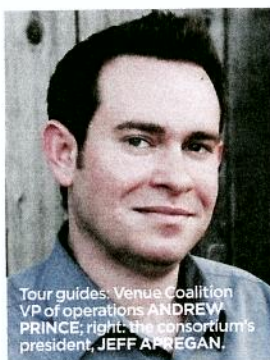


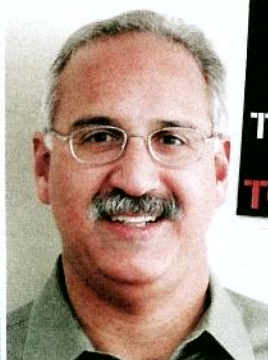
SMALLER IS BEAUTIFUL

The Venue Coalition Promotes Ticket-Selling Power Of Buildings Outside The Largest Markets

BY MITCHELL PETERS



Tour guides: Venue Coalition VP of operations **ANDREW PRINCE**, right; the consortium's president, **JEFF APREGAN**.



At a time when many touring acts want to book dates in smaller and midsize markets to earn additional revenue, the Venue Coalition has played a key role in helping its members avoid dark nights since launching in 2006.

"The one common need that everyone has is that everyone wants incremental content; everyone wants shows," says veteran promoter Jeff Apregan, president of Apregan Group and co-founder/president of the Venue Coalition.

The coalition is a consortium of more than 50 facilities—15 of which have arena-theater configurations—in the United States and Canada. Based in Westlake Village, Calif., and headed by Apregan and Andrew Prince, its VP of operations, the coalition's primary goal is to keep its venues on the radar of music agents and concert promoters for upcoming tours. To accomplish this, the organization keeps in daily contact with the live entertainment business' key players to identify potential new bookings for its members. It also serves as a one-stop shop of venue information for agents and promoters seeking potential markets through which to route concerts.

"These guys have their finger on pretty much everything that's out there," says Darren Davis, executive director of the 8,000-capacity Orleans Arena in Las Vegas, which has been a coalition member since 2008. "Every agent and every agency knows Andrew Prince, because Andrew beats the phones every day. And Jeff has a great history in the touring business with his dates with Neil Diamond and all the management relationships he has."

Newer building members have also seen the benefits of aligning with the organization.

"Jeff and Andrew have relationships that they're

able to leverage and get our name in front of folks. They make recommendations as to whether our market is appropriate and if we're the right venue," says Lisa Cochran, executive director at the 13,000-seat Taco Bell Arena at Boise State University in Idaho, which joined the coalition last fall. "They seem to be very well-respected by promoters and agents for making good recommendations and not throwing names out at them, as far as venues go."

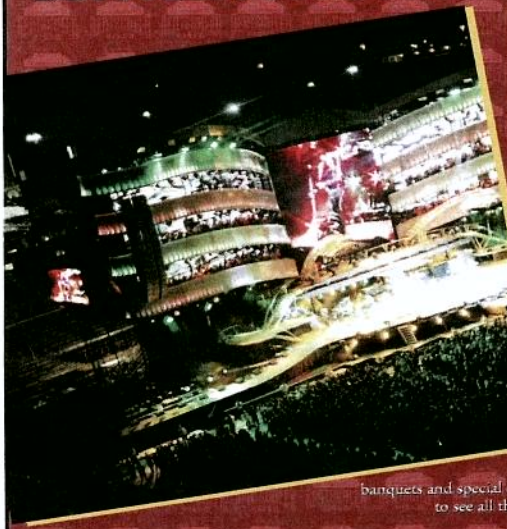
This year, the coalition has helped many of its buildings land bookings by Star Wars: In Concert, comedian Jeff Dunham, the Wiggles, Jason Aldean, Riverdance, the Rock & Worship Roadshow, Brad Paisley and ZZ Top, among many others.


"Every year that goes by we're booking more and more," Prince says. "We've been staying around that [50-member] mark, so I think we've done a good job of helping to identify the right situation for promoters and agents to play our markets in that right situation."

One of those right situations came earlier this year when the coalition helped the Orleans Arena secure two dates in May for Star Wars: In Concert, "one of the most sought-after big tour shows in a long, long time," according to Davis, who says the two shows drew more than 8,000 people combined. Star Wars: In Concert was produced by San Francisco-based promoter Another Planet and booked by William Morris Endeavor Entertainment contemporary **continued on >>p32**

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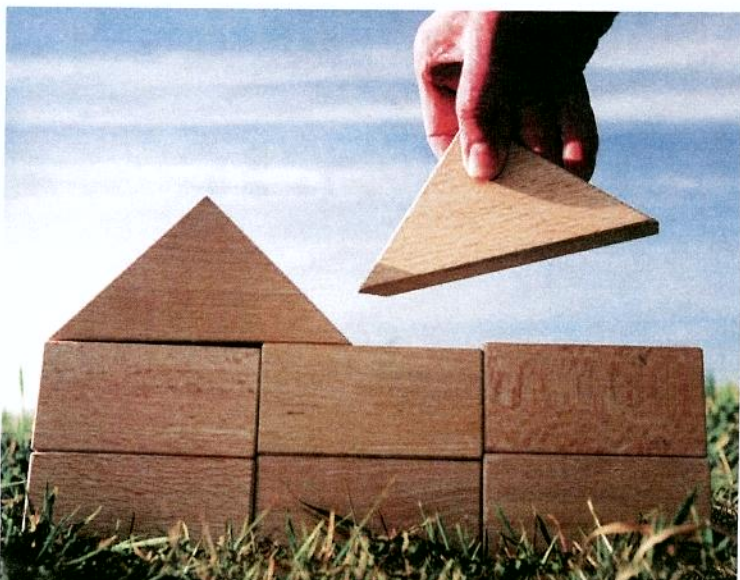


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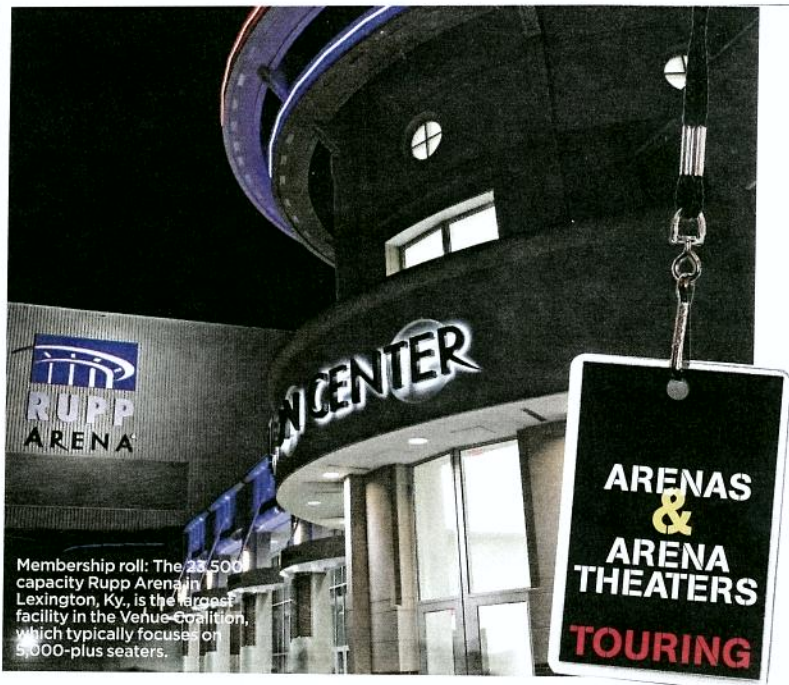
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Membership roll: The 23,500 capacity Rupp Arena in Lexington, Ky., is the largest facility in the Venue Coalition, which typically focuses on 5,000-plus seaters.

from >>p30 music head Marc Geiger.

"When a show comes to Vegas it's not like most cities; [promoters/agents] have four or five venues they can choose to go to," Davis says. "These guys at Venue Coalition had already established a great rapport and relationship with Another Planet and William Morris. They had that show in some of their other buildings and were able to steer that show to our facility."

Taco Bell Arena joined the coalition because "we've got two other competing venues in Boise and felt like we needed some guidance and assistance in setting ourselves apart and getting some shows booked," Cochran says. "It's kind of hard when you're an independent building in comparison to our competitors in SMG. They've got booking representatives at the corporate level and we needed to combat that."

So far, the venue's membership fee has paid off. In March, the coalition helped Taco Bell Arena land an Outback Concerts-promoted concert by Aldean. Through that show, the building was able to forge relationships with promoters at Outback and the artist's agent at Buddy Lee Attractions, Cochran says. The coalition also assisted with a Toby Keith show in July that helped the arena build a new connection with Live Nation's Nashville office, she adds.

In many cases, an agent who's looking to route a tour for an artist will contact Prince for assistance with which venues to book. Most recently, Creative Artists Agency notified him that next year, Lady Antebellum wants to play small to midsize markets.

"The agent came to me and said, 'Andrew, I'd love to see an analysis of your arenas, the ones you feel will sell out 7,000 seats,'" Prince recalls. From there, he identified 30 of the organization's members that fit the specified seating capacity and researched which buildings best fit that request. "We went to all 30 of those and asked them to put together a market analysis, which included all the past country and pop shows, because Lady A is a crossover artist between pop and country, as far as radio format goes. So we had them put together their box-office history and then get a quote from [a couple of] radio stations on why

they think it would do well.

"We also provided other market research that will help them understand the market better," Prince continues. "On top of that, we provided a venue picture based on the configuration they requested and also a diagram that included scaling. So it had suggested ticket prices based on what the venue felt was right for the market and it included the capacity and growth potential."

When all of the data was compiled, Prince gave the information to the agent. "We set it up in a way where when we handed it off to the agent, he could then meet with the manager and the act and look at each of these markets and say, 'Yeah, that's one I want to play,' or not," Prince says.

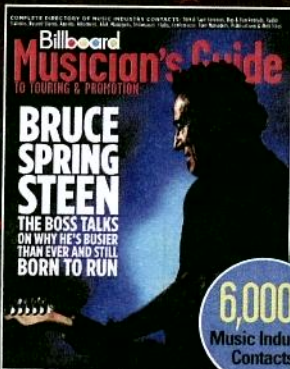
AN AGENT LOOKING TO ROUTE A TOUR WILL OFTEN CONTACT THE VENUE COALITION FOR HELP.

There isn't a strict capacity minimum for coalition members, though the organization typically focuses on venues with 5,000-plus seats. Current members range from the Crystal Centre in Grande Prairie, Alberta, with a capacity of 4,684, to the 23,500-seat Rupp Arena in Lexington, Ky.

But the coalition doesn't plan to rapidly expand beyond its approximately 50 members. "We don't want to do anything that's going to jeopardize the level of service that we offer to our members," Apregan says. "We will grow cautiously but we're not out to try and sign up 100 buildings."

Moving forward, the organization is working on bookings for Dunham, the Rock & Worship Roadshow, Lady Antebellum, Trans-Siberian Orchestra, Sugarland, Dierks Bentley, Miranda Lambert, the Bill Gaither Homecoming Tour and others. And in the near future, the coalition plans to develop its own content to book into buildings, according to Prince.

"It would be a great thing if we could help to produce something, whether it's on the Venue Coalition side or through strategic partnerships, even with venue partnerships, to co-develop something," he says. "I can't talk about anything specific right now, but we have a few things up our sleeve that we're thinking about developing."



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