

Should ticket sales data be published?

By James Cobb

IN the last issue of Main Event, I wrote about changes in the Live Music industry, and how widespread publication of box office data could help the whole industry in the long term.

It's something that's contentious, and some people will argue strongly against.

In the UK most agents and promoters will tell you that publishing their box office figures would be commercial suicide. Agents believe that their ability to extract the best fees from promoters relies on them keeping the artists' ability to sell tickets a secret. Promoters believe that any data on demand for their tickets is a trade secret, and therefore to be jealously guarded.

There does seem something odd with a system that relies on hiding the true 'worth' of an artist from the promoter. If the net result of this secrecy is to earn artists less than the real 'market value' set by the box office, then clearly they'd be better off being open. And if the net result it

to earn artists more than their market value, this has to be at the expense of promoters making a loss. Which in the short term might benefit the artist, but can't be sustainable over time or over the whole industry.

It is possible that in some cases publication could have a negative economic effect on the individual.

But it's one of those cases where if everyone does it, everyone is better off. Research in the American motor manufacturing industry has shown that sharing sen-



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sitive demand side information benefits everyone when enough people participate. And the same rules apply here.

This is only ever going to happen if a big promoter jumps first. It wouldn't be an act of kindness to help the industry and smaller rivals. It would be setting a ball rolling that would ulti-

mately strengthen their own profitability.

Whilst this idea once sounded impossible, Stuart Galbraith has

already put his head above the parapet. In Music Week he clearly subscribed to the principle of publishing ticket sales data.

For it to work, though, it must be done right. Promoters will always have a motivation to publicise their success, and keep very quiet about failures.

The obvious solution is for promoters to sign an agreement allowing venues and ticketing agencies to release data direct to the collating body. Most of the data can then be collected electronically from computerised box office systems. This also takes care of another question – who is going to collect the figures. Now that almost all tickets are sold through computerised box offices, that data can largely be collected electronically.

All that's left is for a publication to come forward and take on the role of publishing the data, as Pollstar does in the US.

I expect the most likely runner is Music Week. But it would be nice to see a specialist live publication step up to the plate. Any takers?