

A black and white photograph of a man with short dark hair, smiling and looking down at an acoustic guitar he is playing. He is wearing a dark jacket. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting like a street or park.

# HOW TO MAKE YOUR AIRPORT A HUB ... FOR **LIVE MUSIC!**



# Contents

---

**3**

Executive Summary

**4**

A New Model for Live Music at Airports

**5**

The Benefits of Live Performance

**6**

Learnings and Recommendations

**9**

Historic Barriers

**10**

The Stagehand Solution

**11**

Summary

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY




Airports have long posed a unique customer experience challenge. On any given day, you may stand in long lines, require extra security screening, need to navigate crowds, and deal with stress and uncertainty. On a bad day, you could be faced with delays, cancellations, and construction.

It is no wonder that airports are looking for creative solutions to ease the stress and bring a little more humanity into the overall experience of travelling. Live music is a great way alleviate stress and inject local flavour and culture, but for practical reasons, to date, most airports have had to reserve live performances for special occasions.

Stagehand is an innovative technology company that makes it easy for nontraditional music venues like airports, office towers and malls to improve customer experience by working with local artists to add community, culture and entertainment. This paper focuses on how Stagehand has been used at large Canadian airports to make live performance an integral part of the daily airport experience. Stagehand has worked with airports whose goal is to revitalize an existing program and those that are starting from scratch. As of the writing of this paper Stagehand airports are averaging over 10 hours of live music per day and each forecasting over 1,500 live performances in the first year. All of this has been achieved with no additional airport staff or budget and overwhelmingly positive feedback from passengers, staff and musicians. It is also worth noting that while every city hosts an abundance of cultural talent, the cities in which Stagehand is currently operating are not known as destination “Music Cities”.

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate with a little innovation and the use of modern technology every airport has the opportunity to become a valuable cultural hub.

## *In this paper we examine:*

-  Details of a new business model for live music
-  Benefits of hosting a regular music program
-  Learnings and recommendations

# A NEW MODEL FOR LIVE MUSIC AT AIRPORTS

## THE RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES!

Over **1,700**

performances by local artists in less than 8 months of with a forecast of **3,000**

**Stagehand managed performances** in the first year.

**60**

partner artists and more being added.

## MULTIPLE STAGES

including experiments with unconventional places.

## NO ADDITIONAL

airport staff was required.

## OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE FEEDBACK

has been received from travellers, musicians and airport staff/executives.

Stagehand began operations in the traditional grassroots music scene with a vision to help existing venues and new entrants like microbreweries and coffee shops more easily work with the local music community to host more live events. The goal was to allow these new types of venues to attract a larger and more diverse crowd while providing new opportunities for artists. More recently Stagehand has found success in working with larger and more corporate venues like airports and downtown organizations who deal with large crowds daily and want to improve overall customer experience. Stagehand provides a modern web platform that bridges the gap between large corporate organizations that need structure and process and the more spontaneous and unstructured world of the arts.

In early 2019, Stagehand began working with two large Canadian airports, one of whom had an existing music program the other had only previously hosted music on special occasions. Both airports wanted to grow their programs to make them a more integral part of daily operations. Stagehand worked closely with the airports to understand and simplify processes and develop the technology to standardize and automate tasks that would make it practical to work with the local music community.

### *Standardized artist intake*

In partnership, Stagehand and the airports issued a call for artists, which attracted hundreds of applicants. The details of the programs were made clear to artists who are required to create a standardized profile as part of the application process. Stagehand enables stakeholder committees at the venue to review and collaboratively make decisions regarding suitable artists. One of the airports selected musicians purely based on the information provided in the Stagehand profile, another held in terminal auditions to ensure compatibility for both artists and the airport. One of the facilitators of the programs describes how she was awestruck by the quality of the musicians that were auditioning: "When I first saw some of them perform, my jaw dropped and that is when I knew we had something really special." Standardizing a collaborative intake process makes it easy to involve multiple stakeholders and saves time in selecting appropriate talent.

### *Automated Scheduling*

Once a list of partner artists is chosen, the artists are given exclusive access to a private schedule and empowered to book their own performances based on business rules provided by the airport. Each performance slot is associated with useful information like business terms, expected traffic, restrictions, and payment conditions. Availability is managed dynamically, so once a performance spot is claimed by an artist, it is removed from the schedule. The airport has final say on confirming performances and if a



# THE BENEFITS OF LIVE PERFORMANCE

performance is declined by the airport or cancelled by the artist it is automatically added back to the calendar for another artist to claim. The Music Programs have become so popular with artists that there is a monthly rush on performance spots when bookings are opened. Typically, 100+ performance slots will be claimed within minutes of initial availability. Automated scheduling of performances has saved countless hours of back and forth communication between the airport and their partner artists.

## *Automated Payments*

Payments to artists have been automated and simplified via Stagehand for the benefit of both the artist and the airport. After a performance, the artist confirms in Stagehand that they performed the selected spot, the airport is notified, and payment can be triggered with the click of a button. While solicitation by the artists is not permitted, artists are allowed to accept tips and display merchandise for sale. It should be noted that this has become a meaningful component of the artists' compensation and also a way for the customers to further connect with the artist. The automation of artist payments has saved time by eliminating invoices, cheques, and petty cash in addition to the process of physically getting payment to the artists. All transactions are precisely tracked in a way that provides the required information to accounting.



**I have had people tell me that when you spend a whole day waiting in line and travelling it can be dehumanizing and when you see someone who looks you in the eye while playing music you feel human again.**

## *Iterate and grow*

With so many performances under their belts both airports continue to grow the program and are experimenting with different and sometimes high-friction locations to learn more about how music improves travellers' experience. Live music has truly become as integrated into the airport experience as check-in, baggage, and security!

Every airport will have different motivations for customer experience programs, one VP of Marketing and Customer experience describes it as follows: "The Airport is like the hotel lobby for the city, it is the first thing that you see when you arrive and the last thing you see when you leave. Those are things people remember so it is important to leave a good impression." Too often airports can be remembered for the wrong reasons—delays, cancellations, lost luggage—and it is easy to dwell on that if not given an alternate narrative.

People don't go out and see live music as much as they once did. Nights out have been replaced by nights in on the couch, so live music is often a pleasant and unexpected treat for stressed-out travellers. One musician who is a regular performer at the airport said it this way, "I have had people tell me that when you spend a whole day waiting in line and travelling it can be dehumanizing and when you see someone who looks you in the eye while playing music you feel human again."

Then there are the travellers who are prone to anxiety when they travel. One passenger who had not flown in 30 years described how she felt her anxiety level rising as she cleared security, but fortunately one of the regular artists was performing nearby and the traveller sought her out and sat down close by. She was able to focus on the music, relax, and avoid a panic attack.

Customer experience (CX) has become the new battleground for businesses that are competing for customer loyalty. Gartner states that by 2019, 82% of marketers expect to be competing mostly or completely based on CX. A leading expert on Customer Experience points out that in today's increasingly competitive world, CX is the one thing that can't be easily copied. "Product and processes can be copied but CX creates an emotional connection with your customer that is very difficult to copy."

# Learnings and Recommendations



The journey from hosting music on special occasions to thousands of live performances is bound to produce some learning opportunities. Here are some of the key lessons and recommendations from Stagehand's experience.

## 01 1. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED BY LIVE MUSIC.

Most of the airport staff that we spoke to admit that they didn't expect the public or the musicians to be as enthusiastic about the program as they have proven to be. Emails and messages are received on a regular basis from passengers that describe the program as calming, uplifting, memorable, and unexpected. It's not uncommon to see couples stopping to dance, children swaying their hips, the elderly lingering to listen, and many people singing along! Artists often receive feedback directly from passengers about how the music has completely changed their mood, prevented a panic attack, reminded them of a loved one, or even resulted in tears in a moment of genuine human connection. Live music has become more than just aesthetics; it is a unique and valuable tool that the airport can use to run their business and proactively manage passenger attention toward positive experiences. As to the ever-present goal for airports to increase their non-aeronautical revenue, that research is still to be done but one airport executive put it this way: "If we can put passengers in a good state of mind in front of our retail offerings, then yes we will make more money, but it's not single minded about money, we do things because they are the right thing to do."

## 02 2. DON'T OVERTHINK IT: START QUICKLY AND EVOLVE

As with any new initiative, it is tempting to obsess about the details. The airport that was just launching their program started small with one stage, a sound system, and a handful of musicians. Over time, they added signage, accessories, additional shifts, and new stages. Start with a pilot project, learn what works for your airport, but don't assume you know. Expect to get feedback from musicians, the public, and staff; listen closely and adapt. In eight short months, the Stagehand airports have learned from over 1,700 performances—that kind of experience provides credibility that goes far beyond even the most elaborate plans. They now have first-hand knowledge to make plans for renovations, more elaborate staging, sound engineering, corporate sponsorship, and more. Much of the learning was unexpected—so don't overthink it, start small, plan to learn, and adapt as you grow.



# 03

## 3. DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS WITH ARTISTS

Take the time to carefully evaluate your musicians and plan to work with them for some period of time. The audience at the airport changes every minute so there is not the same requirement to constantly vary the entertainment. What's more artists will start to learn the format, hone their skills and continue to improve at serving your customers. Take the time to indoctrinate artists into the program, make them feel part of the team. Best practices should be shared between musicians. Playing at an airport will likely be a new experience for musicians—they may understand how to work a traditional stage, but don't assume they know what it takes to be successful in the airport. Artists have a valuable role to play in customer experience, treat them like any other member of the team, make sure they understand their role and know how to be successful.

# 04

## 4. MAKE THE PERFORMANCE SPACE LOOK INTENTIONAL

You don't need a big elaborate stage (or any stage, for that matter) but a few professional touches go a long way. A talented performer may be an unexpected sight at the airport, so you want to make sure that the musician feels at home and that staff and travellers know that they are a valued and supported member of the airport team. Some easy ways to do this include:

### A. Provide a professional sound system.

A quality sound system can be purchased or rented for very little money. For consistency we recommend that you provide the sound system rather than having the artist provide their own.

### B. Provide signage.

Advertise the program and highlight your support for local artists.

### C. Manage the sound.

Be mindful of areas like customer service desks and security that operate close by. Simple and inexpensive sound management solutions can shape and direct sound away from areas that could prove problematic.



# 05

## 5. CREATE A PROCESS AND REMOVE POINTS OF FRICTION

When your goal is to make live performance a regular part of day-to-day operations, a smooth and repeatable process is important. Think about a musician's "journey" through the airport and make it as smooth as possible: Provide parking, a plug-and-play sound system, clear directions regarding security, and make the ongoing process of bookings, changes, and payments as consistent as possible. When done right, this program will become an important part of your partner musician's daily life, so be fair to them by being as predictable as possible.

# Learnings and Recommendations



## 06 6. LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

Stagehand provides a purpose-built solution for airports and other large non-traditional music venues. Key features of the product reduce workload by alleviating tedious and repetitive administrative tasks. Standardizing musician profiles makes it easy to spot and evaluate appropriate performers. Online contracts simplify legalities and communication. Empowering musicians with good information and allowing them to make their own bookings avoids countless back and forth communication. Automating payments saves time by eliminating invoices, cheques, and cash. These efficiencies have meant that minimal daily effort is required to manage the ongoing tasks associated with a very active program, no additional staff has been required despite over 1,700 performances in less than 8 months.

## 07 7. ALLOW THE ARTISTS TO ACCEPT TIPS

Tips have been shown to incent the right behaviour. Active solicitation should not be allowed, but tips provide additional compensation for artists and they provide a way for travellers to engage. Smart musicians understand the magic of creating emotional connections with passengers and they will work hard to achieve it. Experienced artists embrace the personal development provided by working in this type of a venue, as described by one artist who said, "I know as people are walking by that I only have a few seconds to make a connection." Emotional connections lead to improved customer experience, which also often leads to a tip. It is a virtuous cycle, and we recommend that you allow it to happen.

“““

**I know as people are walking by that I only have a few seconds to make a connection.**





# HISTORIC BARRIERS

If there are so many benefits to running a music program at this scale it is reasonable to ask, why aren't more businesses doing it? There are many barriers to effectively running a live music program, but it comes down to expertise, time and budget.



## EXPERTISE

Airport professionals are not music bookers. The music industry can be proprietary and difficult for anyone who is not an insider to navigate.



## TIME

Coordinating multiple performances per day is a time-consuming process, including bookings, emails, changes, cancellations, payments, and more. Most airports simply don't have the luxury of having an employee dedicate the amount of time that is required to make this work in a professional way.



## BUDGET

Running an airport is an expensive business and there are many demands on budget that are not optional. Customer experience programs are less urgent than a broken baggage belt, so budgets can be tight.

Stagehand eliminates these barriers by standardizing processes and efficiently using technology.



# THE STAGEHAND SOLUTION

Stagehand is an innovative technology company that helps non-traditional music venues like airports, downtown organizations, and malls improve their customer experience by making it easy to work with local artists to add community, culture, and entertainment to daily operations.

## How Stagehand works:



### **STAGEHAND STANDARDIZES THE INTAKE PROCESS FOR ARTISTS.**

Artists create profiles that include genre, audio, video, experience, photos, and more. A group or committee can review and collaborate on decision-making regarding incoming profiles.



### **MANAGE THE ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS.**

The devil is in the details—managing even a modest number of performances is a lot of work, and making live performance an integral part of day-to-day operations can be overwhelming. Stagehand automates manual and time-consuming parts of the process while allowing a program owner to maintain oversight.



#### **CONTRACTS.**

Simplify communication and legal requirements by having artists agree online to terms regarding performances.



#### **SCHEDULING.**

The venue publishes a performance schedule with important information like terms, restrictions, traffic, and payment. Artists book their own performances based on business rules provided by the venue and the schedule is managed dynamically to avoid double-booking. The venue has final say on all claimed bookings and if they or the artist cancels a booking, it is put back on the schedule so that other artists can book it.



#### **PROMOTION.**

Stagehand provides integration with the airport's website and can automatically display all confirmed bookings so that the public can see who is playing at any given time and stage.



#### **PAYMENT.**

Payments are automated through a secure payment platform. No more invoices, cheques, petty cash, or tracking down artists to make payment.



### **GATHER AND DISTRIBUTE VALUABLE INFORMATION.**

All information is captured in a queryable database to provide information required to interested parties like security, marketing, communications, accounting, and more.



# Summary

The airport has an opportunity to play a valuable cultural role in the community and it can do it while improving customer experience and positively impacting the business. Every city is home to an inexhaustible supply of talented artists, but this valuable inventory of skills has been inaccessible because of barriers like expertise, time, and budget. Stagehand has changed the rules of the game and that has proven to be a win for travellers, airports, and artists! Contact [info@stagehand.app](mailto:info@stagehand.app) to schedule a free introductory call.

