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# VIP-MAGAZINE

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VALUE  
ADDED  
TALENT  
30 YEARS

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WITH FABIEN MICLET

one of the very few people  
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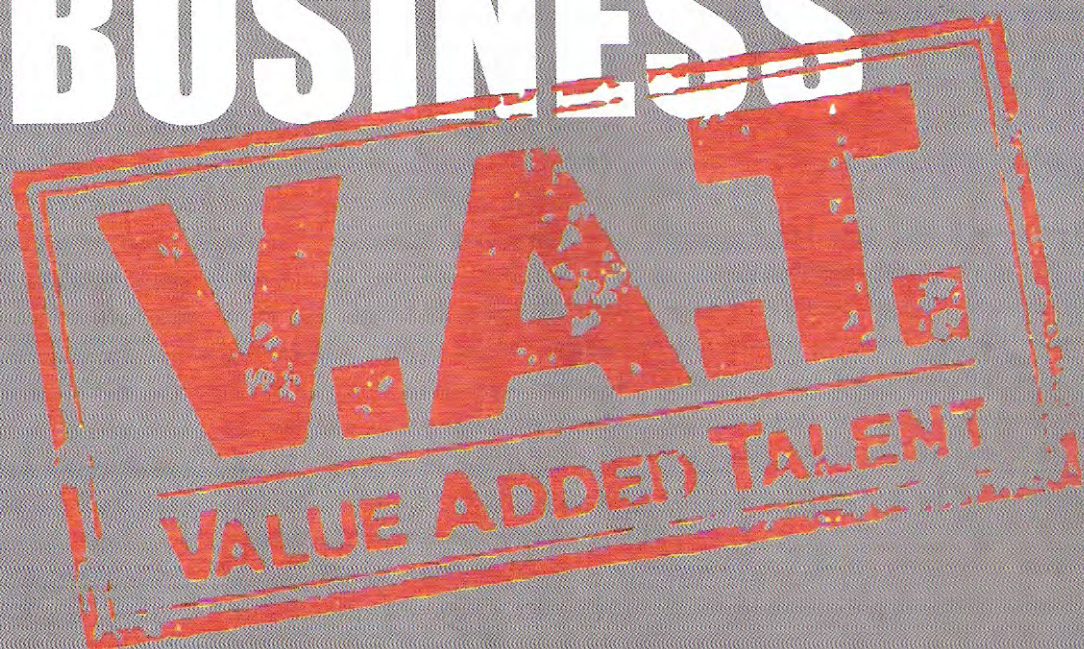
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# LONDON BASED AGENCY VALUE ADDED TALENT CELEBRATES THIRTY YEARS IN BUSINESS



## VIP-News talks to Dan Silver, Founder and MD of Value Added Talent:

**Thirty years is quite a substantial time to have maintained and developed an independently operated booking agency, but your personal experience in the industry goes back even longer than that, to the time when people like you and I would refer to ourselves as 'bookers'. How and when did you get involved in the business, and what did you do pre VAT?**

– My career path was to go to university - UEA (University of East Anglia) in 1972, to read 'Sociology' or rather to promote the groups as Entertainments Officer, to get experience, and to get into the music industry. I worked for my first Agency in the summer vacation of 1973 but decided that then it held limited prospects and returned to university to finish my degree. Graduating in 1975, when 'graduate unemployment' was first talked about as a serious issue, I worked some jobs I hated a lot, whilst still looking into music options. I stumbled into a second opportunity of working with an independent Agency (well almost all Agencies were independent in those days, corporates

hadn't really invaded) in the Autumn of 1977 and I grabbed it with both hands. I have worked full time as an Agent ever since. I got some great experience at Albion, the Agency that invented pub rock and was so influential with the growth of punk, and later worked at MAM and then TBA alongside a young John Giddings, (MD of Solo, and Organiser of The Isle of Wight Festival.) before creating Value Added Talent in 1983.

**You appear to have maintained successful long term relationships with particular acts and managements, how important has that been to the way you operate?**

– As my saying goes, "If you want loyalty, get a dog" – this must be true because it has been borrowed and repeated by John Giddings ever since! I have had my share of upsets over 30 years of trading so I do value very highly continuing to work with the acts that I have grown over many years. Most acts I work with I have grown on a long term basis and from the start of their careers, I am thinking

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of Depeche Mode, and Vince Clarke's' two other bands Yazoo and Erasure, although I no longer work with those acts today. Orbital has always been a pleasure to represent and I am now booking their 25th anniversary tour since their first release in 1989, in 2014. Steve Hillage too is a long-term client that I have helped with other projects as diverse as Gong's 40th anniversary tour and currently in 2014 his new and exciting fusion project with Rovo from Japan.

**In a music business that has seen so many changes over the years Agency still appears to be the sector that has remained consistent in the way that it operates - although the numbers are different as acts have become more reliant on live income, the Agent is still the middle man between the Act and the promoter, and quite often that relationship is based on trust as agency contracts still seem to be very rare documents. What are the main changes that you have seen in the Agency business?**

– There is a fragile and tenuous hold of influence by the Agent over any Artist and this can go badly wrong or be frustrated for many reasons beyond the control of the Agent. Personally I still prefer to agree contracts with new acts as it recognises the huge investment this represents from me, and it also provides the incentive for me

to go further than otherwise is customary or usual in this business. I think of myself as a 'managing' Agent. A huge amount of the work I do represents unpaid work, in the sense that we coordinate marketing campaigns, advise Artists on their strategies and partners and make big efforts to secure data for the Artist, secure favourable deals wherever possible and generally act as an expert consultant in strategy, marketing, international promotion and so on.

When I started in this industry the record companies were Kings and Agents were very reliant on the record labels marketing and promotion to establish an act. Nowadays the Agent has far more influence as the growth of the Internet represents the chance for Artists to assume control of their own careers. The expert input, timing and strategy an Agent can bring to any plan, and the connections we can make today internationally bring added value and represent a big asset to any Artist. The Agent is the key coordinator between the act and its public, and I try to represent the audience viewpoint to the Artist as much as the Artist's to the audience. The key skill is in making the best decision about when and where an Act should play. Associated with that is experience and knowledge about best choice of partners and buildings, campaigns and marketing, as well as logistics, tax and work permits, and making sure a tour is achievable in the first place. There



Dan with his FAMILY at Dan's anniversary party

has been an enormous amount of consolidation and a great deal of money buying up sectors of the industry, which to me undermines the entrepreneurial spirit. The merger of Live Nation with Ticketmaster was a huge signpost that this process will continue and I don't believe this to be in the best interests of either the music fans or the Artists themselves. LN now buying into successful Management companies is further evidence of the continuing process. Without shareholders subsidy this process would not be taking place, the role of capitalism in this industry has skewed the market and concentrated a lot of market power which I don't believe to be in the industry's best interest.

**Do you think that the growth of the festival market has impacted on the traditional touring periods, and has this affected the way you plan your tour schedules?**

– The live industry has swung heavily towards the Summer Festival circuit and this has certainly changed planning and schedules. Appearing at Festivals uses up the rarity value of an Artist and has also changed the pattern of touring. The Summer is now usually our busiest work period, and it used to be Autumn, Spring and then Summer, in that order. I liken Festivals today to the 5-screen cinema concept, as the diversity of acts across a number of different stages is now the norm. Whilst there are now what seems like 'six million live bands' only a very small number

of these command enough of an audience to drive ticket sales and the other consequence of this is an increase in bids for exclusivity and longer lock out periods to other events. At the same time, some events are capable of generating customer loyalty by having high standards of infrastructure and a good diversity, so in that sense the event then becomes a destination in itself and the acts become less important.

**Are you still on the look out for new additions to the roster and how do you source new acts? Are you at all worried about a possible lack of new talent as record companies are not developing acts as they once did, and the smaller venue circuit seems to be having problems?**

– I am very choosy about any new acts, but at the same time I remain open to that possibility. In general, someone whose judgement I respect will tell me about an act and I will then look into it. I do evaluate a lot of situations and often pass. I don't think I am aggressive in the way I look for opportunity – for example I have never knowingly poached an Act, although I have learned about an unhappy band and then looked into it. Yes it is harder to break an act these days as the conventional indicators mean a great deal less. Plus the audience themselves seem to be less 'tribal' in their dedication, meaning that bands can have a great media success and then mean nothing very quickly. There is a divorce between



Dan Silver. On his left Bob Young, On his right is Ian Huffman.

*'fans' – which I remind myself is an abbreviation of fanatic - and bands. Decreased audience loyalty and increased turnover of artists makes the traditional building of an act much harder today.*

**Do you have particular plans for the future, or is it all business as usual? Do you think you'll make another 30 years :) or, presuming there's still a business will you hand on the baton to an up and coming agent - or booker?**

*– I am very thankful that my children are pursuing their own career choices and not wanting to emulate mine. My eldest son is now a professional poker player, he does this using maths and with panache and has had some very tidy wins. As he has been fully independent for the past three years it is a great reward to see him making his own*

*way. My younger son is now completing his schooling and has a huge interest in becoming a film director which I am encouraging. There certainly are some family dynasties in this industry and I am happy not to be amongst them. I expect that VAT will remain a personal operation and very likely come to an end when I decide I have had enough excitement. But I expect to be around for another decade, and would not be surprised to stay involved for even longer than that. As I have said for many years, it's "still not a real job". It provides me with the opportunity to make my own destiny, so it is unlikely I will let go willingly and of my own volition. I suppose I can now actually claim 40 years of service rather than the 30 years in the headline of Value Added Talent's trading – so 50 years would be a good target to achieve.*

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