THE PROFESSIONAL ILLUSIONIST MASTER COURSE

LESSON 15 – DOWNLOAD

TWO-WALLING A SHOWCASE

One effective marketing idea that takes quite a bit of work but is a good platform to launch a show and "kill several birds with one show" is to hold a showcase and two-wall with a venue.

"Two-Walling" came from "Four Walling" or a "Four-Wall" arrangement.

Four-walling (or four wall distribution) is a term originally used in the film industry where a studio or distributor rents movie theaters for a period of time and receives all of the box office revenue.

The term has been also used to describe a business model for live entertainment shows in venues. In this case, the performer (or performer's production company or in partnership with a production company), rents a venue and assumes all production, marketing and ticket sales costs & efforts. The venue simply provides the space although they might also offer a basic billboard, box office services & ushers.

For an entertainer, you can come together with a venue to produce and promote a ticketed show. You provide the entertainment and produce the show. The venue provides the venue and technical requirements. Both parties can share promotion responsibilities and market the show to their respective contact database.

In a two-wall arrangement, there is a partnership or collaboration with the venue to assume part of the costs and risks of the show. Gross ticket sales are then divided in an agreed revenue-sharing arrangement.

There is no fixed arrangement or guidelines to how a two-wall deal must follow as it is up to both parties to negotiate. The ideal is for there to be a win-win situation where both parties contribute their strengths to a project that will succeed and make money.

For example, many (if not most) shows currently in Las Vegas are four or two-wall arrangements. The shift in the business model is largely due to the weakening economic climate in the last 10 – 15 years and competition from online gambling, Macau & Singapore as gaming destinations for the Chinese.

Even if you are not in Vegas, there are four/ two-wall opportunities no matter where you are based.

In this article, we will be discussing only on how to two-wall your show and how to make it work.

As explained above, the basic idea is that you partner up with a venue who provides the place for you to stage the show. You provide the show and together, both parties promote the show to try to fill it.

Here are 5 steps to go about two-walling a venue:

Step 1: Determine Your Objective

The first thing you must think about and be focused on is your single objective when embarking on a two-wall arrangement with a venue. What is your goal for doing this?

Naturally, the whole point of two-walling is to minimize your costs and be able to stage your show with potential returns.

However, you have to decide on your specific objective in order to negotiate a deal that works in serving your objective. Some possible objectives include:

<u>Presenting a Showcase</u>

For a new show or illusionist, my suggestion would be to two-wall to hold a showcase. You can use the platform to invite agents, bookers and potential clients as a showcase of your act. Turn it into an industry event and invite industry partners for a night of entertainment, drink and fun. This gives you a chance to connect with people and at the same time have them as your captive audience to show off your latest act(s).

This is also a good opportunity to try out new material to a friendly crowd and in a controlled environments.

<u>Filming a Promo Video</u>

The benefits of two-walling a showcase is that you can have a good controlled environment and audience to film a promotional video.

In fact, this is only a way to save money by not having to pay for a venue. In addition, you will have a “real” audience to watch the show.

Working with a venue will also mean you can set the stage, lighting and cameras that will produce the best results on video.

Making Money

When done right and barring no unforeseen circumstances, it is possible to make money from two-walling on a consistent basis; although, it is by no means easy.

Experienced "two-wallers" will develop a formula that maximizes returns with minimum costs. They will also have a set of promotional and operational tools in place to best market the show. The high volume of shows also amortizes the costs of these tools over time so makes doing these shows on a frequent basis worthwhile.

The frequency of these productions depends on the size of your market (geographically and number of different venues you can tap on). In addition, for bigger countries, you could organize a city-to-city tour based on this model.

Increasing Your Brand Awareness

If you are looking to build your brand and promote yourself, two-wall deals can be used for just that. The goal is not to make money but the goal is to make sure that this show gets your name out there.

With this objective in mind, you should negotiate with the venue to give the most and best marketing & promotional support as possible.

This may include having posters in their venue one month leading up to your show, having table tents with your image and name on them and even putting up a billboard outside the venue itself. The idea is to make you look like a star. Most venues also have a subscriber/ customer list that they can email and sell the show to.

You can request to use the venue as a backdrop and location to film teaser videos that you can post on social media as well as hold special backstage or meet & greet sessions for contest winners.

You will also send invites to the media (or better yet have the venue send the invites) to watch the show and offer exclusive angles and stories to selected media.

The whole idea is to maximize the fact that you have a "resident" venue to work from/ in, even if it is for a very short time.

While it might be possible to kill a few birds with one stone, it will be unrealistic to try to fulfill multiple objectives with a single two-wall deal. So, focus on one or two main objectives and accept that anything else is a bonus.

Step 2: Find a Venue

Once you have determined your objective, you need to find a venue to two-wall. You need to find a venue that is suitable to stage your show, can fulfill your primary objective and who will be willing to work out a deal.

For example, to stage a magic & illusion show, the venue must be large enough to have a stage/ backstage and a seating arrangement that audience members can watch the show unobstructed.

For magic considerations, you may have to consider sight lines and distance between the audience and the stage. More than likely, some arranging and compromise must be done on the venue's part to house the show.

If it is a restaurant, the venue might do a dinner theatre arrangement or have the dinning area separate from the show area where chairs are arrange in a theatre-style seating arrangement for the show.

If it is a club, they might just do a free standing cum barstool/ cocktail table arrangement.

Other logistic considerations you need from the venue may include sound & lighting systems, curtain drapes, power supply and load-in access. In most cases, it would be better if you provide your own sound & lighting as well as curtain backdrops.

The location and accessibility of the venue may be a consideration as it might impact ticket sales. However, chances are, it will be a venue that is not in an ideal location that might want to partner with you to draw new guests. Also, a venue in the heart of the city will likely not be large enough to stage your show unless it is a small stand-up one.

Some venues to consider include:

- Privately-owned Theatres
- Restaurants
- Clubs
- Country Clubs
- Associations with Club Houses
- Multi-purpose Venues

The ideal venue is one where your show can be staged without too much work (hassle) for the venue. The less work the venue has to do to accommodate your show, the more likely they will want to partner up with you.

Once you identify the venue(s), you would like to work with, you need to find the manager or owner and propose the venture. You will have to introduce yourself/ your show and demonstrate why a collaboration to stage your show is a worthwhile investment for them.

Step 3: Agree on the Business Model

Once you have found a venue, the next step is to agree on the business model for this deal. Both parties must understand that it is a partnership or collaboration and both benefit from the arrangement.

While you may have different objectives to engage in this two-wall deal as discussed above, the venue has likely only one objective and that is to make money.

The venue benefits from collaborating with you by having an event to shout about and attract patrons. Naturally, more patrons means more money made from food & beverage. This is especially appealing to the venue if your show is held on a typically quiet day/ night.

Some things that you have to discuss and agree upon include:

- Date(s) and Time of the Shows
- Logistic & Technical Support You Require from the Venue
- Marketing & Promotion Support Provided by the Venue
- Manpower/ Staff Support
- Ticketing. This includes who handles the ticketing and receipts, the ticketing system (online/ box office/ telephone) and even the printing of tickets if needed.
- Terms of the Revenue Share. The revenue sharing arrangement depends on the value each party brings to the table. In most cases, the revenue share will be based on ticket sales only. The venue will keep all the money they make from food & beverage.

  If you feel you bring more value to the project, then you can request for a higher % of the ticket sales, especially if the show will bring more people in the venue.

  In most cases, to appear fair and make the deal appealing to the venue, I recommend a 50/ 50 split.

  However, just as the venue makes all the money from food & beverage, there are other opportunities for you to make additional money as well. You can also negotiate that you keep all the money made from these extra activities since the venue keeps all the money from food & beverage.

Here are some ideas:

<u>Back of Room Sales</u>

This refers to merchandise or souvenirs that you sell at the "back of the room" after your show. The most common way entertainers create an additional stream of income is to sell video or audio content of their performances. This allows the audience to buy a souvenir of their performance or watch/ listen to their art at home.

Besides video/ audio content, you can produce branded merchandise such as caps, T-shirts, mugs, key chains, fridge magnets, postcards and notepads to name a few.

<u>Performers-Only Event</u>

You can do a piggy-back industry-only event or mini-convention along with your show. It is hard work, tiring and you will need help but it can be a source of extra income. The venue partner is not likely to have a problem with you using the space for a small private event.

Some activities that can be organized for the event include lectures, dealer booths, auction, mini-competitions or workshops.

VIP Tickets

In your agreement with the venue partner, you can request to hold 10 tickets for VIP guests, sponsors or as complimentary tickets. You can then package and sell these 10 tickets at premium prices as VIP ticket packages that includes a free drink, meet & great with the performers and even an autographed souvenir.

However, note that the venue may request the same so be prepared to agree or disagree to that request.

Regardless of the business model and details that you agree upon, ensure that EVERYTHING is written down in black and white and signed by both parties.

Step 4: Produce the Show

As you look for a venue, you will also need to produce a show that is flexible and scalable enough to fit different sized venues with different set-ups/ seating arrangements. The venues who will likely to partner up with you will be smaller venues who are looking for creative ways to promote their business and attract customers. So, space will be a constraint.

If you are staging a magic & illusion show, more than likely, the show will comprise of 75% stand-up/ stage magic with 25% illusions. The illusions will include 1 – 2 major illusions and 1 – 2 minor illusions.

In this case, a major illusion will not be a large piece like a "Table of Death", "Fire Spiker" or even any prop with a full base. It will be an illusion with a modest footprint such as a "Modern Art", "Mini Kube Zag", "Broom Suspension", "Chair Suspension", or "Sword Basket". In the past, I have used smaller illusions such as the "Chair Suspension", Steinmeyer's "Audience Acupuncture" and Dan Wolfe's "Thru Steel".

Minor illusions will consist of effects like Losander's "Floating Table", "Arm/ Head Chopper", Nicholas Einhorn's "Cardboard Levitation" or the Dagger Head Chest.

The bulk of the show will be made out of stage routines, interactive pieces and front of stage acts. Manipulative acts and visual presentations will also make good interludes between the talking routines and illusions.

The duration of the show should be between 45min – 75min, depending on the final arrangement with the venue and if there are other activities like dinner or cocktails before the show.

From a practical stand point, you want the show to be able to be set up and pack down in as short a period as possible; ideally between 30min – 1 hour. The reason is that many venues have their main business to manage and working with you on your show is a side project. Besides working around their main business, they have to think about the extra time and manpower that might be needed to set up the venue for your show, so the faster you can get in and out and not disrupt their main business, the better the arrangement will be for the venue.

Step 5: Come Up with a Marketing & Promotion Plan

Marketing & promotion is the final but most important step if you intend to make the show a success.

In Step 3, you should have worked out how much marketing & promotional support you can get from the venue. Regardless of the support you get, you should still exhaust your own channels.

Posting on your Facebook pages is the bare minimum, come up with a list of at least 10 channels that you can market the show on. Google for ideas. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.