

Communication With Those That Refer You By Joe Bunn for DJN

Communicating with hotel event managers/catering managers can sometimes be difficult. In this article, I want to tackle ways to reach out to them that work and ones that don't. In addition, what to talk and not to talk about once you do get ahold of them.

The first thing to remember is that the folks in these hotels and venues are busy. Very busy. They are often tasked with the planning and execution of several events all at once. Not to mention, they are not only answering to their boss at their location, but also their clients for upcoming events. After being friends with several of them over the years, you would be blown away at how many emails these folks get every day! You think we as DJs do? Nah, not even close. Not to mention, most of the emails that I receive can be answered in two to three sentences. They are getting emails that sometimes require a thesis to answer or lists and lists of questions. Misery! Remember that if they don't respond back immediately. Be patient. Knowing that, how do you crack through that wall in order to make that much needed connection?

Join. As you know if you read my articles or see me speak, I'm a huge fan of two organizations, NACE (National Association of Catering and Events) and ILEA (International Live Events Association). If either of these are anywhere near your home base, join! And then go to every single meeting ready to meet and mingle. I can assure you that these event managers are there. Their bosses pay for their membership. This is your opportunity to make that coveted first impression.

Enlist help. When I was a young buck chasing girls, my game was ok, not great. I would always enlist a wingman to help me. I wasn't great at just going up to a girl and saying "Hey, I'm Joe". The sole purpose of the wingman was to make that first introduction. From that point forward, I was golden. The point of this story is this is the same type of tactic I used when I first joined NACE and ISES. I would hang out with a member that had been involved with the group for a while. They know everyone and they simply introduce you. Your personality will kick in once that introduction takes place...hopefully.

Mail. Guess what? The US Mail may be struggling, but it's still effective. When was the last time you got anything in the mail that wasn't a bill or catalog? Probably a long time. A handwritten letter or birthday card goes a long way with someone that you are trying to make a connection with. Trust me, I still mail a few every single week. It works! You can also use email, but do it the right way! Don't just go in and search for important people at a venue and blindly email them. Refer to this article, a few paragraphs back. Try to meet them in person and THEN follow up with an email asking them to coffee or lunch. You can also use mass emailing programs like Mailchimp, but I would reserve that for something like a monthly e-newsletter vs. one to one communication.

Ok, so by now, hopefully you have a foot in the door. Let's talk about what to talk about and what not to talk about. I always try and set up a coffee or lunch meeting once I make that initial connection. Once there, I always keep at least ¾ of that meeting light and personal. I ask about where they are from (nobody but me is really from North Carolina). I ask about their family or what other jobs they have had, where they went to school, etc. Like Alan Berg says, "SHUT UP AND LISTEN!" It is important to steer clear of things such as how old they are, or religious or political beliefs. I wish people would do the same on social media, but I guess it's a free country!

Another thing you don't want to do is come off too flirtatious. As DJs, we work in a heavily male dominated profession. I don't know about in your market, but here the planners and managers are usually female. Be careful how you act, mind your body language and what you say. I'm a charming Southern gentleman, but I don't want to come off as a creeper. Anyway, it isn't until the end of our meeting, that I start doing the talking and giving them a BRIEF history of how I started the company, how many events we do each year and how many we have done and would like to KEEP doing at their venue!

Good luck to you and go for the gold! The Olympics are on as I write this, give me a break!