

Why the Fast, Cheap, Good Pyramid Doesn't Apply in the Music Business

by Dennis Winge

When shopping for any particular product or service, we've all heard the expression, "Do you want it Fast, Cheap, or Good? You may pick two." In other words, you can have it done quickly and cheaply, but it won't be done well. You can find someone who will do it very well, and it won't cost too much, but you certainly won't get it any time soon. And if you need something done very well very quickly, you're certainly going to pay accordingly.

This dynamic does not hold up in the music business for a variety of reasons. We will take each portion in turn.

Fast. When you are looking for a music service such as a band for your event, or someone to play on your recording, choosing 'fast' as one of your two possibilities is not really an option because music is a time art. When you are looking to hire a band to play for four hours at an event, it is impossible, of course, for any one band to get the job done any quicker than another. Similarly, in a recording studio, if the song is 3 minutes, then both a pro musician and a cheap musician will have to record parts that last at least that duration.

But it goes deeper than that. Oftentimes, the pro is usually able to work at a slightly faster rate than a cheaper musician, because he has the experience and knowledge, and knows how to work efficiently. This doesn't necessarily mean that he will be cheaper upfront because he has spent less time on it. The only such people are those who are not going to work for cheap in the first place. We will discuss this in the next section.

In the end, if you look at the total value that you will now have, they could include memories of the event or a recording that you'll have for the rest of your life. Compare that to the cost of doing things poorly upfront and trying to fix them later, or having to deal with a less than satisfactory service in the first place, like guests complaining that a band is too loud right in the middle of an event that you are hosting and have put a lot of time and money into coordinating, not to mention supposed to be enjoying.

Thus, the higher cost upfront will "save" you in the long run. It's the equivalent in the computer business, when they say, "Garbage in, garbage out." The reasons why 'fast' is irrelevant in this equation is that: a) fast can't necessarily be predetermined in advance; b) those who are able to work a little faster won't necessarily be cheaper upfront, although they will save you in the long run, and generally they will be among the best you can find; c) the artistic nature of music means that it doesn't conform to a timetable as easily as a business transaction, therefore using 'fast' as a criteria doesn't serve anyone, especially you, the customer.

Cheap. A pro musician doesn't work cheap, because he knows the years that it took to get to the place where he is in terms of experience, knowledge, and skill. It takes years and years of time, education, gear, and paying dues. It's not that the experienced musician now has a sense of entitlement, but he does understand the value of what he brings to every situation, and he knows the massive amount of time and money he invested to be able to bring that value. So by going for 'cheap' when shopping for a music service or product, you won't get 'good,' and as we already noted, 'fast' is irrelevant.

Good. This is the only important thing. Years after your event or your recording session or live event, you will never remember how much money you saved on musicians. But you will always remember how dissatisfied or unhappy you feel with something you tried to save money on where you didn't get the best you could have gotten. Whether it is an event like a wedding or a recording, you will never again be able to change your feelings about what was delivered later in life. Thus, paying upfront for a pro allows you to avoid the opportunity cost (the disadvantage you incur from not doing things the best way upfront) for the rest of your life.

I'm not suggesting you just blindly pay the highest prices without doing any homework. Everyone knows there are people who will take a high fee and still not worry about the quality of their work, in any industry. On the flip side, it is also possible to find extremely talented people who simply either don't recognize their value, or for some circumstantial reason, are willing to accept less than their value for their services. There are two potential obstacles there:

- 1) you have to do quite a bit of homework before you may be able to find such a person;
- 2) you never really know upfront whether that person is posing to be a talented person giving you a great deal, or someone who is trying to mask the fact that they are underqualified for the position.

This is a risk you take, and it can sometimes work out wonderfully, but oftentimes, works out very poorly, and you end up blaming yourself. So never mind 'cheap' or 'fast' when it comes to musicians. Only focus on the 'good,' and you will be happy forever.