

# Earning Group Sales

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## Why invest in the group market?

1. **Steady sales:** group tours are less susceptible to the dangers of ordinary travel. When gas prices go up a family of four may decide it's not worth the trip, but a bus group is already on the way. When the economy dips people travel in groups to save money.
2. **Shoulder Season Sales:** groups tend to travel in early spring and late fall to take advantage of lower hotel rates. So while locals may decide to stay inside, tour groups will don their sweaters and enjoy the show. You may need to create an event for the shoulder season if your show is summer only.
3. **Nix lost sales:** Every seat not filled is lost potential revenue. You may have to lower your price per seat a bit, but you'll make up for it in number of seats filled.
4. **Repeat business:** If an operator has a great experience at your venue...**THEY WILL COME BACK.**
5. **Built in word of mouth marketing:** Imagine 52 people coming back from a great experience at your theatre and telling all of their friends about it.

## What does it take?

- **Patience:** to make the most of the group travel market, it takes about three years. Part of it comes from the way they plan their trips, and part of it comes from building trust in you, and trust takes time. This business is all about personal relationships. Go make them. The majority of people working in this niche are "people people"...otherwise they wouldn't be working on group tours!
- **Product:** making sure your product is group-friendly
  - **Pricing:** the reason group travel happens is because a tour operator can turn a profit by buying in bulk. Set up tiered pricing. If a tour operator buys 30 tickets, they get a 10% discount, if they buy 40 tickets, they get a 15% discount, and so on. (Resource: [http://intranet.grouptour.com/PDF/expert\\_tips4.pdf](http://intranet.grouptour.com/PDF/expert_tips4.pdf))
  - **Package:** find another attraction or hotel who's also interested in the group travel market, and create a package between you. If an operators stays at Hotel X AND buys tickets to your show, they get a discount. This will help you bring in groups that may have otherwise passed you by.
  - **Product:** add something special to the mix. The Shaw Festival in Niagra-on-the-lake in Ontario adds a once in a lifetime experience available only to groups. They'll take a group backstage to the costume design department to talk with the head designer, all the while serving tea and scones. Do something special they'll never forget.
  - **Creativity:** Create something entirely new. Have a pipe organ? Try pipes and pizza. Groups love eating on the stage. An experience from the stage is more exciting than you might think for those who don't get to see it every day!
  - **Make sure your physical lay out is ready for groups.**

- Promote:
  - Partner: connect with your local DMO (Destination Marketing Organization). The DMO is a tour operators connection to you as part of your area. Build a relationship with them and you'll never look back.
  - Trade shows: find a local bus group and start getting in on the fun. Meet face-to-face with tour operators and get their contact information. This will help you start building relationships, and operators buy based on relationships. Your media consultant at Group Tour Media can help you find the right groups for you. Trade shows can be expensive. Talk to your local CVB about partnering with them...or put together a group of attractions who can help defer costs.
  - Advertise: Put yourself in front of operators at every possible intersection. The more they see you, the more likely they are to call you. When planning a group tour, tour operators use these resources to help them plan (based on a Group Tour Media survey):
    - 78.4% use magazines/trade publications
    - 78.1% use websites (yours and others, including your DMO)
    - 61.3% use online reviews
    - 54.5% use trade shows
    - 51.4% use newsletters
    - 17.5% use social media.
- Pick up the Phone:
  - The key word in group sales is "SALES." Operators buy based on relationships and trust, and the only way to start building that is to pick up the phone and call them. Start a conversation about how you can give their groups something they'll never forget, and something they can't get anywhere else.
- Hit the Road:
  - Take three days, all of your information, a lot of coffee and go visit tour group offices. This requires planning and calls in advance. Map out your trip, on a good day you should hit 4-5 offices. In three days you could hit upwards of 20 offices. Valuable one on one time with operators within your market. This is a fraction of the cost of a trip to the ABA conference and could be more valuable. If you do this twice a year, in no time you'll be on a first name basis with the most important people in your target markets.
  - Who is the biggest operator within 4 hours of you? Find out and go visit them. Find out what they need to see from you and see if you can make it happen. They will be honest with you, they want more options for their customers!
- Invite Them!:
  - Invite the key players at all the top companies in your market to attend the show as your guest. Nothing will sell your show better than a first-hand experience.



**\*A NOTE ON RAIN OUTS**

It is vitally important that you have a plan for rain on the nights when you have groups attending. Perhaps it's as simple as your promise a refund for those who book under a group contract. Perhaps you have a local movie theatre who you can set up an agreement with to show a fun group friendly movie that night. Get creative about it. Operators want to be certain that they'll provide an experience for their customers...AND SO DO YOU!!

Start employing some of these strategies and use a bit of patience. Group travel markets are about long-term gain. For more information or elaboration, call Group Tour Media (800-767-3489) and ask to be introduced to your media consultant. They'll help introduce you to the group travel market.

**Additional Resources:**

- Be a group-friendly supplier: [http://intranet.grouptour.com/PDF/expert\\_tips1.pdf](http://intranet.grouptour.com/PDF/expert_tips1.pdf)
- Tiered Rates: [http://intranet.grouptour.com/PDF/expert\\_tips4.pdf](http://intranet.grouptour.com/PDF/expert_tips4.pdf)
- 7 Less Than Simple Steps to Group Sales Success:  
<http://www.grouptour.com/onboard/ben/2014-03.php#.VJ2IJMADew>
- Top 5: Spend Your Time and Money Wisely with These 4 Top 5's:  
<http://www.grouptour.com/onboard/ben/2013-12.php#.VJ2IFMADew>
- Get Your Press Release Published by Group Tour Media:  
<http://www.grouptour.com/onboard/ben/2013-10.php#.VJ2IAsADew>

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