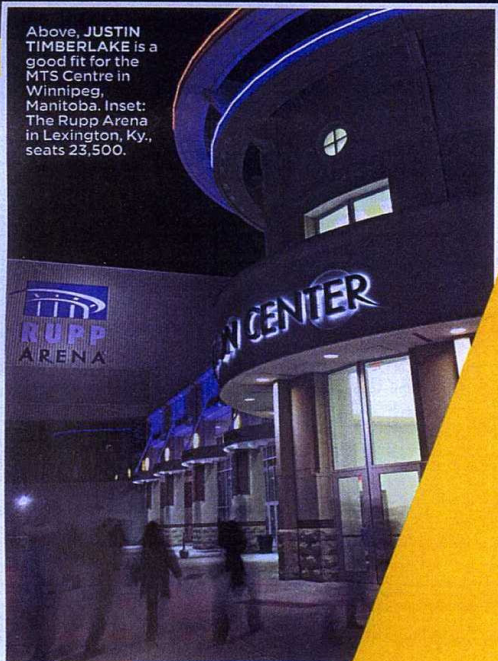


VENUE COALITION'S HELPING HAND

Smaller-Market Venues Join Forces To Fill Calendars

Above, JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE is a good fit for the MTS Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Inset: The Rupp Arena in Lexington, Ky., seats 23,500.



For arenas not located in one of the 40-50 major North American markets, attracting quality content and avoiding dark nights can be a challenge. ■ Even so, there are plenty of quality arenas in smaller markets that are willing to take a risk on shows and offer marketing assistance. ■ The Venue Coalition, a consortium of 30 arenas in the United States and Canada, strives to keep these venues on the radar of agents and promoters. ■ “Every venue of every size wants the same things: more content and fewer dark nights,” says veteran promoter Jeff Apregan, president of Apregan Group and co-founder of the Venue Coalition. “We’ve seen people try to get a group of small or midsized market arenas together, and it never got traction. So we really felt there was a need for these venues to have some representation to try and help them book some incremental events.”

The coalition began in 2005 as the brainchild of Apregan, his partner Gilles Paquin and Kevin Donnelly, VP of the MTS Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. “Really it was just a conversation about how there was a need to try and help find content to play some of these smaller markets that don’t always get shows,” says Apregan, who also serves in a similar capacity with the Gridiron Stadium Network.

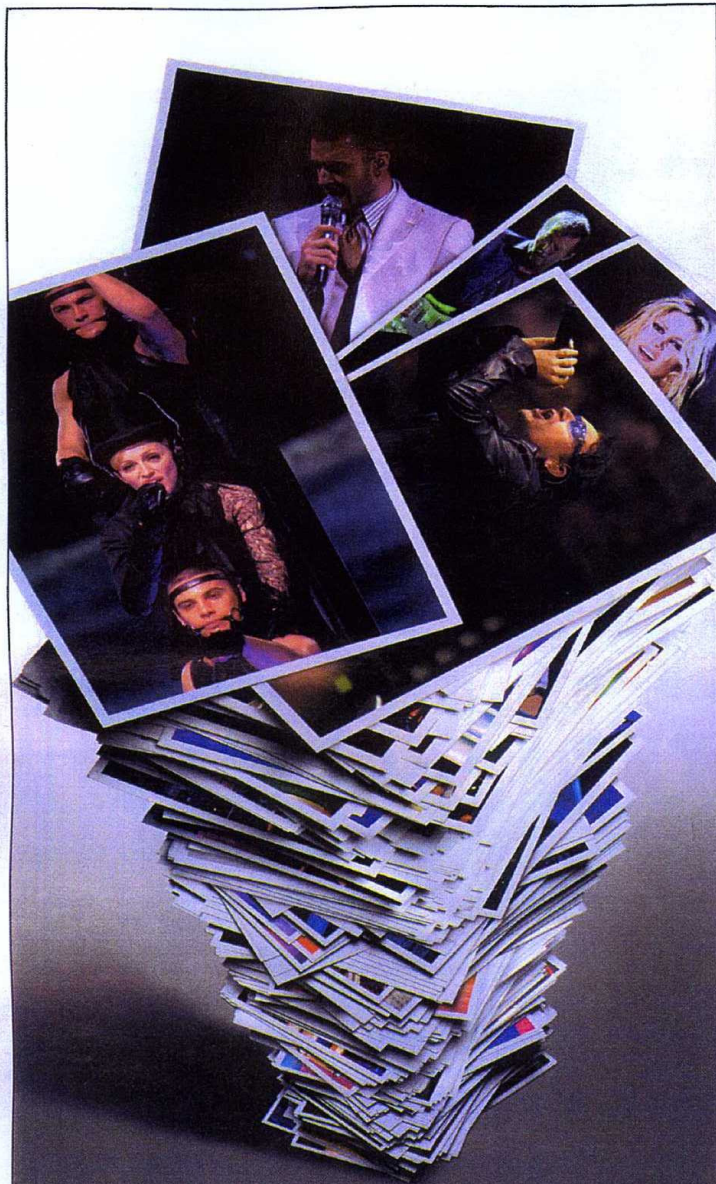
Andrew Prince is VP of operations for the Venue Coalition. He says venue members are not required

to take a financial risk on shows, but that helps.

“Really, the main requirement is an interest in sharing information and working with peers to collectively identify shows that are out there, to give them the best possible chance at securing content,” he says.

“We have venues that have the latitude to take on risks and produce shows, **continued on >>p46**





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JEFF APREGAN of the Apregan Group is a co-founder of the Venue Coalition.

from >>p44 and we have venues that aren't able to do that but are able to either co-promote shows or provide promoters with protection," Apregan says. "The primary function [of the coalition] is to identify opportunities that are either good for everybody or good for certain members. That, of course, is on a case-by-case basis, based on market, routing and different situations."

There is no strict capacity minimum for member buildings, though Apregan says the coalition likes to stay at 5,000 seats and above. Current members range from 4,500 seats at the Greater Vernon (British Columbia) Multiplex to the 23,500-seat Rupp Arena in Lexington, Ky.

Many of these markets are untapped fertile ground. "Some are smaller markets off the radar, and some are markets where certain acts that tour year after year will drive right by four times in a year," Apregan says. "It's really a mix."

All coalition members contribute to a collective marketing fund, or a "cookie jar," as Apregan calls it. Those funds provide for Internet marketing, the Venue Coalition Web site and trade advertising. The coalition is proactive in reaching out to the agent community, Prince says.

"We send [agents] information on a pretty regular basis. We update them and let them know who our newest members are," Prince says. "We sit down with them to identify our markets and our buildings and look at what artists or attractions they have that we can either pitch to the group or take a look at on a market-by-market basis."

Members are interested in everything from one-offs for a single venue to legs of tours to entire tours. "We can fill in gaps on the routing or look at doing a string of dates," Prince says. "The opportunities are endless."

The Venue Coalition successfully worked with promoter Paul Emery to bring Blue Man

Group to coalition buildings in Western Canada, and is now looking at other opportunities for BMG in Eastern Canada and the States.

It can also help an act get another play in during an off date. "Say there's a window of time and we're trying to help the band get from point A to point B, and we have some buildings that may actually be able to promote in-house and do some shows in between markets," Apregan says. "We had a situation where there was a hole in the routing of Pussycat Dolls, who were out supporting Christina Aguilera, and they had an off night going through Canada. We noticed they weren't

going to play the Saskatoon [Saskatchewan] market, so we were able to get them to do a headline show at the [Credit Union Centre in Saskatoon] and it turned out to be a big success on a relatively short promotion."

The MTS Centre is the only building that's a member of both ArenaNetwork and the Venue Coalition. "We have a very friendly working relationship with ArenaNetwork," says Apregan, who adds that it's possible the two consortiums could combine efforts on a given project.

"ArenaNetwork has a lot of venues that are cut down to get in that 6,000- to 7,000-seat range, and that might be an opportunity at some point in time where something could play our smaller arenas full house and maybe play cut-down ArenaNetwork arenas as well," Apregan says.

Denny Gann, executive director of the Tyson Events Center in Sioux City, Iowa, sees many benefits to his Venue Coalition membership, primarily "information, routing an reasonable guarantees for acts," he says. "I also keeps our name in front of select agents and promoters, and provides format for peer input from [similar] buildings in markets."

—Ray Waddell



'THE COALITION IDENTIFIES OPPORTUNITY FOR SOME OR ALL MEMBERS.'

—JEFF APREGAN