



[HOME](#) [NEWS](#)

THE HOUSE ALWAYS WINS: NEW PARTNERSHIPS, VENUE INVESTMENT CONTINUE MOMENTUM IN CASINO
CONCERT SPACE

The House Always Wins: New Partnerships, Venue Investment Continue Momentum in Casino Concert Space

RYAN BORBA / 9:40 AM, WEDNESDAY, 07/23/2025 / NEWS



ROCK IT: *Def Leppard, mostly co-headlining stadiums in recent years, is playing a variety of casino venues this year, ranging in capacity and venue type. (Photo by Paras Griffin / Getty Images)*

The “casino” business of live entertainment has largely been considered separate – or at least different – from the rest of the non-gaming world, but more and more, the lines continue to blur and opportunity presents itself for those looking to connect talent with venues. In many ways a live entertainment frontier – historically and currently – there’s reason to believe those lines will continue to blur.

“Danny Wimmer Presents, DWP, is making a bigger investment in casino properties,” says Del Williams, head of global talent for DWP Talent Services, which got into the casino space in 2021 with the acquisition of longtime talent-buying firm Billy Alan Productions.

The company has officially partnered with two additional casino-focused talent-buying firms – Houston Productions, led by casino and fair entertainment veteran Kell Houston, and NJM Productions, led by relative upstart Nick Miller, who started his own casino-buying firm after spending close to a decade on the agency side. The partnership roughly doubles DWP’s casino business, Williams says, bringing highly specialized experience and adding a varied roster of venues to an already-established network of mostly tribal properties across the country.

"We are completely committed to these casino clients in these markets," Williams says, having gained active concert venues in markets including New Mexico, Arizona, Northern California, Minnesota and others. "We're basically making a big statement within the industry. These are respected talent buyers, and Kell in particular has been one of the most revered casino buyers in the business for decades. We really admire what he has done and feel like, in addition to the clients that he has, he represents the philosophy and the strategy that we have as a company."



THE RIGHT RESIDENCY STUFF: *New Kids on the Block kicked off their "The Right Stuff" residency at Dolby Live at Park MGM on June 20, yet another high-profile Vegas residency making good use of the top-notch theaters on the Strip. (Photo by Ethan Miller / Getty Images)*

The partnerships will add resources to the two independent firms' operations, which Houston says will allow him to pursue further opportunities and develop business in what is still a very fragmented venue landscape with dozens of independent operators who are underserved on the booking side.

"We found some real common ground so that I can still maintain my existing Houston Productions business of my clients but we're creating a second, kind of a hybrid agreement or partnership

with DWP so that we can go after the tribal casino market," says Houston, who says he's known Williams for a long time and had been in talks over the past few years about a potential partnership. "We've got a couple of other people coming on board and we're going to work on developing a strategy and approach for some of the bigger acts for these amphitheaters and larger venues in the tribal gaming network across the country. Tribal gaming right now is scattered with a whole lot of smaller businesses all around the country working in their regions. This will give us much more of a national profile and I think it's got a lot of potential."

NJM Productions is a relative newcomer in the market with an aggressive growth trajectory and experience from the agency side, leading to momentum in the highly specialized tribal casino space. He says his success has come from being inclusive and transparent with tribal properties, who often distrust outside operators and aren't often involved in the booking and entertainment operations directly.

Others have noted strong business in 2025 despite any downturn in tourism or economic uncertainty.

“Show count was similar to what we saw in 2023 and 2024 across our network – some properties aim for 50 shows and some aim for 150 shows and we were able to hit all of the goals that we set out to achieve,” says Andrew Saunders, vice president of entertainment at Hard Rock International and Seminole Gaming. The company recently opened new, 2,000-capacity Hard Rock Live venues in Indiana and Virginia and announced a new one in Ottawa, Ontario, adding to its existing stable of standalone concert venues including the flagship, 7,000-capacity Hard Rock Live theater in South Florida. “We see a mix of touring and more fly-date business – some properties are able to be the ‘arena play’ and participate in a tour, whereas others are better suited for the off-cycle one-off.... Ultimately, the fan doesn’t decide whether or not to come see their favorite artist based on which cycle they are on, and neither do we.”

Designed by Montreal-based design firm Scéno Plus, the eighth Hard Rock project for the company, the Ottawa venue is in line with other recent Hard Rock venue projects, with telescopic seating with retractable seats, allowing for multiple configurations, and a 5,000-square-foot main stage, dressing rooms that can accommodate more than 20 people, and more.

With properties varying vastly and other individual quirks to account for, the job for talent buyers within the casino space is not much different from others – making the best deal possible and ensuring repeat business.

“We look at these casinos that we work with as being our buildings,” says DWP’s Williams. “We don’t have our own arenas and amphitheaters and clubs competing against each other.”



MORE HARD ROCK: *New high-class casino venues continue to open across the country – or continent – such as the latest Hard Rock Live venue, opening in Ottawa, Ontario, in July, which follows two other recent openings in the U.S. (Courtesy Hard Rock International)*

Somewhat unique for being attached to revenue-generating casino amenities that most venues don't offer, casinos are still moving away from the soft-ticket model of yesteryears, although most admit that getting people through the door is still a priority.

"Most that we deal with are hard-ticket shows and they want to be in the black from the show, but I think like anything else, a bad deal is a bad deal," Williams says, noting the importance of factoring in all parts of the equation when gauging whether a show is a good idea, or successful after the fact.

The continued attention within the casino venue community, which some say is taking some shine away from the traditional amphitheater or fair business, suggests business is going well for those who have the experience and go-getting attitude to tackle the territory and take a chance.

"Honestly, it's the best year we've ever had at our casino venues across North America," says C3 Presents' Andrew Blank, the company's director of casinos. "We're booking bigger artists, selling more tickets, and just seeing a lot of momentum overall. A huge part of that is the people we work with, our casino partners are dialed in. They know how important entertainment is to their business, and they're not afraid to take chances or try new things. That has helped give us the confidence to take financial risk on shows at casinos from our end, too. There's a real sense of trust and excitement right now."

