

# 33 Gig Promotion Strategies (And Which Ones Actually Work!)

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I recently did the big gig to film my 3rd comedy special. Through the hard work of myself and others we managed to sell out 90 seats at the very cool Art Boutiki in San Jose, CA. I was supposed to cap the sales at 80, but we sold a few more to last minute people who emailed and texted me Saturday morning trying to get in after advance sales were cut off. 😊

Over the course of a month or so, I tried a ton of promotion techniques. And with this post I want to give you a huge checklist of stuff you can do to promote your own gigs. Some of them worked for me, some didn't. We'll get into the hows and whys of each.

## What You'll Learn

- Which of the 33 gig promotion strategies will give you the most bang for your buck (and time)
- A quick and easy way to track exactly where your flyers are doing the most good
- The one phrase that can kill people's desire to help you promote
- An easy way to both promote your show and entertain your online audience at the same time

I can't claim to have invented any of this. Really, who can? Instead, I went to some sources of great information and compiled as many different ways to promote gigs as possible. Here are a few of them:

[ArisTake.com](http://ArisTake.com)

[Bob-Baker.com](http://Bob-Baker.com)

[IndieOnTheMove.com](http://IndieOnTheMove.com)

[UnsignedBandPromotion.com](http://UnsignedBandPromotion.com)

[Hypebot.com](http://Hypebot.com)

Now, if you look over a lot of the tips you find online for promoting your gigs, it's a lot of "start a blog", "team up with other bands", and "build a mailing list". Those types of tips usually fall under the heading of "Things That Should Have Been Done Earlier" and "Well, Duh."

What we're going for here is "Holy crap, we've got a gig in six weeks and we need to fill the room. What's going to work right now?" That's not to say you shouldn't be building an email list and blog and such. You definitely should. I have, and those were valuable assets in promoting this show.

Also, my results here are things that worked for *me* for *this show*. Your results may be different as each

town has strengths as weaknesses as far as promotion. And your art and fanbase may simply be better suited to something that didn't work for me. So while I'm giving my results here, you should try out everything on this list. Keep the winners, ditch the losers.

You might start with the strategies marked "**Use it.**", then move on to "**Unknown**", and finally "**Fail**". You'll find the stuff that works for you and it'll probably be different than what worked for me.

We'll divide this up into Offline and Online promotions. "Offline?," you say? Yes, offline. There are things you can do to maximize your impact by getting off your phone and laptop and talking to people in the real world. Of course, if you're promoting an out of town gig, you may only be able to do online stuff. But if you get into town early or if you're doing a multi-night run, get out and do some of the offline stuff too.

Ok, here we go... Ready?

## Offline Gig Promotion Strategies

### 1. Put a discount code on handbills and color code them.

**Plan:** With your normal handbill/club card type flyers, include a discount code of some sort. 2-for-1 is common. I did \$1 off on mine. Also, color code your stack of flyers by grabbing a stack and running a highlighter pen down the side. Doesn't stick out on a single flyer, but you can easily see where your stack came from.

**Results:** 6 people used the code with two of them being for ticket 4-packs. So these flyers and codes resulted in 12 tickets sold.

**Why:** None of these sales were random off a flyer. Instead they were flyers that people helping me specifically gave to people they know. In this case, my girlfriend's co-workers and my mom's friends. I think most of these people would probably have bought without the discount code too, but it was extra incentive.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** But don't make it a numbers game. Handing out thousands randomly as an unknown quantity won't help much. But having something concrete that was given to them by someone they trust will definitely help. It's better than just an email because they can keep it in view on their desk to remind them to get tickets.

### 2. Contact area hotel concierges and give them tickets/discount flyers

**Plan:** I visited six of the fanciest hotels in San Jose and gave them discount flyers. For three of them, I also gave them a pair of comp tickets to give away to whomever they'd like. I wanted to test just flyers vs. flyers and comps. All they had to do was email me the names of their comps and I'd have them ready at will call.

I was very surprised that only one of the hotels, The Fairmont, had a dedicated concierge. He was super nice and excited that I was giving him something cool to refer his clients to. All the other places had regular desk staff also acting as a concierge. Downsizing, I imagine.

**Results:** A fat zero on this one. None of the concierges contacted me about comps and I didn't see anyone come through the door on one of the flyers.

**Why:** Hotels are obviously a transient clientele. And in the midst of Silicon Valley, there more full during the week with business travelers than on the weekends. So my attempt was at someone staying

there on a weekend, who asked a concierge if there was a comedy show they could go see, and didn't want to go to the Improv (which was closer to those hotels than my venue.)

I think the concierge route would be a better call for a regular monthly or weekly show that you could regularly keep in touch with the staff about. Also, don't forget about the small places. The average Motel 6 in your neighborhood might let you put some flyers on the counter too.

**Verdict:** **Fail.** But could work in other cases.

### 3. Put posters in area business windows and at colleges

**Plan:** A good 'ol standby in the promo world. The venue was nice enough to print big posters for me, no charge. So traipsed around the neighborhood having them put up in store windows.

It was a good looking poster that pushed the unique angle for the event in giant letters "Comedy Special Taping", plus logos of outlets that play my material for some social proof. I knew my name along wouldn't put butts in seats, but I was hoping the other elements might attract a few.

I also went to poster the two large colleges near the venue. And I discovered that colleges don't have the posting opportunities they once did. If you're looking at your monitor right now and say, "Well, duh..", yes, I haven't done that in awhile and I'm old enough to remember layers of flyers on most

surfaces at school.



One school had just one place to put up a poster and you had to give it to the kid at the desk to put it up. Tried twice and I'm pretty sure they never got it up.

The other school had just one general place. But I also visited the bulletin board in the Music and Theater departments and got some up there too.

**Results:** Nothing as far as I can tell.

**Why:** The problem with postering is that most cities have signage laws now and you can't hit the telephone poles like you used to. So it's hard to get that critical mass of visuals that really call attention to the event. Getting the repeat exposure is key to having someone remember the event and actually get tickets to it. Especially if you're not a known quantity. I'm sure the Cirque du Soleil posters next to mine did just fine.

**Verdict:** **Fail.** Except I was postering in the same neighborhood where my girlfriend works. So it gave me an excuse to have lunch with her.

### 4. Use Thumbtack Bugle or a similar poster distribution business.

**Plan:** Here in the San Francisco Bay Area, Thumbtack Bugle has been around forever. You can hire them to do your postering for you. They'll hit tons of places and get more flyers up than you can on your own.

However I didn't use them this time around even though I planned to. Once I'd done a little flyering myself, I didn't have the time frame, budget, or number of flyers I'd need to contract them to do more. I didn't want to spend money on something I figured probably wouldn't bring much of a return.

**Verdict:** Unknown

## 5. Contact charities and offer them free/discounted tickets or space for a philanthropy table at the gig.

**Plan:** Contact local charities that match your views and offer them some free tickets to anyone you'd like to give them to or they can resell them and keep the profit for their charity. You can also offer them a spot to set up a table and collect donations or whatever during your gig.

I contacted five charities in my area with free tickets. Unfortunately, I didn't do the table space part because I ran short on time and would have had to do more back and forth with the venue to get it arranged.

**Results:** Only one of the charities got back to me and said they'd love to have the free tickets. Then they never sent me names.

**Why:** While a nice gesture, I don't think they really cared. Their need to get the word out about their charity. Table space would have helped them do that. The hope would be that they send an email to their local people saying "Hey, we're going to be at Phil's show this Saturday collecting donations! Come join us!" However, it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes they prefer to show up and build their audience off yours without bringing in new people.

Again, I think this type of thing can work better on a regularly repeating show. And charities also work great as a show angle themselves. If you're building the show around the charity you're more like to get some help from them (sometimes) and create some excitement in your own audience for the event.

**Verdict:** **Fail.** But can definitely work if done better than I did it.

## 6. Contact college clubs and offer free/discounted tickets and private promo gigs on a day near the show.

**Plan:** Find student clubs at colleges near the venue and offer them free or discounted tickets. You can also offer to do a promo gig just for them a day or two before the show. I contacted 4 or 5 clubs at Santa Clara University and about a dozen at San Jose State University. You want to contact clubs that in some way jive with who you are as a person and performer. For me that was contacting clubs that dealt in comedy, music, and geek stuff. SJSU actually has a Jedi Club. No shit.

If you've got a religious or ethnic affiliation, there are loads of clubs you'll be able to contact. I offered the clubs a ticket discount with a code specific to their school so I could track it.

I didn't offer the promo performance at first, waiting to see who would respond on the ticket discount first. Then I'd up the ante. I might reverse that process the next time.

I also contacted the music and theater departments as well as the campus radio stations offering ticket discounts and giveaways.

**Results:** Only one club got back to me, a performers group at SCU that does a weekly open mic. They gave away a pair of tickets at their weekly event. Those people didn't show up. The radio station at SJSU gave away 2 pairs of tix and kept a pair for the some of the station staff to come by. The station staff came, but the winners did not.

The RTVF department at SJSU also had me email them a flyer that they posted for me in their building. However when I was at the campus hanging other posters, I realized they hung just one themselves. I augmented that with a few of my own on other boards.

So out of all that, I got a total of 2 people from the radio station at SJSU.

**Why:** "Free" always leaves the option of not going. I never count on more than half of any free

giveaway people to show up because they don't have any skin in the game. As to why the other clubs weren't interested? College students are notoriously disorganized. I expect some of my emails are only being opened now.

**Verdict:** **Fail-ish.** None of it sold any tickets and most of the comps didn't show. But it was good for two more in the room.

## 7. Contact companies and offer them a ticket discount for their employees

**Plan:** Contact companies in your area and give them a ticket discount code created just for their company so you can track it. I live in Silicon Valley and some of the biggest companies in the world (Ebay, Cisco, Google, Adobe) are right in my back yard. I contacted nine companies. The biggest challenge was finding someone appropriate to contact. I got as close as I could sending the info to the human resources department for each company.

In another case (and this falls under the heading of "Tell Everyone"... ) my parents were buying solar panels for their house and mentioned my event to the sales guy. He said that the company usually gets everyone together for some activity once a month and my show would be great for that. I hooked them up with half price tickets and they bought 20. I believe about 16 of them showed up. Yay Solar City!

**Results:** 20 tickets sold to Solar City, 4 tickets sold to Santa Clara University employees (my girlfriend works there) and nothing from the other companies I contacted.

>**Why:** I had a tough time finding the correct person to send the info to. Companies are very guarded with their human resources info these days because they don't want every yahoo sending a resume. So I imagine this plan would work better by going through people I personally know and making the offer to the companies they work for. My girlfriend told her coworkers and we sold a few that way.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** But go through the channels of people you know to invite the companies they work for.

## 8. Put together a street team of volunteers to help with postering, facebook promo, and giving out flyers at work/school.

**Plan:** Put your fans to work and save yourself some legwork. I sent out an email to all my fans in the area asking if they'd like to be on my street team for this gig and help me do some promotion.

**Results:** An official street team never came together for this event. My email was met with deafening silence. However, putting out little posts online asking folks to help out in a casual way was much more effective. And my mom and girlfriend were actually very helpful getting flyers out to their friends and coworkers.

**Why:** I think for most artists' audiences, the term "street team" is a death knell. If your audience is under 18 and looking for something to belong to, then go for it. Otherwise, it's rare that people have the time (or *think* they have the time) to help you when they can't even get their own stuff done. Being on a "street team" sounds like it'll be a lot of work, even if it isn't really.

But if you present it in a more casual way of "Hey, would you mind reposting this info on your Facebook for me?", you're more likely to get some action.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** Ask for help, but don't call it a street team unless your audience is young or joiners.

## 9. Put together a goody bag or some other perk for advance ticket holders.

**Plan:** I announced that advance ticket holders would get a special gift at the door. I planned to give everyone a CD compilation of some of the Bay Area's best comedians. That gives the audience a cool perk and turns them onto other performer's they may not have known about. It also lets me do something generous for the other comics in my area.

I posted in our area comedy Facebook group that I wanted everyone to send me a quality audio clip of some of their best stuff. No more than 2 minutes. Lots of people thought it was a great idea. 3... count 'em.... 3 comedians actually sent me something.

**Results:** Since most of the comics couldn't get it together to send me a clip, I used the ones I did get and added two of my lesser known EPs on the disc. One a small collection of spaghetti western instrumentals I released last year. The other a small collection of comedy Xmas music since the event was in November. Everybody that received them loved getting them.

I'm sure it didn't sell any extra tickets, but it did make people even happier when they go there, which will bring them back next time.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** From a Disney-esque standpoint of "plussing" an experience, I think it did its job.

## 10. Contact local media for coverage

**Plan:** Personally, I don't enjoy working the media to get coverage. I don't mind doing interviews and stuff. I just don't like the hounding to set them up in the first place. ArtistData.com and Songkick's Tourbox do a good job of taking care of local calendar listings and such. So for the bigger fish I hired a publicist that I worked with on some tour dates over the summer. She's newer in the biz, so her price was only \$350 to work the show.

**Results:** In the "you get what you pay for" realm, I got one interview with the local weekly arts rag. Radio didn't seem interested at all. The one interview I got came out two days before the show when we were nearly sold out anyway. And I'm pretty sure it didn't move any additional tickets. Though I got a few nice emails of "Hey, saw you in the Metro!"

**Why:** The press has always been a mystery to me. Something in the approach wasn't right, but I don't know what it was.

**Verdict:** **Fail.** It didn't sell any tickets and it cost me a large chunk of cash to get it. I'd almost rather tell them afterward how well it went so they might approach me the next time instead.

## 11. Find a sponsor to do trades with.

**Plan:** A sponsor doesn't just need to give you money. Need printing? Have a company use the deal they've already got with a print shop to get some for you in exchange for exposure at the show. Get a wine company to donate some booze. Tell the local hair salon they can come and do a hair demo if they'll give you a free haircut.

**Results:** I didn't do any of this for this event. Haircut? Perish the thought... 😊 And the venue did the poster printing and such for me, so I didn't have to worry about that. I wasn't really in need of a sponsor for this show. But it absolutely does work and I have many friends that have gotten little deals here and there.

**Verdict:** Unknown. (It works. I just didn't do it for this event.)

## 12. Run local cable commercials

**Plan:** You'd be surprised how easy and cheap it is to run commercials on cable stations. Do your fans also watch AMC or Lifetime? You can advertise during their favorite shows and target them right to your geographical area. Check out [SpotRunner.com](http://SpotRunner.com) to see how its done.

**Results:** This is another one I didn't do. Limited time, limited budget. It does take a little bit of time to put together the commercial itself and make sure its up to broadcast standards. And while the spots are cheap (as little as \$5 depending on what time/station) you still need to have a bit of a budget to run enough of them to make an impact.

And you're better off hitting really hard in one spot than spreading them out. If you know your fans also like Anthony Bourdain, then run 3 spots during one episode his show instead of spreading them out elsewhere. Repetition is the name of the game, so have a narrow focus and hammer hard.

**Verdict:** Unknown.

## 13. Do exit flyering at shows similar to yours.

**Plan:** This is another old-school promo technique. You and your bandmates or helpers grab those giant stacks of flyers and show up at other gigs your potential audience hangs out at. Get inside and talk to people and give them flyers if you can. If you can't get the flyers inside, hit the exit traffic as they leave the show. This can also be done with sample CDs or download cards.

**Results:** I didn't do this one either. I was playing a venue that doesn't normally do comedy. And I couldn't very well promote another venue outside the two main comedy clubs in town. Just bad form. We only had two other big comedy shows coming up in town at a venue I could have flyered. I totally missed one and the other was happening two days after my event.

This is totally a numbers game though. If you can get inside the venue and talk to people in person (and maybe get their contact info) you're going to do much better. Especially if you can follow up with them.

If you're just standing outside blowing out flyers to the streaming hordes, you can expect to find more of them on the ground than actually coming through the door at your gig. A fraction of 1% will actually get used.

**Why:** Those folks just came out of a show and their entertainment needs have been met temporarily. They're not looking for the next show to go to. They're looking to get home as quickly as possible.

**Verdict:** Unknown (But I don't recommend it. – To be used as a last resort.)

## 14. Send the venue your music.

**Plan:** The venue is probably playing music before the show and in between bands. They may as well be playing yours. You might also get them to do some CD or download card giveaways at shows before yours.

**Results:** Here's another one I didn't do. I should have at least had them playing my stuff before my own show. A bunch of people asked why that wasn't happening. Didn't think of it. 😞 Nor did I send it to them to play or giveaway at other shows. This particular venue does a lot of shows that may or may not jive with my work, so I put it on the back burner and never got to it.

**Why:** Having your music played is always a good thing. But unless someone actually says, "Hey, this is Roadside Attraction you're listening to and they're going to be playing here next Saturday!", then

it'll do about as much good as getting played on the radio when they don't announce your name. That being said, I'll repeat, it never hurts to have them playing your music.

**Verdict:** Unknown.

## **15. Sponsor non-commercial radio, college radio, and podcasts to get mentions.**

**Plan:** With a bit of budget, you can be a sponsor of many non-profit radio shows. That means they have to thank you at some point during the show.

**Results:** I didn't do this one either. And I've never done it in the past, so I don't know what it costs or how much its worth. Though if you can do it regularly it's probably useful. Especially with the repetition and personal handling you'd get on something like a podcast.

**Why:** I don't know how well this would work for a one-time event. But if you're doing a series of shows in one town you can target to that town. Or if you're touring, you might go with something on a medium sized podcast. You won't be able to afford to be on WTF or Adam Carolla without a hefty budget.

**Verdict:** Unknown

## **16. Buy a strategically placed billboard near the venue or a college campus.**

**Plan:** I don't think I really need to explain billboards, right? Yes, they're expensive. But if you've got the budget and you can get one in a good place, it might be worthwhile.

**Results:** I didn't even consider this one for this gig. Double my budget might have been able to get me one billboard.

**Verdict:** Unknown

## **17. Have a pre- and/or after-party.**

**Plan:** Have a pre-party where you gather everyone for food and drink and then hustle them over to come right into your show. Make sure to do it either at the venue or somewhere very close that won't involve driving. After parties work as a bonus too. Make sure to advertise that it's included in their ticket price. I paid a bunch o'money to see Prince once because I got to go to soundcheck and would have gotten into the after-party had they had one that night.

**Results:** I didn't do this for this event because I had too many logistics to deal with getting the production stuff ready. But I have used it in the past and it's a good way to get the audience more involved with the event and your community of fans in particular. Pre-parties work way better than after-parties.

**Why:** Not only do you want people to see your show, you want them to get to know you outside of it too. And more importantly, they get to know each other. When friendships and relationships happen at your shows, they'll have an even strong tie to your art.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** (I didn't use it this time, but have in the past.)

## **Ok, that's it for the offline stuff. Take a deep breath and relax for a moment. We're 4400 words into this puppy...**

That's enough resting... Let's get back to it. Now for the online gig promotion tactics.

### **Online Gig Promotion Strategies**

#### **18. Submit your event to every event site you can find that serves your area.**

**Plan:** ArtistData, BandsInTown, and Songkick do a great job of pushing your dates out to tons of event sites. But they don't hit all of them. In particular, they often miss specialized sites that offer local flavor or ticket discounts.

For instance, San Francisco has sites like Do415.com and FunCheap.com that cater directly to the San Francisco community. Do a Google search for "<your city> events" and submit your event to every one you can get on.

Also, search for event sites in whatever the nearest major city is if you're outside of it. For instance, Both of those San Francisco sites I referenced above also list events in San Jose even though we're about 45 minutes south.

By the way, this is something you can easily engage a virtual assistant from ODesk to take care of for you for a couple bucks.

**Results:** All of the San Jose events sites picked up my info and a few also put out the press release we were using. A few of the San Francisco based sites published my show, but you're always looking at a little less response from sites based that far away. Still good to be listed if you can though.

I honestly don't know exactly how many people these site listings brought in. A couple maybe. I know two guys came directly from my Eventbrite listing and they drove 2 hours to get there.

**Why:** This is sort of a baseline thing to do for your gigs. As I said, ArtistData and the others will hit a lot of sites for you, especially newspaper calendars and such. Hiring a VA on Odesk can take care of the others quickly. You may pick up a few people here and there. Unfortunately, a lot of artists do this step and then they're done. This step is the barest minimum and definitely won't fill your room. But it does put your name out there where people can see it.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** (But don't stop there.)

#### **19. Do a promo video (or Series) and post it to all your social networks.**

**Plan:** Put together a short 2-3 minute video talking up the show, play a bit of your stuff, include the other acts if you can. Shoot that out to your networks and email list.

I took this idea a little farther. Since this is a bigger project than just a show, I did a [video diary](#) that takes my fans with me through the writing, production, and promotion process of the putting the show on. It's the first time I've done it and there's a lot I can improve. But people really seemed to like them and many told me they had no idea how much goes into putting on a show.

I threw them together pretty quickly. Talk for a few minutes into the camera on my phone. Edit it together with the stock opener and closer graphics I use on all my videos. And at the end of each one I included a short clip of a live performance where I'm working on material that will go into the special.

**Why:** Some comics right now are going, “Ah! Why would you put the material out in an unfinished form before the show?!” I did it for a few reasons. First, it’s collectively about 10 minutes of material out of the hour plus I’d be filming. Second, it gives them a behind the scenes look at how comedy material develops over time. Third, they were all crappy back of the room flip cam videos which will make the final product look that much better.

Having multiple videos means I can regularly send new stuff out to my networks to keep them engaged. They go to Twitter, my Facebook page, my Facebook event page, Google+, and Pinterest.

As an extra, those episodes will go on the DVD as bonuses too.

Here’s a playlist of the video diary episodes if you’d like to see how I did it.

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1u2ZqOE-khM4TiWh1vhCV5JtAqUEJSBw>

**Results:** While I don’t think I can pinpoint ticket sales coming exactly from these videos, I definitely know that it kept people engaged in the process, and allowed me to both regularly remind them of the event with something new, plus entertain them a bit for their patience with some new jokes.

**Verdict: Use it.** Obviously you might not be able to do something this extensive for every gig. I do 10-15 shows a month. That would be ridiculous. But if you’re doing a big event or you’re the type of band that only gigs once a month, definitely use this.

## **20. Create printable and digital posters, flyers, and coupons.**

**Plan:** This is another baseline thing to do for your shows. Flyers and posters and old-school as old-school gets. Frankly, I kind of miss the days of cut and paste flyers printed at Kinkos. 😊

If you don’t have graphic ability, someone else in your band probably does. If you’re a comic, I know for sure one of the other comics around you will have some Photoshop skills you can tap. Use your network.

Start with the largest print format you’ll need. Then it’s easy to resize down from there for other uses without having to re-do too much of your work. Create them in this order:

- Full size print poster at 300 dpi
- Handout/Club Card size at 300 dpi
- Online flyer at 72 dpi
- Any other sizes you might need for events sites or the venue’s own site

Here’s the online version of mine.

Sat  
Nov  
8th

SIRIUS  
SATELLITE RADIO  
PANDORA  
internet radio

The World's Best  
Comedy

The Edinburgh Festival  
fringe

# Comedy Special Taping

With



funny  
OR DIE

# Phil Johnson

and  
ROADSIDE  
ATTRACTION



Saturday Nov 8th

Art Boutiki

44 Race St, San Jose

7:30pm Tix at

[www.PhilJohnsonComedy.com](http://www.PhilJohnsonComedy.com)

Photo Credit: Jane Higgins

A couple of things to notice on the poster:

- The angle for the show (special filming) is prominent
- Some social proof in the form of network logos. You'll notice that a couple of those aren't that

difficult to be on, like Funny or Die. Heck, if you're on Spotify, throw the logo on there. It acts as social proof that you're part of the entertainment business ecosystem and also tips people off to where they can listen to your stuff before the show. And yes, I am on Spotify, but ran out of room for their logo.

– Show info presented in a clear and coherent way.

– My picture at the bottom is both looking at and pointing to the show info which forces the viewers eyes in that direction if they aren't already there.

The only thing I don't like about this poster is that my eyes are closed in the main shot. Eye contact, even in a photo, will draw people in. But I thought the picture was interesting enough to make people look and make people wonder what I'm screaming about. If you're wondering, it's the introduction I do to [this song](#).

On the printed versions of both the poster and club cards, I included both a QR code and a \$1 discount code for advance tickets. QRJumps.com is a good place to do a QR code easily.

The venue printed the posters for me in two sizes for free. A great deal that you won't normally find elsewhere. I also got club card sized ones printed through GotPrint.com. Good prices and a quick turnaround.

I don't do posters for every single show I do. If I'm booked on another comic's show, they usually do at least an online flyer that I can use to promote. And if I'm playing a comedy club, they often have promo materials I can use. If you're a music act, don't expect the club to do a damn thing. You'll be lucky if they get around to listing your show on their website.

**Results:** Again, this is a basic thing you need to do for your shows. As I mentioned earlier, the printed posters didn't have a huge impact that I can see. The club cards had a great impact when distributed by people who knew each other. And honestly, I have a lot of leftovers that weren't used.

The QR code on the posters and flyers was only scanned once according to my stats.

The online flyers definitely help because people online like pictures. Sticking a poster image into your regular promotional status updates will help them stick out better. Reuse that poster regularly. You want it seared into their brain.

The \$1 off code was used 6 times and that was only available on the flyers. A couple of them were 4-pack tickets, so that brought in 12 people.

**Why:** Presenting a visual image to go with your show is like putting a face to someone you've only spoken with on the phone. It makes it more real and gives it a more official air. Remember, the goal of any show is to create long term fans. They have to know what you look like and what you're about.

**Verdict:** **Use it.**

## 21. Use meme images.

**Plan:** In addition to your regular online flyer, create meme images with your photo, a joke or lyric, and info on your event.

You can use Photoshop or Gimp to create these or any one of the million meme generator websites that come up on a Google search. You'll have a little more control over the final look if you do it on your own though.

If you're a comic, post a joke. If you're a musician, post a lyric from one of your songs. If you're a dancer, post an inspirational dance quote of some sort. People love this stuff online and will repost and

favorite them like crazy.

Here's one I used for this event:



That particular picture is one from a short film in which I played a pirate. And I posted in on Halloween when everyone was looking at costumes. All of the others had live performance shots of me with the joke.

A lot of my material doesn't work in short forms like this. You had to have heard the first 4 jokes for the 5th one to make sense. But I went through my first two hour specials and made a list of all the jokes I thought would work on a meme. I didn't use any of the new stuff from the special I was filming. Saving that stuff for promoting the DVD when it comes out.

**Results:** As far as social media posts, these were some of the most popular things I've done in a long time. Many more shares and likes than usual. Because the images weren't clickable directly through to a ticketing site, I didn't really have a way to track if sales came from these. But it was a great way to keep the show info in people's faces and entertain them at the same time.

Something to remember is that only a tiny fraction of your online audience is seeing any of your posts. Maximum 10-20% of your people will see a post. So don't be afraid to repeat posts to get it in front of new faces. To insure it, post duplicate material at different times of day.

**Why:** While your hardcore supporters will repost your digital flyer to their friends, the casual fans won't. But if you entertain them and give them something they actually want to share, you're far more likely to get the share. Slip your commercial is as an add-on and it goes right along with it.

**Verdict:** Use it.

## 22. Create discount codes.

**Plan:** Create discount codes both to entice people into buying and give you a level of tracking where sales are coming from.

If you're using something like Eventbrite or Brown Paper Tickets for your ticketing, creating discount codes is super easy. I did individual codes for Facebook (\$2), different companies and colleges I was promoting to (\$2-50% off depending on who), and even a freebie code for a few select locations we'll talk about later.

If you're dealing with a venue that does its own ticketing, you may not have this option. I ran my own ticketing for this event even though the venue normally does. So sometimes if you explain that you want to do something outside their system, they might let you handle it and bring in the lists at the show.

If that's the case, be sure to keep them updated on how the sales are going both so they can staff properly and so they know you're actually doing the work to fill the room.

If you're working with a comedy club, they'll be less likely to let you do your own ticketing as they usually have their own pretty well entrenched. However, they often paper the crap out of their shows. So ask them for discount codes and comps and they'll probably be able to set you up with something.

Since you're going to be doing a lot of discounting, set the regular price of your show high enough that you can still turn a profit even if the discounts get used a lot. In the case of my DVD filming, I wasn't looking to make a profit as much as just cover some of my costs, so I was pretty aggressive with the discounts. And the ticket sales pretty much covered my rental agreement with the venue. In this case, a full house was more important than a profit. But that's not usually the case.

You'll also want to make sure that your advance price is high enough to get you on some of the ticket discounter sites we'll talk about next.

Your door price should be higher than the advance price to encourage people to buy in advance. Our advance price was \$10 before discounts. Door price was \$15. And I still had a dozen people show up at the door and pay \$15 to get in.

**Results:** As I mentioned earlier, I got 12 people in on the \$1 off code. I got another 4 in from the \$2 off Facebook code. One person from a \$2 off code on Meetup. And 20 off the \$5 off code for the Solar City guys. I offered them that discount after they contacted me about bringing a large group. If I were looking to make a profit for this event, I would have given them a smaller discount. But as I mentioned, a full room was more important than a profit for this particular event.

**Verdict:** Use it.

## 23. Use discount ticket outlets.

**Plan:** There are a few sites out there that will list your tickets at a discounted (or free) price. Goldstar is the big one. Depending on where your show is, there are also some seat filler services.

*Goldstar:* They require a minimum of 40 tickets and a minimum discount of 50%. But it is negotiable. I told them my venue only holds 80 and I couldn't rightly give them half the room. So they took 30 instead.

I offered them half price on the regular tickets (\$5 instead of \$10) and less of a discount on the ticket

plus DVD package I was offering (\$10 instead of \$15). They told me they needed at least 50% off that package price too. I told them I was already cutting out most of my profit on the DVD with my original price and told them to just drop that option from their listing. They listed it anyway at the price I specified originally.

If you're using Goldstar to sell tix right from the beginning of your process, get your account and listing set up at least 7 days before you need them to go on sale. It sometimes takes them a little bit to get it up, especially if you're negotiating with them.

I was using it to get rid of last minute tickets. So I set mine up about two weeks before the show which got the promotions going out on their end about 7-10 days before.

*FillASeat:* If you're in one of the 34 markets serviced by FillASeat.com you can give them some tickets for their members too. The way they work is their members pay an annual fee to get free tickets to events. You don't make any money on these tickets, but they will fill those last few seats. I gave them 20 tickets a week before the show and dropped that to 10 a couple days before when my sales started to pick up.

*Tourist Half Price Ticket Offices:* If your gig is in a city that's remotely touristy, you can often find a half price ticket office of some sort. San Francisco has one. And Vegas is lousy with them. They can be a little harder to find a contact for, but can definitely help you put more butts in seats. I didn't do that for this show because I was a little too far away for the San Francisco one to be effective and San Jose doesn't have one.

**Results:** Goldstar sold a whole 1 ticket to my event. Very disappointing. It had been a few years since I posted an event with them. In the past they were good for 25-50 people per show. And that one guy didn't even show up. A free \$5 for me and I resold the seat to someone at the door.

Goldstar audiences are always not always the most appreciative audience members. They will often give worse reviews of a show than someone who paid full price.

FillASeat booked 3 tickets. And they didn't show up either. No skin off my back since they were free anyway. And I resold their seats too.

**Why:** Goldstar always has a few no shows. And since they only moved one ticket, I wasn't super surprised. The less you spend on a ticket, the more likely you are to blow the event off without too much mental anguish. Which is exactly why Goldstar people give worse reviews too. Someone who paid full price has a vested interest in the showing being good so they feel like they made a good purchase.

Someone who only paid a few bucks to get in doesn't have that same vested interest and is more in the mindframe of "Ok, make me <laugh, dance, cry – whatever you make people do>." It's the same reason an audience at a free show is almost always worse than a paid audience. The more money they put in, the more mental dissonance they'll feel if the show isn't good. So everyone wants it to be good and it becomes good.

For FillASeat, most of their audience is in San Francisco for this area. And I think people booked it on a whim and then decided it was too far away. If you're paying an annual fee, there's zero friction in booking a ticket for an event you might not attend.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** But don't count on it being either the majority of your sales or that many of the people will show up. They're only to be used for filling the back of the room.

## 24. Post a limited number of free tickets with a suggested donation on Craigslist (1 week out from show.)

**Plan:** A week before the show, post a couple pairs of free tickets to Craigslist. My friend [Stroy Moyd](#) suggested this to me. His suggestion was to put it in the “Free” section. However, Craigslist frowns on tickets in that section and I’ve had posts pulled before. Instead, I posted in the Events section with the prominent headline of “Free Comedy Tickets”.

Stroy also mentioned you should make it free with “suggested donation”. I honestly forgot that part until afterward. But it’s a good idea to set up some reciprocation.

You’re obviously dealing with bottom feeder audience members here. Not that they’ll be bad. Sometimes they’re the best audience members. But it’s a crap shoot to see if they even show up.

So I could track them, I sent them to my Eventbrite page with a discount code that would get them 100% off the regular ticket price. My CL ad was for 2 pairs of tickets and I limited the code that much. To avoid angry emails, I made sure to include, “If the code doesn’t work, then the free tickets have already been given away.”

Within 30 minutes one lady had snapped up all four tickets. I left the post up figuring it might entice others over to my event page and they may get tickets even if the code’s already been used.

**Results:** The four tickets were gone within a half hour. I knew right then they wouldn’t get used. I emailed the lady back and congratulated her on being so quick on the draw. Got no response. And I was right. None of those tickets got used at the door.

**Why:** She was just snapping up the freebie “in case”. Like Goldstar and FillASeat, there was no skin in the game and no mental dissonance in not going.

Here’s what I suggest with something like this. You need to put a couple steps in between that person and the free tickets. Having to go to Eventbrite and put in a code is more helpful than just hitting “Reply” and asking me for tickets. But I would probably add another step or two.

People can pay with money or time. Money is still better (since most people don’t respect their own time). But a couple extra steps would set up more of a commitment to actually attend the event. Maybe a survey of some sort or a couple trivia questions. I did at least get her email address added to my email list, but I don’t expect to hear much from her.

**Verdict:** **Fail** – In this case. But I think it could be adapted with some other stuff to work. Like the other discounting ideas, this is really just to fill the back of the room. Only a small percentage of free tickets will actually show up.

## 25. Offer tickets to Meetup groups (2 weeks out from show.)

**Plan:** Meetup.com is a site that has local meetings of people based around interest groups. you can offer tickets to groups that you think will fit your show. Very much like promoting college groups, this works best if you have a solid angle to your act: ethnic, religious (or anti-), geek, etc.

If your angle really really hits the core theme of the group, they may be happy to add your event to their calendar. If it’s more general, like hitting up a 20-something dating meetup, you’ll definitely need to offer them a discount or freebie on the tickets.

And, of course, if you’re actually an active member of that particular meetup, you’re much more likely to have success with this tactic.

I contacted about a dozen meetups in the area and offered them a \$2 discount on advance tickets. The majority never responded. One told me her members don’t like doing comedy shows because they

don't get to talk to each as much. One told me to join his group and I could post the event myself. And two others posted it for me on their calendars.

One group runner told me she actually charges a fee to offer events to her members to help her cover the cost of running a Meetup group. To which I responded, "Oh, hell no." (in my head.) To her, I replied, "Sorry, I don't have room in my budget to offer your members a discount and pay your Meetup fees too."

**Results:** ONE. One lady bought a ticket and came to the show and enjoyed herself. She was the runner of her particular group.

**Why:** As you may guess, I'm not an active member of these groups. I may not be a 20-something single engineer looking for love, but I do want those folks at my shows. With being out most nights doing gigs, I don't often get a chance to hit meetups even for stuff I am interested in.

Plus I know a lot of other show producers that hit Meetup too. So these group runners are probably getting a lot of offers for tickets. In some cases the group isn't well run. In other cases, the runners just know what will or won't appeal to their members.

**Verdict:** **Fail.** But your town and your situation may be different. If you're more social than I am, get out to some Meetups and get them interested in what you're doing. I've seen Meetups fill a room and I've seen other shows get nothing from it.

## 26. Offer volunteers a commission through Eventbrite affiliates

**Plan:** In the spirit of street team stuff, Eventbrite offers an affiliate program. People can sign up and you can offer them a commission on every ticket they sell. I offered a \$2 commission.

I posted the offer of commission a couple times on Facebook, a couple times on Twitter. I don't think it went out to my email list because I was already bombarding them with show plugs. The people that would have seen it in an email but not on social media are probably not that active on social media. Though I would recommend letting your list know about it too. I was just short on time.

**Results:** I had two people sign up to be affiliates. I also got messages from a couple other people telling me they didn't want a commission. They're happy to help me promote without it.

Of the two people that signed up, both posted links a couple times. One guy sent 24 clicks. The other nothing. It really depends on how big and developed their personal networks are too. Neither of them sold any tickets.

I believe I got a few more likes on my Facebook page. And it got some additional eyeballs on my name and image, but it didn't make any money or bring anyone to the show.

**Why:** A good affiliate team can do wonders for your business. But it does take a little more time and effort that I put into. They only put up links a couple times and then it went by the wayside. I should have been emailing some rah-rah reminders and offering them bonuses and such.

If you're doing a series of shows or selling tickets through Eventbrite on a regular basis, you could definitely put more development time into an affiliate team and see some good rewards from it.

**Verdict:** **Fail.**

## 27. Run Facebook and Twitter contests to get people to share

**Plan:** There are a variety of different Facebook and Twitter contests you could run to get people sharing your event info:

On Facebook, have people invite all their friends through your event page and then report back to the original thread with a “Mission Accomplished” comment. Then, at the show, draw a random winner for some sort of prize.

You can do the same type of things with shares on Facebook. Those are even easier to track because FB will tell you who shared the post.

These same things can be done on Twitter with Retweets.

You could also run a contest to get people to change their profile header for picture to your flyer. Picture would be better than header since more people see that. Joe Lowers from the World Series of Comedy uses this tactic, getting comedians accepted to the festival to change their header pics to (funny) banners for the festival.

**Results:** I didn’t have a chance to try this one out. By the time I got to it on my list tickets were selling well enough that I didn’t need the extra help.

**Why:** Visibility is everything. BUT, you want to concentrate on people that live in the area you’ll be performing. If you’ve got someone three states over that wants to help, that’s nice, but they probably don’t have a lot of friends in your area. For them, rather than shares and such, have them specifically call or message people they know in your area to tell them about the event. More focused work on a smaller number of people will work better. If you can get people in your local area to do the same, you’ll still find that more effective than the average share.

**Verdict:** Unknown

## 28. Get a phone/email tree going.

**Plan:** This is a classic strategy that I was just reminded of while reading Billy Idol’s autobiography. He talked about using a phone tree to build Generation X’s draw until they were packing the major clubs in London even on weeknights.

The plan goes like this. A traditional phone tree is structured around a group of people. You’re responsible for calling two people. That person is responsible for calling two people, etc. They’re traditionally used for things like schools to disseminate information by phone quickly.

For our purposes here in promoting a gig, you would let your immediate fans know about your event. You would also ask them to invite 2 or 3 people they know to the show by email or phone call. By the way, phone works way better than email here if you have that information available. It’s a lot harder to say no when you’re actually talking to someone. And they’re much more likely to follow through if they’ve said yes. Emails are easy to ignore.

For my event, I did this in an extremely unstructured way that could have been implemented better. I sent an email to my list simply asking them to pass the show information on to 3 other people they thing would like to see the show.

**Results:** I can’t pinpoint exactly how many tickets were sold based on this idea, but I did have about ten people at the show that were brought by people who had seen me before.

**Why:** Personal recommendations trump everything else in promotion. People may see your ads and posts and flyers and whatever else. But they may not actually take action on buying a ticket until their friend says, “You gotta see this guy. He’s great.”

Now all the other stuff will solidify that idea. If that person has already seen your face everywhere and THEN gets the recommendation from a friend, they’re almost certain to come along.

An added bonus is that you’re creating a community of people who know each other and will use your

gigs as a meeting place.

**Verdict:** **Use it.** (And do it better than I did.)

## 29. Do a Facebook event page

**Plan:** Put together a Facebook event page for your show. Update it regularly with content to keep people engaged with it. Offer a special discount code just for your Facebook friends.

I was hesitant to bother with this on my show. I can't stand Facebook event pages. How many times have you gotten event invites for stuff 1000 miles away from you? Yep, me too.

And it's not the event creator's fault. It's Facebook's fault for making it so damn difficult to sort through your friends and only invite people in a particular area. So people get lazy and just click everybody's checkbox. In the rare cases I set up an event page, I scroll through my 2500 or so friends and try to remember who lives in the area and whether or not they're a comic. I don't bother inviting comics to my gigs because they have their own.

And since I don't have a robot memory, I still got some wrong and got comments like, "Sorry, I'm in the wrong state."

New posts on the event wall will notify everyone who's been invited. So make sure to keep that content coming. It's a good place for your memes, videos, and any advance press previews you might get.

There are a ton of tips and ideas for Facebook events. Instead of me yakking on about them, let me just point you in the direction of two good articles on the subject:

[Top 10 Tips For Creating A Facebook Event](#)

[Creating and Managing Events Using Facebook Pages](#)

**Results:** This helped a little bit. I believe I had 3 people use the Facebook discount code that was only available there. And it was another angle to get entertaining information out about the show.

**Why:** With the Facebook algorithm being so picky about what it puts in the newsfeed, you want to use every angle you can to get your info in front of as many faces as possible. I yearn for the day when Facebook will let you sort friends based on location. You can make groups based on location, but that's a lot to implement if you don't already have it set up.

The only thing that takes time here choosing the correct people to invite. The set up and posting is very quick with a little planning. Try not to get lazy and invite everyone. It just dilutes the effectiveness of FB Events in general.

You could actually hire a virtual assistant for a few hours and give them access to your Facebook account to sift through your friends for who lives in the area and then both invite them and add them to a list for later use. It would probably take 4-5 hours and cost \$20.

**Verdict:** **Use it.**

## 30. Use Facebook ads

**Plan:** Here's what Facebook really wants you to do. Sure, they limit of what gets into the newsfeed "improves the user experience", but it also pushes people into buying ads to get their stuff seen.

You can do sidebar ads, but boosting a post will put your ad in the newsfeed, which is more effective. Use a video or photo rather than just text. And narrow your targeting down as much as possible.

For instance, you might do a video post targeted at people who already like your page to make sure they're aware of the event. Then you might do a different video ad targeted at people who don't know you yet, but are fans of an artist you're similar to.

In my case, I might do a video saying, "I hear you're a fan of Stephen Lynch. You might like my stuff to and you can see me do it live at...." I would target that ad specifically to people who like Stephen Lynch's page and live in the area of my event.

Video has the advantage of letting put in more information than an image. However, if you're paying per click, you'll be paying even if they just watch the video and don't click through to buy tickets.

With images, you're only allowed 20% of the image to be text. So something like the gig flyer I posted above wouldn't fly. However, I did boost one of those meme images like I showed you above. Definitely over the 20% rule, but it got approved and went through the small \$5 budget I gave it.

I don't know if they've loosened that rule or if they didn't count the joke since it has entertainment value. But you can do some experimenting on your own and see what gets approved.

**Results:** I did very little of this. I didn't have a need to run ads much. I boosted just the one meme for \$5 and targeted it just to people in the area of the show. I don't think it resulted in any ticket sales directly, but it did get likes and shares.

**Why:** I don't think this should be your first go-to. Try the organic stuff first. But if that's not getting reach or if you're playing a town where you don't have any fans yet, some targeted, entertaining advertising might bring you a few more people.

It can eat your budget fast, so make sure your back end is really set up to move people toward buying tickets and getting on your email list. Because of that, I wouldn't send them to a Facebook event page. Rather, send them directly to the ticket buying page or a page on your site where they can buy tickets.

You want as few steps between them and a purchase as possible.

**Verdict:** Unknown (for my event) – But I suggest using it sparingly.

## 31. Use local blogs and forums

**Plan:** If you can find any blogs or forum sites specific to the area of your show, get active on there and see if you can get people interested in seeing your show.

Do not... DO NOT... Just go on and spam your show info. It won't work and you'll waste everyone's time. Get into conversations and meet people. Comment on the blogs a few times, then maybe email and introduce yourself to the site owner. Use the profile messaging function on forum sites to meet people. Ask about them a lot. Before long, they'll ask what you do. There's you're opening for "Oh me? I'm a musician. Got a show coming up near you if you'd like to see it..."

**Results:** In doing searches for stuff near me, I came up with a fat zero. No forums. And most of the sites were just tech oriented since I live in the middle of Silicon Valley. Plenty of blogs about the area. But they're all more interested in with Google's about to do than my little comedy show.

There is a site called Nextdoor.com that you might want to check out. It connects you with the neighbors in your immediate area for discussion. Unfortunately, during my event, everyone on there was busy arguing about the midterm election propositions happening at the time. And I disagreed with most of them. So I stayed out of the whole darn thing.

**Why:** These types of sites are another avenue into your local community. And the more you're involved, the more people will be interested in what you do, even if what you do isn't totally their

thing. They make help out just to be supportive.

**Verdict:** Unknown for my event. (But if you've got it, use it...)

### **32. Be a guest on local podcasts**

**Plan:** If you know of any podcasts that record in the area of your show, see if you can be a guest. Especially if the topic is something about the town you're playing in. Most podcasts are fairly small affairs and they're always looking for guests. Email the producers and tell them why you as a guest would be interesting to their listeners.

If you're playing outside of where you live, you may be able to call in for a phone interview a few weeks before your gig so it plays right before you get there.

**Results:** I didn't do this one for my event either. Mostly due to time constraints.

**Why:** Even if it's a small podcast, chances are most of their listeners are local to the area because the hosts tell their friends to listen. For bigger podcasts, you're trading quality for quantity. Either way, they can be helpful. Or they can be an utter waste of time if the pod you're on is only listened to by the host's mom.

**Verdict:** Unknown (But worth a shot.)

### **33. Consider unusual places on the internet like Craigslist, eBay and StubHub as promotional tools (2 weeks before show)**

**Plan:** 2 weeks before your show, try putting a pair or two of tickets up on Ebay or StubHub. On Ebay you can do a buy it now or auction type listing. And on StubHub you can either put the tickets up for a discount or heck... charge more for them like everything else on that site.

**Results:** I posted a pair as a buy it now on Ebay and got no takers. There was a stumbling block with listing on StubHub and I don't exactly remember what it was now. But there was a point in the process where I felt it was too much work to finish.

**Why:** Obviously these are going to do better if you're a bigger name. People are going to those places looking to buy tickets for certain events. And I don't think many people are randomly surfing through for artists they've never heard of. Worth a shot, but don't count on it for much.

**Verdict:** **Fail**

Start trying these on your next gig. As I mentioned earlier, some of those "fails" may work great for you. If you figure out a tweak that turns a loss into a win, be sure to leave a comment because I'd love to hear it and try it too.

Good luck!