

The Online Cultural Marketplace: Performing Artists and Presenters Doing Business Digitally

by
Don Druker
TOP Program Officer



Like most other state and regional arts agencies, the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) has struggled to develop an efficient, workable system to link artists and the theaters, community centers, libraries, churches, schools, festivals, and coffee houses that hire them to provide cultural programming. They publish a *New England Touring Roster* and distribute it in hard copy by mail, which lists over 900 individual artists and groups available for hire throughout the region.

To get on the roster, an artist must go through a review or “jurying” process by their state arts agency. Then, the roster is made available to arts presenters, in the hope that it will generate bookings for listed artists. However, only 27 percent of New England presenters say they use the current roster. The act of identifying, observing, and scheduling an artist via this paper-based methodology just doesn’t work anymore.

The **Online Cultural Marketplace** will bring this system into the 21st century by more efficiently linking performing artists in the region with presenters. The Marketplace is a transactional online

booking service that allows artists to market their work and interact directly with a wider variety of presenters. It provides presenters with a management tool to locate, schedule, promote, and track their artist bookings. The outcome will be increased income for artists through bookings, and improved cultural offerings for New Englanders.



Initially the system will be tested with NEFA and six state arts agencies

partnering with a group of 20 artists and presenters. Following this test, the Marketplace will be open to 930 artists currently included in the *New England States Touring Roster* and will be marketed to over a hundred potential presenters.

The system will allow artists to maintain their portfolios online, including low-cost, high-quality audio and video samples of their work. Presenters will use the tool to locate appropriate artists, view work samples, and negotiate and draw up contracts. Both artists and presenters will also have access to technical assistance, including tips on how to document their work and write contracts.