



Block Booking:

The 45-Day Sale for Campus Activities

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BOGO (buy one, get one)! 50% Off! LOW PRICES!

The sign does not matter. It seems as though everyone enjoys a sale. Think about it: how many people rush off to Sam's Club for the discounted price on a vat of ketchup? The need for ketchup is not nearly as important as the need for the sale on ketchup. There are some grocery stores that offer a meal deal. You buy two packages of hot dogs because you learn that beans, a promotional pack of flavored chips, the no-name brand soda, and some form of cheese all come with the purchase—for free. Everyone loves a sale and there are billions of dollars spent in advertising to prove it.



Be sure to talk to agents and listen to demos in their booth. You might discover an artist that turns out to be a hidden gem and could be a hit on your campus.

Buying Entertainment Is No Different

When you think about it, you realize purchasing campus entertainment should not be any different. What if Kelly Clarkson offered a contract sale on her next show—50% off for the next offer. She'd still make money and if you took her up on it, you would save money. It's my understanding that Kris Allen performed at the University of Central Arkansas prior to winning *American Idol*. It's possible that the students who attended that concert had no idea who Kris Allen was. They certainly could not book him at the same price now, though.

With economic times such as they are, shouldn't there be a sale on everything? This would set things up so everybody wins. In the case of college entertainment, there is such a sale, and it's called Block Booking.

What Is Block Booking?

It allows schools to work together to get good deals on campus entertainment and service contracts. It proves you should never underestimate the power of working in numbers. In fact, any prices that are published in a regional conference or National Convention *Program* are to be honored for 45 days after the event. So, in effect, NACA has a 45-day sale after each regional conference and National Convention. This is one reason why many advisors keep the conference or Convention *Program* after the conference. It allows them to know what's on sale and how much of a bargain the school is getting.

In fact, I have learned that by booking acts at the NACA National Convention, the University of Memphis saved \$7,900. The previous year, they saved \$10,850 at their regional conference and the National Convention combined.

I have spent the past two years working in the NACA Central Region as the Block Booking Representative. My sole goal while serving in this position has been to get great deals for our school members and to get work for our associates and touring acts. In pursuing this goal, I developed my own "how-to" guide for Block Booking that I'd like to share with you here. Follow these steps and you can discover just how much money you can save during the ultimate 45-day sale!

1. Attend Block Booking sessions.

Block Booking Representatives for each school should attend all Block Booking sessions. These sessions are where all the action happens. In fact, there are times when a school's failure to attend one of these meetings prevents another school from establishing a block of dates—and everyone loses. These meetings are sometimes longer than we might like, but when you consider the savings that are possible, you realize they really are not that long. And who wouldn't spend a little bit of time to save a whole lot of money?

2. Visit every booth and talk to every agent.

Many of the acts that are discussed at the Block Booking sessions are the acts that showcased earlier that day or earlier



Block Booking sessions are important and allow schools in close geographic proximity the opportunity to work together to form blocks and save money.

in the conference/Convention. However, there are literally hundreds of acts and programs that can be discovered in the Campus Activities Marketplace (CAMP) by visiting each booth and talking to the agents. Delegates should go to the Marketplace armed with their calendars, dates that are flexible and dates that are not. It is much easier to book a comedian when you know you need them for your talent show on Oct. 15 instead of "sometime in the fall." And, by having a date in mind, you might start a block for other schools that can be more flexible with their dates.

3. *Talk to your delegation.*

Every school has one Block Booking Representative who is the official voice for their Block Booking efforts at the conference/Convention. However, your school sent an entire delegation to the conference, so remember that every voice is important. After each showcase, ask your delegation members who they liked and after each Marketplace, ask them who they found that everyone else should go check out. Also, every school should work with their activities boards back on their campuses to help them understand the Block Booking process. This will empower the delegation at the conference to make decisions for the group and, ultimately, save money.

4. *Take advantage of fun things in the marketplace, but move on.*

There are many awesome, fun things going on in the Marketplace and you should definitely schedule time to do some of them. Remember, though, that your school sent you to the conference/Convention to scout talent. If you spend your entire time in line for the oxygen bar or to meet the guy from 'N Sync, you are not doing what your school has invested time and money for you to do. In today's tough economy, doing your job at the conference/Convention is more important than ever.

5. *Keep going back to CAMP.*

Be sure to visit the Marketplace several times during the conference/Convention. Even if you think you've seen it all, you probably haven't. In fact, some of the later showcasing acts may have hats or CDs for you in their booth if you go back. In addition, if you are working on dates at the conference/Convention, you can go back to that agent and update them. If your delegation decides they no longer have an interest in an act, let the agent know. Agents love to hear the word yes, but their second most favorite word is no. If you are not interested anymore, save them time and save time later at your campus, too.

6. Take time to listen to something even if it doesn't suit your style.

You might discover something new. NACA is rich with diversity. You never know what you might find if you take time to listen to the videos or CDs playing in the booths. Even if something is not your cup of tea, you might experience something that is cool. You may also discover you love an act even if you know it won't play at your school.

7. Meet someone new.

The Marketplace and the Block Booking process provide incredible opportunities to meet new people. The Block Booking meetings are arranged so that you sit near schools that are near you geographically. Not only do you meet people, you get to meet people who are near your own school. And, the Marketplace provides an opportunity to meet agents and acts. One school delegate told me he enjoyed meeting a band. While that student's school did not book the band, the student made a connection to the music business that proved helpful in his career later on.

8. Talk to other schools.

It's also important to see whom other schools are considering bringing to their campuses. This will let you know if you can discuss forming a block or if everyone is on their own regarding a particular attraction. This becomes especially important as regions work together with and against other regions. You work with other regions to allow the acts to route from one region to the next following a reasonable itinerary. You work against them in the following way: one region has an act lined up for five-of-seven dates. Your region has two isolated dates. Where would you send that act if you were an agent?

However, in the world of Block Booking, it's also important to remember the following: you may have to agree to bring a comedian who is number two on your list in order to get the band that is number one on your list. The University of Texas at San Antonio and Stephen F. Austin University (TX) recently worked together so that both schools got their top choices. They each helped the other form a block for their number one acts.

When I was a student, the hot act was Regency. Regency was expensive and the only way we were going to get them on my campus was to work a block. We also needed a comedian for our Spring Fling. So, we worked with another school to help them get the comedian they wanted and they helped us get Regency.

9. Fill out Block Booking Forms when something interests you.

And follow up on the forms you submit. When interested in an act, you should fill out a Block Booking Form. Please note that only the Block Booking Representative is authorized to sign the form. There are three different levels of interest:

- SI (Strong Interest)
- CB (Contract if a Block Forms)
- CR (Contract Requested)

It is important to note that you can always upgrade to a higher level, but you may not downgrade. Some regions are very serious about this process. When they say they would like to SI an act, it generally ends up forming a block. Other regions use this process as a calling card and simply see it as an exchange of information. It will be important to find out at the beginning of your conference how this works in your region.

10. Learn and save money along the way.

There is a lot to learn in the Block Booking process, but ultimately, it is about learning the system and then saving money along the way.

Wouldn't you like to have your school save thousands of dollars?

Wouldn't it be great to share with your friends that you made a huge deal for a big name act?

One school I know about was able to secure a winner of *Last Comic Standing* for a significantly reduced rate. It was fun for them to share with others what a great sale they had experienced. More importantly, because of the relationships that were created, that same act will continue to return to that school for a discounted rate.

NACA's Cornerstone

Block Booking was the cornerstone of NACA when it was founded nearly 50 years ago. Now, given our nation's economic situation, Block Booking is more significant than ever.

About the Author

Barry S. McKinney is the director of Student Activities at the **University of Texas-San Antonio**. He recently served the NACA Central Region as its Block Booking Representative and currently serves the Association as its National Institutes Coordinator. He holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from St. Mary's University (TX), a master's degree in educational administration from Texas A&M University and a doctorate in educational leadership from the joint program of Texas A&M University-Kingsville and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

