



A Guide To Hiring A Function/Wedding/Party Band.

It's just booking the band how hard can it be?

Just read that line above again and think what would happen if it all went wrong on the night.

When organising an event and trying to minimise the costs it's easy to pick the cheapest band available on your date, but with these reduced costs have the band also cut back in other areas? This guide helps you ask the correct questions to ensure your chosen band are able to offer the service that you would expect at the price quoted.

The guide also highlights some of the key points involved in hiring a band that you may not have considered and will help you plan the finer details of your event and seamlessly fit the band and the music into the proceedings

Right, you've got this far so lets get to it...

1. Are you hiring the band directly or via an agent?

Either way is acceptable. Some bands don't use agents, some do. In either case you must have a contract. It'll detail times and costing at the bare minimum. But you will want it beforehand and do read it and check it. It should include overtime if required. If you are not happy with it then discuss it with the band before you agree to it.

Totico have a standard contract, you will find an example at the end of this document. Further we are happy to work with any agent that may be involved.

2. Go and see them.

This sounds so obvious but you may be surprised at the number of people who don't go to see the band first. This is usually because there are so many things to do, especially for weddings, that going to see the band falls low on the priority list and often gets left out.

If you are struggling to find a suitable date try and turn up at a rehearsal. Some bands will allow it some will not. However please do have a bit of an open mind at a rehearsal as the band will be playing stuff that's 'in development'. Every band has to learn new stuff.

Totico will attempt to provide a list of performances that you can attend. We also will request that we can bring up to 4 guests to your function. This allows us to be seen by others like you in an actual real environment. We also put on our website public events that we are performing at. We certainly have no problems with anyone turning up at rehearsals. We always have coffee/tea there and often biscuits and cakes!

3. Asking for previous satisfaction reports etc.

Its often suggested to obtain information in the form of testimonials etc.

Many bands are only too willing to give you testimonials. But like anything really, they are unlikely to give you the bad ones. If you do happen to know someone that's used a particular band before do ask them what were the arrangements, contracts etc.

Totico will ask you to fill in a satisfaction questionnaire. This is mainly used internally for our own purposes. In some cases we may put it on our website. Also on our website is photos of past events we've done and we'll gladly provide contact details for references if you'd like them. In some cases though, certain private parties etc, we obviously can't without getting permission first.



4. If we have a band, do we need a disco as well?

It's entirely optional. However in our personal experience we'd "mostly" say no.

Totico can arrange a disco as part of your package or, if you would prefer to arrange your own disco, we are happy to work with them and possibly share equipment reducing the total amount of equipment. However having a disco isn't crucial so if you'd prefer not to then simply, don't, and save the money.

5. Type of music?

This subject is, contract aside, the most important thing in this whole document. Its also not as straightforward as you may first think.

If you want a Ceilidh night then hire a Ceilidh band. If you want a Rock night hire a Rock band. However, if it's a wedding; a function; a party or some other general type night then you really do need a wedding/function/party type band, and that's something completely different. They'll not stick to a single genre. They'll not play rock songs all night or jazz or soul or, well you get it... A wedding/function/party band will play music that's across the board.

Now there is method behind this and it goes as follows:

Of your ten closest friends, how many of them have the same taste in music as yourselves? This is probably two or three, maybe four at best. Now ask the same question about your ten closest family members and almost certainly the number goes down to 1 or 2. Expand that up to 100 guests at a wedding and you have about 10% to 20% of people that like the same music as you. At other functions you may get as high as 30%. In other words most of the people in the room like something else.

Are you seriously going to hire a band that plays a style of music that most people you've invited don't actually like?

The overall aim of a wedding/function/party band is to make the party swing. They are also not there just to provide music, a DJ can do that. They are there to provide entertainment, and further it's to all the guests. Although it sounds horrible they really aren't there for you, they are there for the guests. Especially at a wedding where the chances are high that the "happy couple" usually leave long before the evening is over anyway.

Totico play a variety of music spanning different decades and genres to ensure there is something for everybody, and to keep the dance floor busy.



6. Set lengths.

This depends on your requirements and schedule. Party bands can do anything from one set to three or more. The most often is two sets. The first being often 45mins to an hour. The second being an hour up to an hour and a half. Discuss the requirements and have it written into the contract.

We would normally go with two sets. Allowing a break between for food etc. However we are happy to fit around your requirements. This will be discussed when booking and written into the contract.

7. The first song at a wedding.

Some bands will play them, others will not. It's really dangerous ground for a wedding band. The bands version of the song will certainly be different to the original or the version that you like. Either play it on a MP3 player or get the disco to play it and it'll be as you wanted it to sound.

Totico will only play the 'First Song' on agreement that it has been heard at a rehearsal beforehand. Further, we'll not be disappointed if the Totico version isn't what you wanted. Some people like them some don't. We will also be happy to play your track from a CD / MP3 through our PA.

8. Requests (Play and Don't Play).

Some bands will take requests. Many will not. It's difficult enough to sort out arrangements for songs beforehand without on the fly requests. However, as long as it's not the first song then, given enough time, many bands will have a go at learning something requested. Almost all will honour a "Don't play" request.

Totico will not take requests on the night. We will discuss requests beforehand and if possible (i.e. we can learn them in time) we will include them into the programme for the evening. We will honour any "Don't play" requests.

9. Who controls the sound?

A small band say, 2 to 3 musicians, will be "reasonably" able to control the sound that's put into the room. Once a band gets larger than that it starts getting more difficult. Find out how the band is going to control the sound. If they say they'll do it from the stage then ask how they know what the audience is hearing? **This is really important.** If the band gets the 'mix' or 'volume' wrong it can be disastrous for the event. It can lead to simple complaints like; "I cant hear the singer properly" to more serious "I can't hear a thing!" or worse "I can't hear myself think!". In some cases it may actual constitute a breach of the venue noise regulations.

Totico has dedicated sound and lighting engineers. These will set up at an agreed location where they can control everything and they'll know exactly what the crowd can hear and see.



10. Band size.

Its not always true that a "bigger band a bigger/better sound". But larger bands do often provide a sound that smaller bands have to either emulate or just go without. For example; a horn section changes the dynamics considerably. A smaller band may just play the horn parts on a keyboard, use a recorded track, or just not include those parts in their performance.

Larger bands may also cost more. Again, this goes back to point 2 here... Go and see them.

One further point regarding band size is that people often get put off with larger bands because they assume that the space requirements will be very large. This is wrong. It's worth asking a band to comment on a location and the space requirements.

Totico can fit into a 5m x 3m area. Its tight, yes, but its possible and we've done it lots of times.

11. Sickness and unavailability?

Ask the band how they'd manage if someone was ill on the day or could not attend. They should have considered this and have some sort of contingency plan. You really want to know how it would impact your event.

Totico has deputies that can step in for most roles. We've also done a "people risk assessment" (if you really want a copy just ask when talking to us). That allows us to know what we should do in the event of someone not being available as the date of an event comes near. It also includes a section on what would happen if something awful was to happen to one of our members at a gig.

...and yes, it has happened!. We've had a singer taken to hospital between sets. We worked our plan and all was well. (And for those that must know... she was fine!)

12. Equipment – What is there, certs, and what happens on failure?

Many venues themselves will require a full list of equipment to be used by the band and all the relevant PAT certificates for it. In fact, there are two legal requirements at play here. The health and safety at work act says that anyone working (i.e. the band) must do so in a safe manner and is responsible for their electrical equipment (and other equipment) insofar that it is safe to use. Additionally, the electricity at work act basically states that electrical equipment must be fit for purpose and safe to use. This is basically what the PAT certificates are all about.

Now a small point.... Things like this are never an issue until something goes wrong. If something awful happened, lets say an electrical fire, then PAT certificates will almost certainly be talked about by the lawyers. Its real easy here, ask the band can they supply them. If they can't or won't then I'd suggest not using that band. And please, do look at them when the band turns up. If you've not got the time yourself, ask someone else if possible. It is a burden I agree, and 99.9% of the time nothing happens. But in the event that something occurs... well.

Also ask any potential band what they do in the event of equipment failure. You don't need your event stopped because the guitar amp has failed. What happens if the main PA fails? The band should have considered this, most (not all) party bands have done some planning for it. A main PA failure at 11pm on a Saturday night pretty much excludes getting another one in quickly.



Totico has undergone a "fault risk assessment" process. (Its boring, but yes, you can request a copy of it if you'd like to see it.) We also carry with us direct replacements for all major items. For example: We bring two main PA amp systems. The backup will be at the venue and the changeover time is in the order of a few minutes. We have a backup mixing desk, backup lighting controllers and an array of smaller backup items all brought to the venue. All our items are PAT certified and the certificates will be presented beforehand in a "Client pack" that we put together for you.

13. Set up time.

Ask the band how long they will take to set up. Some bands can set up quickly others can't. This may or may not impact or be impacted by other activities during the day of your event and/or access availability of the venue. Say wedding breakfast / dinner is in the same room as the evening event. This can be managed but it does need a bit of time planning it beforehand.

For a smaller show (no backdrop and a few lights) we can set up in around an hour and a half. For larger shows (full set up) it usually takes a between 3 to 5 hours to set up. We prefer to start around mid-day allowing us time to set up and sound check then go and eat. We will liaise with the venue and arrange set-up at a convenient time to ensure no disruption to other activities.

14. Clothing.

If you have a preference for what the band wears do discuss it.

Totico have a no jeans policy (unless its requested – which it never has been). We'll often wear black bottoms and a single colour top. Although the girls tend to like to "dress it up a little". We'll try to accommodate most requests just discuss it when talking to us.

15. Other Requirements.

Ask about and confirm any other requirements that the band may have. Some bands will require, for example, food or a place to change. Get these agreed beforehand and written down.

All bands will require a contact name at the venue and a contact for the event. For weddings; it is suggested that the 'Best Man' is **not** used for this purpose.

The venue contact will be used to arrange access and power points etc.

The event contact will be used for event logistical and activity management planning.

And do ask for any other things that are important to you.

Totico will only ever contact these two people. We will; if at all possible, visit the venue well in advance of the event and arrange with the venue staff access times and operational plans.

We would appreciate that the 'Event' contact be someone who will be in a position to talk to our engineers during the performance to confirm sound levels are acceptable etc. We'd like a place to get changed, but only if it's easily available. We can change in the van if need be!

I hope that this has been useful to you and given you a helping hand when dealing with a band for your event. Further, even if you don't choose Totico for your event I hope it all goes well for you.

Keep rocking, Paul.