those of the promoters that is unlikely to happen. £500 maybe with a fair wind and a walk up. Maybe, maybe, maybe! I've been hit before and ran a tour with only about 5 breaks in 20 shows. I never gamble. I nearly lost a house before being way way too optimistic. And it's a recession and there are a lot of bands all chasing the same pie!

On the figures I have across the 12 dates with Gig cartel based on guarantees and without any merchandise sales in the equation and adding those empty 3 days off I am looking at a loss of 6.5k.

The lottery win of a complete sell out tour would be around 45k profit. Those numbers aren't coming up! Half that and I would be a happy man but that's doubtful . If it did hit say 25k there's still the bogey man of HMRC and corporation tax at 24% taking 6k and leaving 19k. It's still a lot of money which I would be lucky to be able to make in this day and age and which I'd be exceedingly grateful for.

But to throw that figure in perspective in the big picture it's the only UK tour I could safely command for at least another 18 months without another new album and apart from the Fishheads Club tour that closed in 2011 my first full electric band touring since 2008 with only around 10 or so shows in 2012.

The European tour in the Autumn is a completely different ball game. Slightly bigger fees but way more expense with the added kick off withholding taxes by relative countries. And again it will be the

last one for at least another 18 months.It's a harvest of sorts after years preparing the ground and you have to make sure you gather what you can as it has to last a while.

<http://fishheadsclub.com/2013/01/29/touring/>