



Guide to Showcasing

What is a showcase?

A showcase is essentially a market place for venue and festival bookers to see lots of artists perform in one condensed programme. Showcases come in many shapes and sizes from a handful of artists performing to ten or twenty delegates like Music Finland's 'Arctic Paradise Wold & Jazz Event' to ginormous super-festivals with thousands of delegates and hundreds of artists such as South By South West or WOMEX.

Showcases take place all over the world and across all genres of music. They are a great way for festivals and venues to discover new and exciting bands to put on their stages, and provide important networking opportunities for the industry.

There are many different showcase events across the world, often with a specific focus on a country or territory, sometimes only open to artists from that country or territory. Examples of showcase events in this genre, or including this genre, include:

WOMEX - <https://www.womex.com/>

Folk Alliance International - <https://www.folk.org/>

East Coast Music Association - <http://www.ecma.com/>

Folkelarm (Norway) - <https://www.folkelarm.no/>

Showcase Scotland - <http://www.showcasescotlandexpo.com/>

What does a showcase performance entail?

There are many different types of showcasing performance, but they can largely be broken down into two distinct varieties:

Public Showcases are where the showcasing artist is performing a public concert in front of a live, paying audience, but industry delegates are invited to attend this public event. This kind of showcase enables delegates to see how an audience reacts to a performer in a 'real' gig setting.

Industry Showcases are where the showcasing artist is performing exclusively to the invited delegates, with no other members of the public in the room. This type of showcase has advantages in that the artist can speak more openly to the delegates about their career aspirations, pointing out their team and performance options.

Industry showcases tend to have much shorter set lengths than public showcases. Some industry showcases can happen in quirky or unusual settings, very often they take place in rooms not specifically designed for live music.

What is English Folk Expo?

English Folk Expo (EFeX) is the annual showcase of English folk, roots and acoustic music to an invited audience of music industry delegates from the UK and beyond. It runs alongside a public festival, Manchester Folk Festival.

Approximately 40 artists showcase at EFeX to around 160-180 invited industry delegates. The showcases are a mix of public and industry showcases. The event is usually the week before WOMEX, meaning that long-haul international delegates often visit EFeX before moving on to WOMEX.

EFEEx is the only showcase for English folk, roots and acoustic music and happens in association with the public Manchester Folk Festival. The model is extremely similar to that of Showcase Scotland and its partner festival, Celtic Connections. It began in 2012 in Bury (alongside the Homegrown Festival), moving to Manchester in 2017. It is primarily funded by Arts Council England and is a not-for-profit venture; all delegate places are heavily subsidised to help attract industry buyers to the event. EFEEx is also one of the very few showcases to insist that all artists receive a fee for performing.

Independent evaluation indicates that each EFEEx generates approximately £1.8 million spend on showcasing artists in the two years following the event. EFEEx delegates are approximately 70% UK and 30% international delegates. On average, 60% of delegates are programmers in one way or another, 25% agents and managers, the remainder are comprised of labels, sync, distributors, press and broadcast media, funders and other industry professionals. EFEEx tracks the artist bookings made by each delegate and does not issue return invitations to delegates who do not do business whilst in Manchester.

How should you prepare for a showcase?

If you have an agent or manager, first and foremost it is essential that they attend the entire showcase event as a delegate. Nothing is more effective at capitalising on opportunities from a showcase than having a visible, accessible cheerleader for you with the other delegates.

A good agent or manager in attendance at a showcase event spends their time before your performance telling delegates they should go and see you perform, ensuring that the right people are in the room and that there is a buzz around you. After you have performed, they should actively engage with those delegates, having conversations with as many people as possible and trying to work out who is interested, if possible getting commitments on bookings whilst at the event.

If you do not have an agent or manager, it is a good idea to see if you can find someone to attend the showcase to represent you to the delegates. This could be a friend, or it could be someone in the industry who you know well who can temporarily act as your conduit at the event, even if they are attending the showcase for another reason.

If you are unable to have a person at the showcase event acting on your behalf, it is important to find out other ways that you can engage with the event. Can you have access to a delegates list? Is there a forum or portal where your music can be shared? Can you engage with their social media outlets? Can artists attend any part of the event to network? Is there a chance to have a trade stand or buy advertising? If a trade stand costs you £200, but you get three gigs from it paying £150 each, this investment is worth the while.

Look at your full online presence. Is your social media and website up to date? Test all of your links and ensure that the music and live footage you want delegates to see is what comes up first when searching for you. Strong and active online presence indicates a motivated performer who is actively engaging with their fan base.

However, there are some things that you should probably avoid:

Don't do a bcc blanket email to all delegates inviting them to your showcase performance. In almost all cases, these are ignored and some delegates actively find them annoying. That said, a direct and targeted email at individual delegates, letting them know why you are specifically approaching them, and asking them to see your performance and/or meet for a conversation often goes down extremely well. If an artist is motivated and organised in advance of a showcase and makes a direct approach to a relevant delegate, this is often looked upon favourably as all delegates prefer to give opportunities to those artists they feel they can work with. Being proactive in the right way at this stage can yield very strong results, in part because delegates are rooting for artists to do well.

Consider whether having flyers printed for your showcase is an effective way of reaching delegates. At many showcase events, every available surface is littered with flyers and posters for a showcase performance. Very often yours can be lost amongst the others and so not noticed by many delegates. If you do want to invest in something for the delegates to have and keep, think of something different or interesting, or offer something such as a QR code with a download sample link, or a useful/fun object like a USB, sweets or booze including this QR code link to your website. However, the most important thing to recognise is that there is no substitute for investing your time in making personal approaches to selected delegates.

How should you deliver a showcase performance?

Of course, there is no right or wrong answer to this question, but there are some tips and tricks which can help maximise the opportunities once you have managed to persuade the delegates into your showcase performance.

Public showcases

Remember that these are gigs and delegates will want to see you how you engage with an audience. Often delegates will only pop in for short periods of time and will not see the whole set. This means that your usual set list which builds through periods of light and shade may not be appropriate in this scenario. If you have a 20 minute section of your 45 minute set which is a bit more subtle and quieter, before building to a final 10 minutes or raucous crescendo, one delegate may get a very different impression of you to another. Whilst you should not compromise your artistic integrity, you may want to consider whether any 15 minute window of your set when seen in isolation conveys yourself appropriately as a performer and potentially adjust the set accordingly.

Similarly, many delegates will run in from one showcase performance to the next and occasionally might not know who they are watching perform! Thinking about how to ensure they know who they are watching can be helpful later on when following up. There are a number of ways how to do this, including sympathetic onstage branding, such as a branded cover for a kick drum. Alternatively, simply saying your name regularly throughout the set will avoid any confusion from delegates, although this is best considered beforehand to avoid sounding odd to the public.

Industry showcases

These performances are very different to any other type of gig and can often feel quite intimidating, especially as some delegate crowds are not necessarily as forthcoming as a standard gig audience. Preparation is the key for these showcases. Plan your set and any patter in advance, and run it to check timing. Often it can be a good idea to start with your best song or tune, rather than building to it at the end. Starting with your strongest piece captures delegate attention immediately and helps them decide quickly whether your performance is appropriate for their audiences. Likewise, plan what you are looking for and say it, especially if you don't have any other representation in the room. 'Hi, I'm xxx and I am looking for a UK booking agent' or 'Hi, I'm xxx and I'm interested in speaking to labels/European festivals/folk clubs.' If you do have representation in the room, make them known to the delegates. 'Hi, I'm xxx and if you enjoyed my set please speak to xxx at the back of the room [get them to stand up and wave].' In addition, if you have different variations of line-up then do let delegates know. You may be playing today with a trio but can tour solo, duo or with a full band line-up. It's a good idea to let delegates know about this versatility this either in your set or via your representative at the event.

Similarly, showcases are often extremely tightly scheduled. Make sure you know how long you have to get on stage and set up, often the time can be very limited. Equally, don't overrun. Being timely with your set is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, if you overrun you could eat into the set length of the next artist, limiting their opportunity to perform for the delegates. Secondly, many of the delegates are event organisers and so are keen to see that a showcasing artist can work to time. Whilst artistic appropriateness is the driving

factor in decisions around making a booking, often the little things like sticking to timings can be a deciding factor for a booker when choosing between a few different artists.

How should you follow up on a showcase performance?

Firstly, it's important to note that not every showcase yields bookings immediately so do not be disappointed if you don't receive a flurry of gig offers in the week following the event. These things can take time to come together, many delegates might not be in their booking window at that point and you might get the call 6 months or even a year or more after the event.

For some artists, you might not feel you got any direct opportunities from a showcase. However what is important is that many industry professionals look at showcasing line-ups regularly for ideas about who is on the up. Simply having your name on the bill will raise your profile amongst the industry and it may take a couple of showcase performances before anything comes directly from it.

You should approach your showcase from the point of view that if opportunities come, then great news. But your presence at the event will have ensured that many industry professionals have heard your name and quite possibly heard your music for the first time. You might then be at another showcase and see a familiar delegate name on the list, and ask if they didn't see you at Showcase1, perhaps they could come and see you at Showcase2?

Immediately following your set, get into the audience and speak to delegates. This can be daunting at first but is something that gets easier with time. Have some CDs or music download cards with you and for every one you hand out, make sure you get a business card in return!

Following the showcase event, the same rules apply as for the preparation before the showcase. Send direct targeted emails to selected delegates. It helps if you have spoken to them at the showcase. 'Hi [festival booker], thanks for coming to see my showcase. I'm touring over your festival period and would love to perform at your event.' Or simply 'Hi [label/manager/agent], have you had chance to listen to the CD I gave you? I'd be really interested in having a follow up conversation with you about your thoughts on it and if there are any opportunities to work together.' Often delegates who have attended a showcase will return to a mountain of emails and so may not respond to your first correspondence. If you have sent a targeted email to a specific delegate you have met, it is acceptable to follow up on an unanswered email after a few weeks or a month. If you still don't get any follow up from there, then depending on how friendly or positive your conversation with the delegate went you could try a third email, but certainly no more after that – but remain friendly and polite, even if you feel that their lack of response to your emails is rude or unfair. Even at this point, some delegates are notoriously slow at responding to emails from artists, but that does not necessarily mean they are not considering you for a booking.

Remember though, not every artist is right for every booker. Sometimes you just might not be someone's cup of tea. Try not to take this personally, just keep hunting for that booker who does like what you do. And if someone doesn't return your email or get back to you to say they can't book you, be aware that most festivals in particular can receive hundreds of artist approaches a week. This is why showcase opportunities are so valuable and give you a chance to stand out from the crowd.

Most of all, enjoy the opportunity, put in the hard work and keep pressing on.