

Music Touring Logistics Managers' Critical Skill Set Requirements

Kim LaFevor
Athens State University
Kim.LaFevor@athens.edu

Sam Khoury
Athens State University
Sam.Khoury@athens.edu

Charles Roberts
Athens State University
Charles.Roberts@athens.edu

Abstract

A challenge for any academic institution planning the development of a new degree program is determining the required skill set graduates should have by the time they enter the workforce. Institutions need accurate information that precisely identifies those skills most valued by experts in industry. To address this need, a state university in Alabama planning a touring logistics degree program sought the help of experts in the music touring industry to determine the most valued skills necessary for music touring logistics graduates. Interviews and acquired documentation obtained from two music touring industry experts with over 50 years of combined experience produced a detailed list of critical skills necessary for the development and deployment of a new minor in this area. This paper presents a detailed breakdown of these critical skills that are necessary for graduates of a music touring logistics management program of study.

Introduction

A challenge for any degree program is determining the required skill set graduates should have by the time they enter the workforce. The music touring logistics industry is no exception. This knowledge is usually gained from advisory groups and surveys of graduates that have entered the workforce. Unfortunately, these methods produce limited information, since advisory groups are a small representation of the employment market and provide advice in a limited capacity, while surveys of recent graduates only reveal the perception held by graduates and not necessarily those of the employer or industry experts. To determine if degree programs are preparing students for rewarding careers, academic institutions need more precise data from organizations that will employ their graduates. Furthermore, these data should determine the exact skill set requirements these employers look for. Most of all, academics must keep in mind that career fields often change as a result of internal and external forces. This is especially true in the rapidly changing music touring industry. Therefore, programs have to be carefully planned and developed based on the most accurate and current information available.

While government employment agencies provide valuable job description data for common and recognized fields such as computer programming and marketing, data are limited on fields that are either emerging or do not operate as a standardized industry. The music touring logistics management profession is an example of a field that has operated in an obscure and unstandardized fashion for decades. The obscurity can be attributed to the confidentiality and fierce competitiveness of the music touring industry, while the unstandardized nature of the industry is a byproduct of an ever-changing field that must assist artist with tours that often span continents. No two venues are identical, since there are different officials, environments, procedures, accommodations, and other characteristics at each location. Music touring logistics managers have to account for these variances and rapidly adapt to each situation. As a result, expertise and knowledge is gained through on-the-job experiences that can differ by individual circumstances and exposures to different environments.

Further adding to the problem is there is no music touring logistics management program in the United States. Individuals operating in this industry were trained on the job and do not hold a degree in music touring logistics. They may have formal training or a degree in other music areas, but they acquired their skills by supporting artists on tours. Those who were fortunate were able to gain these skills by working with others, while those who were not gained their skills through trial and error. Therefore, a need exists for formal academic programs that prepare students for these exciting and rapidly changing careers. The challenge for academic institutions is to determine what skills these students will need to acquire by the time they graduate. Furthermore, academics will need to find ways to connect the classroom environment to the actual work environment. Therefore, internships will be critical to the design and development of these programs.

To gather the critical skill set data needed to develop these programs, faculty at a state university in Alabama gathered documents and interviewed two touring logistics industry experts with over 50 years of combined experience in the music touring industry. This paper will present their findings by listing the skill set most often identified as a necessity of graduates of a music touring logistics program.

Background of Music Touring

A music touring company is typically created for the purposes of financially transacting business associated with a string of concerts referred to as “tours” performed by an artist or band. The tour company may be formed 6-12 months prior to the tour and may be dissolved as soon as business for that tour has been transacted.

A tour company will typically consist of two individuals, one representing the artist or band and one representing the business management firm hired by the performers. Individuals working for the interests of a tour company and are traveling from city to city are considered “on tour.” These individuals primarily fall into one of two categories: individuals and vendor-supplied labor. Individuals are employed through temporary payroll companies and are hired “at will,” with no written contracts in place. Vendor-supplied labor is hired through an agreement between the tour company and another corporation, usually one that provides equipment to the tour. Labor hired through an agreement with another corporation will

answer to a foreman (crew chief) supplied by that corporation, but all labor on tour will answer to the stage manager, production manager or, if addressed, tour manager.

A typical on-tour roster includes a tour manager and an assistant, production manager and assistant, stage manager and assistant, artist road manager, artist security director, and tour accountant and assistant. Specially skilled labor directly hired by the tour company include riggers, lighting director, front-of-house audio engineer, backline technicians, lead carpenter, and carpenter crew members. Typical vendor-supplied crews include the lighting, audio, video, pyro, and catering crew chiefs and their associated crews. Additional vendor-supplied crews include the lead truck and bus drivers and their associated drivers. Also, positions that are associated with the tour company that will continue to interact with the tour include artist managers, publicity agents, business office personnel, booking agents, sponsors, and accountants.

The relationship of a tour to a concert is typically one where a promoter (buyer) agrees to provide an-agreed venue, qualified labor (stagehands), and infrastructure (power, dressing rooms, secure facilities, etc.) to the specifications laid out in a contract rider written by the tour and production managers. The buyer agrees to pay a specific amount (guarantee) with the potential for the arrangement to become a percentage deal, if the buyer is able to attract a large number of patrons. Outside of deposits made on the contract, all financial obligations are resolved between intermission and the conclusion of the performance.

Literature Review

The popularity of music is as strong as ever. Touring, plus recorded music and mobile ring tone revenue continues to climb. One of the most notable television shows in the recent decade, “American Idol,” is based on music. This conveys in essence how central music remains in people’s daily lives [1]. While the demand for music touring persists both in present day and in the predictable future, there is a critical need to assess personnel and their readiness for properly managing touring operations. While the focus of this study is primarily aimed at assessing the required skill set for music touring logistics managers, the literature available focuses largely on market assessment, music touring venues, and other areas. A much smaller body of research addresses the topic of music touring management; however, there remains no existing literature that broaches the needed skill set of a music touring logistics manager. This literature review highlights some of the categories that exist in the industry and frame the gap in this literature.

One area of the literature that appears saturated is the analysis of the music market. The research clearly points to how live music and the concert business is realizing great success. The positive trends in ticket sales are indicative of a loyal fan base to the live experience. In 2013, Billboard’s Boxscore reported a record \$4.8 billion in gross ticket sales worldwide which reflects a 30% increase from the prior year, as well as 9% higher than the largest recorded sales in 2009. This substantial growth was then followed by the music touring slump of 2010. According to Waddell, “Touring is, as ever, a cyclical business . . . this year’s strong numbers came in a year short on such mega-tours, populated with acknowledged superstars and featured artists with conservative ticket prices” [2].

On a global basis, live music is exploding. Artists are pricing better, there is great fan demand, and it is the best place to spend two hours for the price. As one industry expert noted, “We’re seeing a great supply of artists filling the venues, and when you add globalization to that, we think that the live business is booming and has a long growth period ahead of it” [2]. One business model used to promote touring bands focuses on the profitability of merchandising. Record labels provide financial support for the artist in return for a percentage of funds raised from all their income, including merchandise. Artists may use the funds for marketing, promotion and touring. Furthermore, the role of the Internet has increased the sales opportunities for artists [3].

Researchers contended that the music touring industry, which has had to recover from a slump over the past decade, has rebounded. All industry indications reveal that this turnaround will last for years to come. One indication of the rebound is the increase in gross revenue that is up nearly 16% from a year ago. At the same time, attendance at music tours is up 5.6% [4].

The touring business largely depends on a healthy Live Nation, the industry’s only public company, which posted record earnings in 2013. In their repertoire of hosted tours and concerts in 2013 were Justin Timberlake/Jay-Z, Beyonce, Rihanna, One Direction, Luke Bryan, Jason Aldean, Tim McGraw, Swedish House Mafia, Bruno Mars, Maroon 5, Roger Waters, Kid Rock, Mumford & Sons, Fleetwood Mac, the Eagles, and Imagine Dragons. The company also sought to increase its presence in the festival space realizing record attendance levels at Electric Daisy Carnival, HARD, Paridiso, and Digital Dreams. While these are positive trends of a currently healthy market, there are concerns whether it can remain that way. Live Nation Entertainment CEO Michael Rapino noted, “On a global basis, live music is exploding. Artists are pricing better, there is great fan demand...when you add globalization to that, we think that the live business is booming and has a long growth period ahead of it” [2]. Five of the most influential stakeholders, managing partner of Creative Artists Agency (CAA), Rob Light; William Morris Endeavor Head of Music, Marc Geiger; AEG Live CEO, Randy Phillips; C3 Presents partner, Charlie Walker; and Live Nation Global Touring Chairman, Arthur Fogel in the live music industry agree in its current trajectory, although each add some notes of caution. While these experts agree that the health of the touring market is favorable, there are some challenges. Marketing has become more complex due to the eclectic nature of fan preferences, which has expanded the reach of venues. Social media have played a central role in marketing and sales. In addition, the festival market has seen significant increases, while some fans continue to resonate with classic radio media. Also, they all agree that international markets will continue to grow and expand, offering the music touring industry the opportunity to increase sales and promote more venues worldwide [5].

Despite these positive projections, historical slumps have led the way for skepticism. As an industry, it is important to realize when a show does not do well, there is good reason that generally includes the wrong venue, wrong ticket price, wrong timing, and/or poor implementation strategy. In reality, even in the wake of a down year or period, the music industry will rebound as live music can never be replicated in other media [6]. In 2009, Latin music fans responded to the decline in the economy and the touring industry slump by

becoming more selective as to the venues they chose to attend. Then and now, value has become a key concern. However, while there are fewer Latin acts to compete for the same ticket dollar, and with artists resorting to fewer acts to offset their decrease in revenues, it has become a price-sensitive market. In response, the Latin concert industry has responded with creative pricing, offering VIP packages that may include perks such as gift bag, tour laminate, lanyard, and souvenir tour ticket or a more upgraded floor-seat version that includes meet-and-greet and a separate VIP check-in and entrance. Ironically, this business model has resulted in sold-out tickets in presale for the more expensive VIP tickets and cheaper VIP tickets near sell-out levels [7].

While it is difficult at best to fully discern the health of the music touring industry, all indications are that, from the seller side, it is especially healthy. In 2012, music touring reported gross ticket sales of \$3.8 billion and more than 53 million in attendance. The primary areas of growth in the industry today are being realized in festivals and international business [8]. This was supported by Schwartz [9], who indicated that music touring is a solid and dependable source of revenue for international acts. In Japan, the world's second-largest music market, Lady Gaga sold 96,550 tickets over three nights at the Saitama Super Arena, grossing \$18.3 million. Japan's largest ticket agency, Ticket PIA that has operated since 1984, is approaching an average of 62 million in ticket sales each year and holds about 50% of the market share. About 20% of all ticket sales are for international acts.

While the topic of music touring tends to generate discussion and primary focus on the artists or on the market as discussed above, there is another layer to the industry, touring management, which is often overlooked or given little attention in the literature. Yet there are many music touring professionals, working behind the scenes, who assure that the event, artist, and venue planning are effectively executed. These touring managers can differ in their focus, yet the skill sets that define what they do are comparable. Some tour managers have set out to promote local artists [10], while some artists choose to largely manage themselves. Researchers, such as Knap [11] and Bertoni [12], point to success stories of artists who were successful in managing themselves.

While these management approaches are relevant to the industry, they fail to represent a definition of the skill set largely needed as a music touring logistics manager. This significant gap in the literature suggests specific research is needed that outlines the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to meet the relevant needs of touring management in this high grossing, high demand, high profile industry.

Also, while some avenues for training are available for a touring manager, they are limited in scope and have centered on conferences, where industry participants can share experiences and ideas [13, 14]. Furthermore, a limited number of researchers, such as Waddell [15], have helped educate touring managers on effective processes.

In contrast to the limited resources training and education, there is significant literature centered on music venues, which are central to the success of live tours. Therefore, researchers such as Peters [16] and Waddell [17] are helping educate touring managers with research centered on exploring successful venues, while other researchers such as Somerford

[18] and Morgan [19] helped educate touring managers, as well as artists, about reducing tour expenses and maximizing revenues through technology and other resources.

Overall, the literature is rich with analysis of demand and trends by artist, genre, venue, and domestic and international geographies. By contrast, literature addressing competencies for touring professionals remains scarce. Based on the relevant need for well-trained touring professionals, especially music touring logistics managers, there is a critical need to define the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for success in this high demand and high profile career.

Methodology

To identify music touring logistics managers' required skill set, an Internet search and interviews of two leading music touring logistics managers with over 50 years of combined experience were conducted. The data gathering attempted to determine the critical skill set requirements, job titles, career fields involved, current standing of academia in fulfilling the education and training requirements, how current touring logistics managers were educated, and if there is a viable need for a college-level curriculum.

In late fall 2013 and early spring 2014, the websites of institutions with music-related programs were searched to identify majors or minors in music touring logistics, programs in music touring logistics or plans to offer such programs. Institutions identified as having music-related programs were contacted by phone to determine if they had any courses specifically related to music touring logistics.

A search of publishers' websites was also conducted to identify possible textbooks that could be used in a music touring logistics program. Books with music industry-related titles were assessed to determine if their content addressed music touring logistics.

In addition to Internet searches, two leading music touring logistics managers with over 50 years of music touring logistics experience were interviewed. One of the managers operates out of Nashville, Tennessee, and the other out of Milton, Vermont. Each has supported well-known artists on domestic and international tours.

In-depth interviews attempted to determine what skill set is considered critical in the music touring industry. In addition to the interviews, the touring logistics managers were asked to provide detailed descriptions of positions within the music touring industry these managers would hold.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study are worth noting, such as the small number of industry experts who agreed to participate in the interview and data gathering. The inclusion of additional industry experts would have produced more accurate results.

Another limitation is the lack of government employment data for touring logistics managers. While extensive information exists for logistics managers and other similar fields, no data exist for touring logistics managers. Although some tasks performed by logistics managers in other environments may be performed by touring logistics managers, the music touring logistics profession is unique for the reasons noted above. Skills gained in typical logistics educational programs deal with the concepts and theories involved understanding supply chains and the movement of goods from the raw materials stage to the final product delivery. In contrast, music touring logistics involves the planning, rapid positioning, and setup of equipment and personnel in various cities for a short period of time. This rapid deployment and redeployment to another city typically take place in a 24-hour period. Supply chain management concepts and theories do not clearly fit this group of daily activities. Therefore, applying government employment data available on logistics managers to music touring logistics managers would not be appropriate, because of their significant differences.

Another limitation is the lack of previous studies of the music touring logistic profession. As a result, this study could not make a connection to any established music touring logistics theories and peer-reviewed literature documenting any required skill set graduates should possess. Previous literature on music touring logistics managers' critical skill set would have served as a good starting point for this study and would have established a good point of reference in determining those skills that have been deemed critical.

Also, the lack of music touring logistics degree programs in the United States further limited this study. Since there are no existing programs centering on music touring logistics, textbook selection, lab exercises, and other academic materials could not be evaluated to help identify those skills that have resulted in student placement in the field. If these programs and their associated data existed, evidence of successful selection of critical skill sets taught in those institutions could have been identified and applied to this study's findings.

A final limitation of this study is the scope of the critical skill set being limited to only touring managers. Although this study gathered job descriptions of the various positions a touring logistics manager may hold, it attempts to summarize all the positions while determining the critical skill set of touring logistics managers. Limiting the scope of this study and the paper in this way enables the researchers to describe a general necessary critical skill set, regardless of the position held within the music touring logistics industry.

Findings

Despite an exhaustive search of websites and calls to academic institutions with music programs, no touring music logistics programs were identified. Extant music programs concentrate either on developing artists or managing artists. In a few cases, a course was included that centered on music touring management. These courses did not address all of the aspects of the logistics operations involved in touring. Instead, they concentrated on management of tours in general. In all of these courses, logistics operations were only slightly covered. No courses identified all of the logistics critical skill set required for effective employment within the music touring logistics industry.

In-depth interviews of music touring logistics experts who participated in this study produced much better results than the search of existing music touring logistics programs and skill sets taught at those institutions. Furthermore, the job descriptions of music touring logistics professionals provided by these experts significantly contributed to the music touring logistics skill set requirements outlined in Table 1.

The expert interviews and the accumulated data for revealed that logistics managers are required to perform a variety of highly specialized tasks, some of which are identified in Table 1. The tasks in Table 1 assume that graduates of music touring logistics programs can work in other positions besides touring manager positions, yet they all should possess the skills listed in Table 1. Data analysis revealed that most of the position descriptions provided by the industry experts listed these skills.

This study confirmed that the vast majority of music touring logistics managers acquired their skills by trial and error or, if fortunate enough, they received on-the-job training. This study also confirmed the need for formal training programs that emphasize the development of the skills listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Music touring logistics managers' required critical skill set

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Good communication skills: This is required in order to serve as liaison between the artist and management, booking agent, publicity, and the promoter. The tour manager also maintains close communication with all upper echelon in case of emergencies or catastrophes. 2. Attention to detail: This skill is required in order to arrange flights, hotel, and other travel arrangements for the artist, band crew, and drivers. 3. Organizational skills: The tour manager will have to gather information on frequent flyer accounts, seat preferences, next-of-kin, emergency contacts, passport details, medical history, criminal history, food allergies and preferences, financial history, salary, show pay, per diem, list of doctors nationwide on the tour route, and who can make a call to the venue if required. Furthermore, the tour manager organizes police escorts in and out of venue. 4. Ability to manage budgets: This skill is required in order to budget the complete tour. This includes inception, pickup, to rehearsal, all equipment rentals, truck rentals, bus rentals, fuel, road cash, return of all equipment, and final cost closeout. 5. Basic understanding of account auditing principles: During the tour, along with the accountant, the tour manager makes sure costs are in check, verifies reasons for excess, and reports these issues to management for review and approval with suggestions for remedies. Also, the tour manager maintains all accounting, accurate road reports, cash disbursements to road personnel, and submits to the tour accountant for review with explanation when necessary. 6. Basic understanding of marketing and promotions: The tour manager makes sure promotion is adhered to for maximum sales, day-of-show ticketing, guests, meet & greet, and VIPs. The tour manager also interfaces, schedules, and executes time with the press, radio, and TV in local areas. 7. Detailed understanding of transportation: The tour manager must be able to view routes and create a complete detailed itinerary, nationwide and worldwide, well in advance that can be issued to all personnel and families in a timely manner. Also, the tour manager organizes private jets, limos, transportation for artist/band, management, and crew. 8. A cultural awareness: Since international tours are common in various cultures, the tour manager must acquire a basic knowledge of the customs of other countries. 9. Knowledge of current events: Tour managers must be knowledgeable of a host country's political stability and unrest so they can plan accordingly.

- 10. Effective people skills:** Touring managers must be able to maintain a positive attitude and possess good people skills. Teamwork skills are also necessary for this profession.
- 11. Effective problem solving:** Since problems are likely to arise during tours, managers must be able to develop solutions that lead to satisfaction among many different types of stakeholders.
- 12. A detailed understanding of safety practices and principles:** Touring managers need to adhere to all safety and security aspects affecting or potentially affecting tour personnel, the venue, and spectators. They must be aware of safety regulations and mandates established by local safety officials.
- 13. Understanding of leadership principles and proven effective leadership practices:** Since logistics managers will be expected to manage a variety of resources and personnel in a rapidly changing environment, they will need to develop leadership skills.

This study also determined that any proposed programs in music touring logistics should have substantial hands-on exposure to the tasks required of logistics specialists in the touring industry. Music touring touches many different fields of study such as accounting, marketing, and human resources that have well established programs and substantial bodies of knowledge. Unfortunately, this is not the case for music touring logistics. Therefore, hands-on training through formal programs is essential to ensure that the industry receives the same attention other business programs have received.

Furthermore, an analysis of the literature determined little to no research exists that addresses the needs and challenges music touring logistics faces. While substantial literature exists that addresses other areas of the music industry, such as artist management and promotion, no body of knowledge exists that can help bridge the gap between what is known by practitioners and those considering a career in this field.

Conclusion

This study has confirmed the need for formal music touring logistics programs of study that address skills that are inherent in other business-related programs: teamwork, leadership, problem solving, and cultural awareness. The lack of formal business programs specifically addressing the unique requirements of the music touring industry has left touring companies with no choice but to hire untrained labor and train them on the job. This approach carries many potential risks, some of which can be catastrophic, where the artist, crew, and spectators lives could be placed in jeopardy due to poor decisions.

As noted above, considerable research is needed in many different areas of the music touring logistics field. Further studies should look at the relationships between music touring logistics managers skills and their on the job effectiveness. Other studies could attempt to determine if the skills noted in Table 1 are the most appropriate. Studies of music touring logistics pedagogy, lean logistics, and safety are also need.

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Biographies

KIM LAFEVOR is currently dean of the College of Business at Athens State University. She has over 29 years of experience in human resource management and is a retired personnel director from General Motors. Her research interests are recruiting and selection, performance management, labor relations, total rewards and compensation, and leadership development.

SAM KHOURY is currently an assistant professor of Management at Athens State University. He has over 27 years of experience in information technology and is the former founder and president of SAMIR Systems, Inc., a privately held company specializing in academic software development and support. He has published extensively in the areas of logistics, organization development, information technology, and automation of academic processes.

CHARLES ROBERTS is currently an associate professor of Management at Athens State University. He has over 20 years of experience in contract management and acquisitions in the Department of Defense and has extensive teaching experience. His research interests include logistics, organizational management, and leadership. His area of expertise is in acquisitions, contracting, logistics, and project management.