



Artist Management vs. Artist Consulting

The key differences & the benefits for local and developing artists.

In 2025, the music industry has evolved into an intricate ecosystem where artists navigate both creative and business complexities. Two distinct roles - artist management and artist consulting - play pivotal parts in supporting musicians. While these roles share similarities, they diverge in their focus, approach and long-term implications for artists. Understanding these differences is essential for artists to make informed decisions about their careers.

The Role of an Artist Manager

An artist manager is the linchpin of an artist's business operations. Essentially acting as the CEO of the artist's brand, a manager's primary responsibility is to oversee and coordinate all aspects of the artist's career. This includes:

- **Negotiations and Gatekeeping:** Handling contracts and discussions with booking agents, record labels, publishers, PR companies, distributors, and other industry stakeholders.
- **Strategic Guidance:** Offering developmental advice tailored to the artist's goals and ensuring the project's messaging aligns with its vision.
- **Business Oversight:** Managing finances, sourcing opportunities, and delegating responsibilities within the team.

Managers often step into areas that lack expertise within an artist's team—whether it's PR, digital strategy, or design. This flexibility is both a strength and a challenge, as it may stretch the manager's capacity beyond their core role. Importantly, managers typically earn 15-25% of an artist's income, which aligns their financial success with the artist's success.

The Role of an Artist Development Consultant

An artist consultant, on the other hand, provides specialised expertise on a short-term or project-specific basis. Unlike managers, consultants are paid upfront fees or retainers for their services, offering artists a clear and fixed cost structure.

Their role focuses on:

- **Upskilling Artists:** Empowering artists by sharing knowledge and strategies tailored to specific areas, such as marketing, branding, finances or touring logistics.
- **Goal-Oriented Collaboration:** Working over agreed-upon periods to achieve clearly defined objectives.

For example, Cartel Australia offers Artist Development (AD) Sessions—one-off consulting sessions designed to provide affordable, actionable insights. These sessions help artists address specific challenges or build their skills in key areas. It essentially allows us to put on our management hats for artists (without technically being their management, and help them develop their own operations. Ongoing consulting services, typically structured over six-month engagements, allow for deeper collaboration to meet strategic goals.

Key Differences Between Managers and Consultants

1. Compensation Models:

- Managers earn a percentage of the artist's revenue, incentivising long-term collaboration but often leading to financial strain in the early stages of an artist's career.
- Consultants charge a flat fee or retainer, making costs predictable and avoiding revenue sharing.

2. Scope of Work:

- Managers oversee all facets of an artist's career, acting as the main delegator and strategist.
- Consultants focus on specific areas, such as digital strategy, branding, or audience engagement, without taking on overarching responsibilities.

3. Long-Term Commitment:

- Managers typically enter long-term agreements, which may involve signing over a percentage of intellectual property (IP).
- Consultants work on a project basis, providing flexibility without binding contracts.

Challenges in Artist Management

For developing acts, artist management often poses challenges. The percentage-based payment structure may not adequately compensate managers for the time, effort, and resources they invest. This imbalance can lead to strained relationships or unmet expectations. Furthermore, early-stage artists who lack a clear vision or plan may struggle to fully leverage the benefits of management.

"We have found that for developing acts at a local and even a national level, the current format of artist management isn't conducive to the best work. On one side, you have an artist with certain expectations (realistic or otherwise) trying to build something. Then you have a manager who is expected to put full-time hours of commitment in for 15% of an artist that makes \$0 in income. This leads to managers having to take on other work, leaving the artist feeling like they have been shelved. We have found the consulting model allows us, one, to spread our wings across a wider array of artists that we think are cool instead of being limited to a small roster, and two, to be remunerated for the value we provide.

Management is great and absolutely important when there is something to actually manage." - Anthony Agostino, Cartel Australia Co-Founder

The Case for Artist Consulting

For many developing artists, consulting offers a lower-risk, higher-reward alternative to traditional management. Consultants bring extensive industry knowledge and focus on building the artist's skills and strategy without taking a financial stake in their IP. This approach is particularly beneficial for:

- Artists who are in the early stages of their careers and lack a solidified plan.
- Artists seeking guidance on specific challenges without committing to long-term contracts.
- Artists who want to retain full control over their business and creative decisions.
- Artists who think they need management but aren't actually ready

By engaging consultants, artists can gain the tools and insights needed to create a solid foundation for their careers, ultimately preparing them for future collaborations with managers or other team members.

In 2025, the choice between artist management and consulting hinges on an artist's stage of development, goals, and resources. While managers serve as long-term partners invested in the artist's success, consultants provide targeted expertise to address immediate needs. For developing artists, consulting often proves to be a practical first step—offering valuable insights without the commitment of revenue sharing or long-term contracts. As the music industry continues to evolve, understanding these roles and their unique benefits will empower artists to make strategic decisions that align with their aspirations.