MODERN TOOLS FOR PLACEMAKING

STAGEHAND

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Every place has a personality which is made up of its physical attributes, usage, collective history and stories. The personality will evolve based on what happens in that place on a daily basis and, if left to chance, it could evolve in undesirable or problematic ways. This is why it is important to be intentional about placemaking. Local artists, musicians and entertainers provide a valuable and inexhaustible resource for placemaking but working with artists presents many logistical challenges. Where to find them and how to manage, schedule, promote and pay artists can be a huge administrative burden. Stagehand is a purpose-built technology platform that has been developed as a tool for placemakers, it uses technology to alleviate the tedious but important details of managing performances. Stagehand allows placemakers to spend more time on high value activities rather than low value administrative tasks.

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We have gotten so much great feedback from the merchants.

THE CALGARY DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION

STEPHEN AVENUE MALL
A CASE STUDY

The Calgary Downtown Association (CDA) manages Stephen Avenue which is the busiest walking mall in Calgary (40,000+ pedestrians/day). The CDA wanted to revitalize the Avenue and in 2019 they worked with Stagehand to reintroduce street performance in a more strategic and intentional way. Stagehand was used to:

· **Facilitate a call for artists** which quickly resulted in over 100 applications from talented musicians and performers.

· **Enable collaboration between multiple stakeholders** to view, comment & select artists to perform on Stephen Avenue. Stakeholders included, businesses on Stephen Avenue, Tourism Calgary, The City of Calgary, Bylaw services and more.

· **Maintain a list of "partner" artists** who are given special privileges associated with performing on Stephen Avenue.

· **Publish a schedule and guidelines** that enabled partner artists to self-book 3 to 6 busking pitches at various times during the day. The CDA retained final approval for all bookings to ensure diversity of entertainment and monitor adherence to guidelines. If a booking is declined or cancelled the time slot is automatically added back to the schedule for other artists to book. Empowering artists to make their own bookings within a set of guidelines saved countless administrative hours associated with managing a schedule.

· **Pay honorariums.** Because of issues that had previously been experienced on Stephen Avenue, the CDA found that it was beneficial to provide incentives to encourage a diverse group of artists with varying levels of experience to perform. Stagehand simplifies the process of paying artists by verifying that a performance took place and then enabling online payment with a single click.

· **Monthly reporting.** Valuable data about performing artists, times, frequency, payments and more is collected and .distributed, as appropriate to stakeholders such as accounting, adjacent businesses, tourism, security, marketing and others.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Calgary Downtown Associations work on Stephen Avenue was considered a great success, especially given that it was accomplished with very limited time and budget. Stakeholders on Stephen Avenue appreciated being included in the planning process. Talented performers were reintroduced in an orderly fashion, adjacent businesses appreciated the increased level of talent, predictability and reduced conflict and the public was treated to a rich cultural experience. Many lessons were also learned that will be built upon in future years. Here are some key learnings:

Start small, experiment, learn and adapt.
Any initiative needs to start somewhere but you should plan for the inevitability that some of your assumptions will be wrong. Busking pitch locations that seem perfect might turn out to be problematic. Performers that you think would be ideal will not work out and others will surprise you. Performance times that seem intuitive will need to be tweaked. It is tempting to obsess over the details of an exciting new program. We recommend that you start small and expect to get feedback from all stakeholders, learn from it, adapt and move forward. Challenge yourself to run multiple experiments so you can learn as much as possible as quickly as possible.

Involve Stakeholders.
Every public place will have multiple stakeholders who legitimately have a say regarding how a place will be used. City adminstration, the ward, the downtown business association, performers, bylaw officers, tourism, arts organizations and more. Invite them all to participate in early planning, artist selection, pitch locations and times. Sometimes your biggest critics may become your biggest advocates when given an opportunity and a voice in the process.

Be patient.
Rome wasn't built in a day and you should not expect that your program will immediately be embraced by all. A place may have organically developed personality traits that are not ideal, and it will take time to change public perception and behaviour. You should be prepared to provide incentives to the types of artists that you want to attract. Compensation for street performance can vary widely based on public perception. If based on past experience the public's natural reaction is to avoid eye contact and walk on by, then you may need to augment your artists earnings to keep them coming back until public behaviour changes.

Think about the artists journey.
What will the artist need to bring, and can they easily carry it all? How will they get there, can they take public transit, or will they need to drive? If they need to drive where will they park? Should they perform in the sun or the shade? Should they be up against a wall or out in the open? How will current inhabitants of the space react? Do they feel safe? Do they feel valued?

Make performance spaces look and feel intentional.
It is important to legitimize a public performance space so that the public and authorities can easily recognize your valuable partner artists. You don't need to spend a lot of money or provide a formal stage; intentionality can be achieved via signage and street decals and also through communication via social media and by communicating through traditional media channels.

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> **I like the structure; it makes it more predictable for me... I like the fact that you can book your performances online.**
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> SKIP DRAKE, MUSICIAN

Use technology to automate repetitive tasks and to empower trusted partners.
Stagehand provides a purpose-built solution for placemakers. Key features of the product are designed and proven to reduce workload by alleviating tedious and repetitive administrative tasks.

· Standardized musician profiles make it easy to view, evaluate & select 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 street performance program.

THE STAGEHAND SOLUTION

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

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.

COLLABORATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS.
Stagehand makes it easy for multiple stakeholders to view, comment and vote on incoming artists.

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 venues website and can automatically display all confirmed bookings so that the public can see who is playing at any given time and location.

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.