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Our Beginning

It was a telegram from respected talent agent Lance LeRoy (now a rightly honored Hall of Fame member), circulated in 1985 to a small cadre of influential leaders that was the spark for a meeting to form a trade organization for bluegrass. Knowing the folks who were on the list, at least some of the responses to the call would have been, ***Why do we need a trade organization??***

It's a question we regularly encounter at IBMA. Don't trade organizations traditionally represent the interests of ?industries? and organize a variety of services for people in the ?trade??

Those words ? industry and trade ? suggest something, well, more ?industrial? than music. ?Trade? organizations seem more fitting for kitchen appliance manufacturers or housing contractors. The movement to create trade organizations has enveloped the common interests of everything from coin laundries, to sports fishing, to ice cream. Some are focused on a specific geographic area and others on subjects as broad as economic development, marketing or leadership. Our favorite recent discovery is the Association of Professional Animal Waste Specialists. (Yes, there's a serious organization for professional ?pooper scoopers?!)

A message received recently from an IBMA member confessed that he initially wondered why music (and bluegrass more specifically) needed a trade organization. But after his first time accessing a wealth of connections from our database that contributed to his success he finally understood part of what IBMA does.

And finding connections is just one of the benefits.

So?What Is It That IBMA Does?

One of the basic tenets behind a trade organization is that **we are better off working together** than we otherwise would be by doing the same work separately.

Our members speak of our world more as a ?community? than an ?industry,? but regardless of the characterization, we have similarities with our counterparts in the manufacturing world. And the purposes of our seemingly disparate trade associations have parallels. Our product (though we hate calling it a ?product?) is born through a creative process, needs to be protected and exploited, requires tools (instruments, voices, sound equipment, marketing, leadership) in its production, involves an ensemble and team approach to be successful and has to be exposed, promoted and recognized to find public acceptance.

And even within our own community, IBMA represents a diverse array of professions. We each specialize in different arenas of our own world, but the many constituencies in bluegrass (artists, event producers, labels, broadcasters, luthiers, etc.) have a subject of common interest ? our music.

The foundation for **success in music is built on the ability to motivate talent, acquire knowledge and make connections**. At the core of what IBMA ?does? is a community-wide approach to fostering the ingredients to that success.

Since 1985, we have built an impressive framework of benefits for our members and the music (both collectively and individually). IBMA has made tangible contributions to the careers of artists and the success of events, labels, agents, broadcasters, merchandisers and every other facet of the music. Some can be directly attributed to IBMA and many are often times indirect and lift up the entire genre. A complete list might be fun but our point here isn't to boast about every contribution, but to point out the value of the institution we've built for our future.

That value of IBMA is largely derived from five broad categories of benefits:

- knowledge
- relationships
- visibility
- encouragement
- a way to give back.

Knowledge

IBMA has heightened the knowledge base within the industry through hundreds of live seminars, webinars, workshops, panel discussions, mentor sessions, crash courses and leadership programs. Throughout each year, information you can use to help reach your goals is also here on this website and delivered in e-blasts to keep you informed about opportunities and developments. And not to be overlooked, there's the informal sharing that happens between members who wouldn't have known each other had it not been for a meeting facilitated by an IBMA event or program. **Sharing information is the bridge to new relationships and better opportunities.**

Relationships

Relationships are critical, and fostering them runs a close second to talent as a required ingredient for success in music. **IBMA organizes more ways to connect and keep in touch on a day-to-day basis than anyone**, while the annual World of Bluegrass week is the premiere meeting ground for people interested in our music. And IBMA is party to hundreds of phone calls, meetings and emails each year with outside interests who want to make a connection with our music.

And what spurs relationships like well planned promotions and visibility with the decision makers you need to reach?

Visibility

The World of Bluegrass conference heightens the visibility of every facet of the industry through showcases, festival appearances, private functions, special events and exhibit opportunities. Those benefits may seem to center on artists, but there are also sponsor relations that spring from the week, broadcasters and media who use the week as a platform and labels that foster their products and build sales, to name just a few angles used for promotions.

IBMA doesn't serve as the marketing team for any one artist, event or company, but it is the one worldwide organization working for the greater appreciation for our music.

Members have consistently made it one of our highest priorities to assure IBMA's resources open doors for the music with new broadcast outlets (radio, television, internet), with concert and festival promoters, at retail outlets and in the mainstream press.

We've showcased talent at other industry conventions, put significant resources to work in campaigns to radio, communicated regularly with television outlets and producers, built relations and special programs with music retailers and provided volumes of research to members for sponsorship development needs. Again, to quantify them would be of great interest, but the point is that by working together and pooling resources we're all stronger and the better for it.

Encouragement

We've labeled one of the primary benefits of having created IBMA as "encouragement," which may be confusing. We use that word to wrap our arms around the purpose of one of the most visible things we do, which is to honor our own through organized recognition each year. There's undeniably a promotional angle to awards and value in opening doors with events, retail and the media.

But equally - if not more - important is that honors and awards can be a great boost to confidence, they elevate self-esteem, motivate us to continue to work hard and lift up our pride. In short, they encourage us.

And you would think it might be just the recipients that benefit, but we're confident **the people offering encouragement get as much or more than those receiving it.** We, as an industry, are better ourselves when we honor - with integrity and genuine gratitude - those who have made great contributions. And in the eyes of the world beyond our own, we certainly do our music a great favor when we uplift our own.

A Way To Give Back

Which brings us to the fifth element in this basket of benefits - "a way to give back."

Among the obscure legalese of IBMA's articles of incorporation where our founders first addressed the purposes of the organization, one of the phrases reads:

"To create among bluegrass music professionals a general awakening and awareness as to their responsibilities to the industry and to public service activities."

That seems a curious clause for such a document, and we can't imagine that people in our music were averse to helping each other and the broader public before there was an IBMA. If we were lacking, maybe there was a need for more organization and, in that department, we should be most proud of what we've collectively spawned.

For history and preservation, see our sister organization - the **International Bluegrass Music Museum** in Owensboro, Kentucky which IBMA helped establish and continues to support in a variety of ways. To help our own family members in need, talk to the **Bluegrass Trust Fund** which has granted hundreds of thousands to take care of emergency situations. And most recently, a new non-profit called the **Foundation for Bluegrass** is connecting philanthropic giving to bluegrass focused efforts of public benefit. One of their centerpieces is focusing on the youth of the world and the Bluegrass in Schools programs which have touched hundreds of thousands of young people and spurred a wildfire of programs through scores of other organizations around the world.

There are also scores of causes that IBMA has directly contributed to - from simply sending a few extra t-shirts for a radio station fundraiser to cooperating with other music industry trades to raise aid for major world disasters. It would be an impressive list, but again, the point is that **we have forged a "can-do" tradition of working together** on such things.

And to end on the point about "giving back," let's close in celebration of the fact that as a community of music industry professionals, companies, organizations and zealous fans **we understand our duty to one another and to the music we have inherited**. Yes, we find joy in arguing about what it is, wrestling with what our priorities should be and the inevitable politics of business and human relations. These are not negatives, but a healthy sign of just how seriously we take our responsibilities.

Our Future

As we glance to the future, we know we will have our individual differences and no organization is immune to mistakes and problems. The general economy and overarching changes in the business of music present challenges like none we've ever seen. Our financial resources are limited, and members rightly will judge how much they can invest and commit to being involved each year. Given the landscape, **we need active and engaged members and leadership with vision and the ability to forge consensus**.

The future of bluegrass is at once both ominous and exciting.

But what other community is as open when it comes to sharing information and advice, pitching in even when they have nothing to gain, and is just as happy to see others get the credit they deserve as to receive it themselves? And musical talent? have we got it or what?

A colleague from another music industry trade organization recently complimented IBMA saying how he envied the **genuine community spirit** we've fostered and the **integrity and professionalism** the organization has fostered for the music it serves. We very often hear the same from within our own ranks. If that's a fair summary, then it's hard not to be both proud and optimistic.

Our founders set out in 1985 to create a trade organization and we have built so much more. We have framed and filled in the architecture of a thriving community.

Thanks for your interest. Let us welcome and encourage you to get involved!

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