

The Business



of being a Community Musician

MARK JACKSON AND JANE JELBART

THE BUSINESS OF BEING A COMMUNITY MUSICIAN

September 14, 2017 at 11:04 PM

Hey guys, with you on your concept of wealth. Interesting that the topic of the dreaded \$ has come up a bit recently, and I meant to say to you a few weeks back – I hope you guys never feel embarrassed by what you're charging us punters – a) it's cheap as chips, and b) I'm pretty sure all the groups you nurture (and bully/tease/try to learn 'em) want you to be successful and be able to enjoy the lifestyle you do. We certainly don't want you to be forced to give it up and become an accountant or something (no offence to accountants, I'm sure there are some lovely ones). In summary – the value you give us is far more than the few \$ we give to you. Please don't underestimate your value to the community, or agonise over taking modest bit of filthy lucre from us. Uke on!

Anonymous

The Business
of being a
Community Musician

MARK JACKSON AND JANE JELBART

Copyright © Mark Jackson and Jane Jelbart 2018

Published by The Sum of the Parts (music) www.thesumoftheparts.com.au
Merewether NSW 2291
Australia

Editing: Robert Watson, Danielle Scott

Design & layout: Danielle Scott www.daniellescott.com.au

Illustrations: Gwynneth Jones www.gwynnethjonesillustration.wordpress.com

Photographs: *pg 7, 47, 49* - Groovy Banana www.groovy-banana.com

THE GENUINE MESSAGE

This book has been nurtured by 8+ years of direct ukulele teaching and leadership experience; 100s of hours of cogitation, reflection, writing and editing; and many dollars spent in support, relief teachers, editing, osteopathic treatments and artwork. Please respect our right to earn a living helping others help others make music.

THE LEGALESE

All rights reserved. Except for a single printout for use of the purchaser of the pdf version, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any mechanical or electronic means including information storage or retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Business of Being a Community Musician owes a similar debt of gratitude to the same people we acknowledged in the Ukestration Manual. However a few deserve special thanks for this volume.

Once again, Danielle Scott has been there for us for a long time, as a sounding board, offering creative and professional advice and experiencing first hand our business strengths and our foibles. We will miss her.

Robert Watson - who suggested that what we had with initial drafts was TWO books, and subsequently was the first to read the book and give it back to us in two parts.

We thank the Australian Government and the NEIS personnel and trainers who set Mark on the initial path to being a proper business.

Our fellow community music business people (and aspirants) world-wide with whom we have had useful conversations.

The ukestrans who made this business possible, some of whom have even provided business advice.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Who is this manual for?	2
1.2 Being a business or being business-like	2
1.3 Diverse income streams	3
1.4 Is this a hobby, a job or a business?	3
1.5 Value yourself as a community musician; sell yourself	5
1.6 Make a business plan.....	6
1.7 Your mission statement (should you choose to accept it)	6
Chapter 2: The Unique Selling Point (USP).....	9
2.1 The Ukestra Method using Ukestration	9
2.2 The importance of venue and our social approach to music.....	10
Chapter 3: Reality check - the numbers needed to stay in business	12
3.1 How much administration is involved?	13
3.2 Setting the personal teaching rate	15
3.3 Pricing – how much we charge	15
3.4 The statistics that keep us working and creatively engaged.....	17
3.5 The Uketen, our prepay system.....	18
3.6 Other pricing considerations	19
3.7 Critical mass.....	20
Chapter 4: Specific administration tools	22
4.1 Xero.....	22
4.2 Dropbox	23
4.3 The Ukestras database	23
4.4 MailChimp	24
4.5 Wordpress	24

Chapter 5: Staffing	25
Chapter 6: Advertising and marketing	28
6.1 Our marketing successes (and not so successes).....	29
6.2 Other marketing initiatives we have used.....	36
Chapter 7: Additional income streams	37
7.2 Private tuition.....	37
7.2 School ukulele groups	38
7.3 Other musician projects (aka maintaining your creative mojo)....	38
7.4 Hospitals	39
7.5 Paid ukestra gigs.....	39
7.6 More possible income streams.....	40
Chapter 8: Compliance Issues and Professional Development	43
8.1 Copyright and licensing	43
8.2 Workplace Health and Safety.....	44
8.3 Public Liability insurance (PLI).....	45
8.4 Professional Development.....	46
Chapter 9: Conclusion.....	47
Are you ready to be a community Musician?	
An Essentials checklist:.....	49
References	51

Chapter 1



INTRODUCTION

This manual is for people who want to make a living, or run a small business, as a community musician. We have had some success in this endeavour and wish to share our experiences and knowledge in the hope that others may also spread the joy of community music in a sustainable fashion. Mark has supported himself with a full-time income for the last eight years, and Jane joined the business six years ago when it could support two full-time incomes. We work in our community, as musicians, but also nationally and internationally.

The Ukestration Manual is a mandatory pre-requisite for reading this book. There we describe our philosophy and teaching approach which underpins everything detailed in this book. As described in the introduction of *The Ukestration Manual*, the three essentials of the Ukestra Method are music-making, community and sustainability. Maybe it is restating the bleeding obvious, but we rely upon the income generated from our community music business not only to sustain us, but to maintain sustainability of this community, and our service to that community.



1.1 Who is this manual for?

We envisage that three different types of people might benefit from reading this manual:

1. A community-oriented person who enjoys playing music and would like to earn an income from community music. Practice and commitment to the art of music-making with the ukulele (including singing) is also required.
2. An experienced musician who enjoys conveying musical knowledge in a relaxed and empathetic way to novice musicians. Someone who wants a stable core business to supplement the (frequently) poverty level wages of being a performer, and who wants to build a fan base. Effectively this could be seen as 'value-adding' to their chosen profession.
3. A volunteer or unpaid leader of a ukulele group who does not need the income because they are sustained by another job, a retirement income or a supportive partner. This manual aims to provide some tools to help keep the group viable and active without burning out the leader.

1.2 Being a business or being business-like

From the beginning it was our overt intention to establish The Sum of the Parts (music) as a business. That is, we sought to generate a sustainable and liveable income. In doing so we joined a long statistical line-up of new businesses that are destined for failure. Luckily for us we have been on the successful side of the roughly 50% of businesses that survive their first five years.

We cannot guarantee a sure-fire method of replicating our financial sustainability. Success relies upon a whole bunch of coalescing good fortunes, the existence of empty niches, and various factors that ultimately come down to timing, location and personality. As a business, running a ukestra is not as precise as teaching a fifteen year old about how and when to flip a burger.



If you wish to **create an income-earning business** then you will need to collect and draw upon a myriad of relevant resources. You need to write a comprehensive business plan and many agencies such as accountants, business advisers or government agencies will help set you on that path. This manual is not a business plan, but it is one of your key resources to develop one!

If being financially viable **is not a key concern**, then perhaps this manual will help you reflect upon what it means to be professional and more sustainable as a not-for-profit business or community organisation.

1.3 Diverse income streams

We have written this manual based upon the assumption of running four weekly ukestras in your community. However, as a community musician you will need numerous strings to your bow to make a viable living. The 'numbers for staying in business' (Chapter 3) shows that four ukestras alone do not make for financial wealth. For us in early 2018, our eight ukestras (and two choirs) provide us with our most significant, reliable and regular income streams. However, we have other income streams including ukulele educational book sales, recreational music in hospitals, performing income and one-off ukulele workshop income.

Other income strategies might include: teaching children in groups within and outside of schools, teaching individual lessons, doing gigs, weddings, and group music therapy in health institutions. Particularly at the outset, this diversity of income sources is a key to income stability, and to maintain a diverse and viable creative life.

1.4 Is this a hobby, a job or a business?

Which of the following best describes your goal when considering creating a sustainable community music organisation? Do you want to:

- a) Play the ukulele and earn some money; or
- b) Earn money playing the ukulele with people who are beginner and novice musicians, and hence travel a longer journey with them as you help them develop their skills?

What motivates you to do this? Is it *really* your passion?

A business mindset (b) is different to a hobby (a). If (a) best describes your goals, then this manual can help you be more 'professional'. If it is (b), then reading this will help you clarify the tasks and attitudes you need in order to establish a sustainable business.

Creating a sustainable business requires strategies and processes that can continue to earn income for you when you are not delivering the service personally. If you cannot do this, you have merely created a job for yourself, and have little room for 'time-release'. If you are able to take a break and other people can teach/lead in your absence, and administration tasks are being completed, then you can start to call it a business. This relies on training staff and putting in place systems that can be used by others in your absence. Most of all, your students need to feel reassured that they will have a good experience at the ukestra even in your absence. These are important distinctions to keep in mind.

GETTING HELP TO SHIFT INTO A BUSINESS MINDSET

Mark had been in pub bands for many decades, earning income from music gigs both 'on the books' and 'off the books'. Despite the best endeavours of the Australian Taxation Office, the live music industry is still riven with cash payments. 'Cash' usually means no tax paid, but it also means an attitude of treating these usually small quantities of income with the same cavalier attitude with which it was earned: easily disposable, and not reliable.

It takes a psychological shift to change this 'beer money' attitude into a business attitude. The New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) was Mark's ticket to this paradigm shift. NEIS is an Australian Government program to help unemployed job seekers become self-employed business owners. The program involves:

- 4-8 weeks of training in setting up and managing a small business
- 9 months of income and rental support (equivalent to unemployment benefits)
- One year of mentoring, support and advice from a professional business manager adviser to help put the business idea into practice.

What sort of assistance could *you* get in helping to set up a business?



1.5 Value yourself as a community musician; sell yourself

Google the phrase ‘sell yourself and not the product’ and you may be surprised that this pops up as one of the key first principles of successful sales. Sure, we are selling ‘the ukulele’, and ‘making music together’, but having a sustainable business means more than that, and ultimately comes down to attracting people to what *you* do. This ventures into branding, having a profile in the community, and it means being more than ‘nice’ and ‘likeable’. There are extra dimensions such as being generous (with your time), being available (when people need you) and being highly visible (in the paper, on social media, at relevant concerts and workshops), and having branding that is prominent, consistent and recognisable.

Successful community musicians draw on a unique skill set, combining musical and community experience. Recognising this uniqueness is the first step to valuing oneself enough to charge appropriately. This *is* valuable work, and we need to keep this attitude uppermost in our thoughts despite negative attitudes that may be encountered along the way from all sorts of people.

Organisers who are not paid have significant fewer reasons to stay the course when facing challenges. A business approach implicitly mandates someone to be dedicated to the task, as a community leader, as a musical mentor, as a teacher - and that person is remunerated for their work. It also provides an incentive for that person to become more skilled at what they do.

To do this well, we walk a fine line between business and community perspectives. We need to develop and utilise a diverse suite of business skills, community development skills, and be a competent musician! Considering all this helps us appreciate the complexity and skills required in being a community musician *as a business*.

If all of that goes well, then the ultimate affirmation of your success as a business is that it can be successfully sold, and that the activities and opportunities continue with a similarly skilled and focused person. Your time in this role may well have ended, but the community and demand that you have identified and created continues. You are responsible to see this work continue without you.



1.6 Make a business plan

Once committed to the idea that we had something of value, we structured our plan to make this business a reality. A business plan is a written document that sets out:

- Life goals, and how this business helps achieve them
- Services being provided, the unique selling point (USP), the demand for that service, and potential competitors
- The amount of money needed to make it worthwhile, and that can be expected to be made
- Cost structures
- The challenges, and resources to meet those challenges – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- Benchmarks against which the performance of the business can be judged

Consultants and government agencies can provide more information on what a comprehensive business plan entails, not to mention your accountant (a vital partner!).

1.7 Your mission statement (should you choose to accept it)

Starting a business is the conversion of a dream into reality. Successfully achieving that conversion requires a clear and concise statement of the overall aim. That is a mission statement. Although it will be personal, it is also a means of engaging support from allies and other relevant people.

A mission statement broadly describes and guides you in your business, but it is also the most public statement of the business plan. By contrast, the numbers in the business plan are largely confidential, detailing goals as defined in terms of money and customer numbers.



For a community musician the major considerations include:

- Are you teaching in groups and/or individually?
- Are you offering more than just ukulele?
- Are you selling stuff?
- Are you working in a specific region?
- Are you working with a particular age group?
- Do you have a purpose beyond music?

There are many free online resources to help write and refine a mission statement. As a starting point, this is ours from 2009.

The Sum of the Parts (music) helps people make music together through providing accessible, friendly, appropriately targeted and fun group musical opportunities. We want people to join in, to have fun, to create new communities through music, and to reclaim the place of music-making in their life, and in our communities.

The ukulele is the best way to start and achieve these goals.

These words are still relevant for us eight years later. But you cannot simply copy someone else's mission. You need to look at your own drivers and aims, and then craft something simple which conveys your particular view of what you are intending to do.



DOING THE RIGHT THING

There are so many ‘ukecandothisorthat’ puns on the word ‘uke’. Let’s call this company – ‘Ukan Do The Wrong Thing Ltd’.

We knew of a professional ukulele teaching company who had big plans. They were corporate, sold ukes from China, printed books, and ran a few different weekly groups. And then one day they didn’t.

They just disappeared.

They left their community in the lurch; perplexed and simply hurt. We are not sure what happened to the people who ran “Ukan Do The Wrong Thing”. Maybe they needed to earn more money; maybe they fell foul of the law; or maybe they just got bored.

All of this says the following when taking on the significant responsibility of stewarding a community:

- Have integrity and operate in a sustainable way
- It’s not just about the money, money, money
- Know that people rely on what you do



Chapter 2



THE UNIQUE SELLING POINT (USP)

Our approach differs from the way that many music schools establish and run themselves. That is:

1. The Ukestra Method, using ukestration, frames our approach to group-teaching ukulele;
2. we select venues that help support our social goals in relation to music;
3. we charge in a different way and in how much we charge; and
4. we focus upon 'community building'.

Many of these differences are attitudinal, and in pursuing them we face some unique personal challenges about how we see and value ourselves. Addressing these attitudes in relation to ourselves, and to the work we do, plays a key role in our ongoing success.

2.1 The Ukestra Method using Ukestration

In late 2009 we could not find any voluntary ukulele groups in the Newcastle area. We were the first ukulele group established (to our knowledge) and so had the advantage of offering something new and unique. However now, in 2018, there is barely a town in our country where there is not a bunch of people playing ukulele, mostly run on a volunteer model. In Newcastle there are now numerous volunteer groups (many of whom are still our students). Despite this, our ukestras continue to thrive, because we offer something different from these volunteer groups.

The Ukestra Method is about group teaching ukulele in a social environment. So it combines the structured learning of a teacher-led situation, with a fun, social vibe. This is our USP. We go beyond strumming, which most volunteer groups are trapped by, but also provide a fun and enjoyable atmosphere of acceptance. Ukestration is where we arrange a song into different parts for players of all skill levels, so all players can be included in a song. In our experience there is no substitute for a weekly session with a paid regular teacher/leader.



Group teaching provides the potential to earn more dollars per hour, meaning other time can be committed to increasing business, improving processes, creating new projects or holidaying.

Identifying your USP is an integral part of a business plan, along with the various steps put in place to systematically achieve your goal. The business plan is where those systematic steps are detailed.

2.2 The importance of venue and our social approach to music

Central to our social and financial plan is that the venues we use cost us nothing. In Australia it is relatively easy to locate club venues that are under-utilised and generally welcome the patronage.

Apart from the obvious financial benefits to our own business model, a good public venue creates a social and relaxed atmosphere for the ukestra which clearly distinguishes it from a classroom or educational institution. If people can buy drinks, coffee and sometimes food, then it also fosters a social atmosphere and facilitates friendships forming. Ukestras also potentially add an extra vibrancy to the venue. Saturday mornings at the Newkestra is a hive of activity, with bowlers out on the green, ukulele music filling the club house, and other patrons enjoying breakfast and the general ambience.

If our personal leadership/teaching style is sufficiently entertaining, then this also adds to the general feel in the venue. On top of this, we are bringing new customers into the venue at no cost to them.

It is vital to retain a cooperative and open relationship with the venue. We try to ensure that we know the person who makes decisions and we check-in regularly with them (more often in the early days) to ensure that they are happy with the relationship. Good open communication with venue management ensures that inadvertent double-bookings are kept to a minimum, and that we are aware of how much the venue is appreciating the presence of the ukestra. We encourage ukestrans to join the club (in Australia this is usually a very small fee) and to buy drinks, etc., to support the club.



We do hire community halls for various activities. Most notably this is for our choirs where people feel more vulnerable when singing and appreciate greater privacy.

Having described our USP, social and venue approach we now turn to describing and analysing our own business finances and workloads. We hope that setting it out here allows you to best assess your own opportunities and risks. Ultimately we want you to realistically know how much work and what sort of pricing is required to make a business viable and to be realistic about the potential income.



Chapter 3

REALITY CHECK -

THE NUMBERS NEEDED TO STAY IN BUSINESS

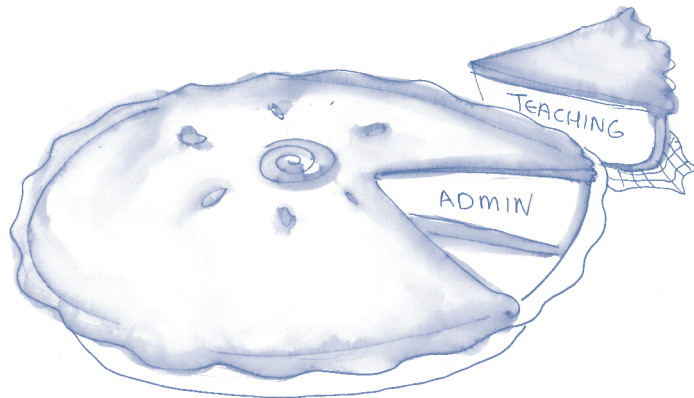
We make a living from this work, but can you? Answering this question is dependent upon a whole range of personal circumstances, skills, experience and local contexts: all of which must be detailed in a business plan.

To help you get started, we reflect on our own experience, ordered into five considerations:

1. How much administration is involved in this sort of business.
2. The personal hourly rate (based on considering #1) necessary to 'charge' for teaching.
3. How much to charge per person, based on ukestra attendance (we will illustrate this point using our own 2016 business statistics), and upon how much we need to earn per hour.
4. How payments from students are handled (including discretion and exceptions).
5. The critical mass required for the sustainability of the business.

Considering administration first is a reality check. It is the elephant in the room when you are teaching. People often tell us we have a dream job, but to remain sustainable that dream job requires administration. That's the reality. If it doesn't happen, no matter how talented we are as teachers or musicians, we are soon out of business. Our logic follows on from that decidedly unsexy beginning and, given that imperative, we work out how much money (per hour) we need to earn to stay afloat. That rolls on into pricing, how people pay, and how many people need to come along.





3.1 How much administration is involved?

It is essential to consider how much time you have for the business, and for the two different types of duties that need to be completed:

- a) Work which directly earns an income (in our case, face-to-face teaching hours)
- b) Work that supports creating that income, but which does not directly result in dollars being paid (i.e. administration).

This distinction is critical, because the amount of dollars we earn doing face-to-face teaching, must pay for all of the administration hours in which we are not earning money. The administrative tasks of a community musician are mostly generic, typical of any small business. We are required, amongst other things, to maintain our books (record and track revenue and expenses), website, communications and social media, as well invoice students, pay bills, and prepare for class.

Our basic assumption is that we are supporting **one person working full-time by teaching four ukestras per week**. The following statistics are based on four consecutive years (2012 -2016) of data from The Sum of the Parts (music).



Table 1: An example of administration hours for one week for one person teaching four ukestras a week.

Task	Hours per week
Driving to and from ukestras and other related work events	3
Class preparation: photocopying and filing (45 minutes per ukestra), loading car with P/A	3
Processing cash and ukestra attendances (using database)	2.5
Researching songs, arranging, writing out music for ukestras	2.5
Writing emails to groups and answering emails	2.5
Website and social media activity	1.5
Answering individual enquiries (telephone)	1
Invoicing, banking and reconciling	1
Paying bills and maintaining records	1
Business development	1
Other media (e.g. radio), postering, and distributing flyers	0.5
Equipment (printers & computer) & instrument maintenance	0.5
SUBTOTAL of administration hours	20
Direct service face-to-face delivery of four ukestras (2 hours each plus 1 hour bump-in bump-out time)	12
TOTAL TIME WORKED	32



It is a sobering thought that 20 hours of administration time is required to deliver four ukestras a week. But with that done we can now set about calculating what hourly charge-out rate we need to sustain life. *Note that the more ukestras you have, the greater the ratio of earning hours to administration hours i.e. more income for less administration.*

3.2 Setting the personal teaching rate

Maintaining four ukestras requires 32 hours of work per week in total, which is close to a full-time job. We have found that around \$65 per-hour is a good estimate for a face-to-face charge out rate which equates with a 'normal' contractor fee in the general working world. \$65 per hour for 12 hours of face-to-face time equates to about \$780 per week, and over 49 weeks (assumed number of weeks worked in a year) results in an annual income of about \$38,000.

This equates with a total per-hour figure of around \$24, not a princely sum by today's professional standards. Of course you may choose to aim for more (or less) than this notional figure, depending upon your lifestyle choices! In our calculations we are not including any work earned from outside the nominal four ukestras.

Having achieved some estimation of the per hour face-to-face charge, the next step is to calculate what combination of session price, and student numbers could give this nominal income requirement. In effect, this becomes a classic supply-demand balancing act between class size and cost.

3.3 Pricing – how much we charge

For this exercise we assume that each ukestra has approximately 15 people attending each session. Our experience is that ukestras vary vastly in numbers, with some attracting up to 50 people and others around 12.

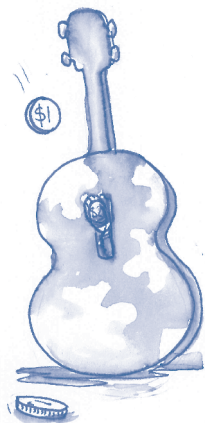


Table 2. Charge rate required for four ukestras with 15 people each (total 60 people)

Charge per person	Actual charge due to adding GST*
\$780 weekly income divided by 60 people = \$13 per person	\$14.30

In 2016-17 our ukestra session fee was \$10-17. It varies according to how much a person attends, how they pay, and where the ukestra session is being held.

Table 3. Our 2016 - 2017 session prices (GST break down shown in brackets)

Type of attendance	Session price
Casual city attendance	\$16 (\$14.55 + \$1.45 GST)
Casual regional attendance	\$17 (\$15.46 + \$1.54 GST)
Prepaid city attendance	\$13 (\$11.82 + \$1.18 GST)
Prepaid regional attendance	\$14.50 (\$13.18 + \$1.32 GST)
Additional ukestra attendance/s in a week	\$10 (\$9.09 + \$0.91 GST)

When we started in late 2009 we charged \$10 per session but we increase our prices biennially to keep in line with inflation (as advised by our accountant). Unlike many music/dance/yoga schools, we do not charge a term fee. This means that students only pay for the ukestra they attend. We call our fee system a 'Uketen' - see Section 3.5 for more details.

We believe in charging something that is roughly equivalent to the price of two hours of entertainment i.e: a movie ticket; or two beers and a packet of chips; or two coffees and a cake. All these options are roughly the same price. It's just with the ukestra you learn while you socialise!

**GST is the Australian Government's Goods and Services Tax*

3.4 The statistics that keep us working and creatively engaged

We figure that if you wish to make an informed decision about whether running ukestras as a business is for you, then it is simply easiest for us (and better for you!) to share the relevant data from our own experience. Our business has grown, from one weekly session in 2009 starting with less than a dozen people, to nine weekly sessions serving approximately 170 people per week in late 2017.

All of these statistics are round figures, with some being estimates made to the best of our ability. We hope that such a candid (and usually confidential) snapshot gives you the tools for assessing how it might work for you.

We earn revenue of around \$160,000 annually and take home about \$33,000 each, as income. Of this, about **two-thirds** of our revenue is derived directly from adult ukestras. For our chosen Australian lifestyle, those are the numbers that keep us alive financially, ethically and creatively.

Table 4. The Sum of the Parts (music) - annual business statistics (average of 2013 to 2016 - includes GST).

	4 year average
Annual revenue from all activities (ukestra and non-ukestra)	\$160,000
Annual taxable income for Jane and Mark	\$66,000 (\$33,000 each)
Annual revenue from 9 ukestras	\$90,000
Annual revenue from 4 ukestras	\$40,000
Average weekly attendance (across all 9 ukestras)	170 people
Average number of people attending each ukestra	19 people
Average fee paid by each person	\$14
Average number of people attending once a month	250 people
Average attendance at smallest ukestra	12
Average attendance at largest ukestra	31
Number of people on our mailing list	850 (August 2017)
Number of people regularly reading the mailing list	400



It is surprising, even to us, that our costs are so significant, and that our take-home income is so much less than the \$160,000 revenue. What needs to be kept in mind though is that many of the business decisions we make are also lifestyle decisions, in that they increase our quality of life, rather than increase our income.

We choose to employ a local administration assistant to carry out invoicing and database management. We also choose to employ one ukestra leader and three teaching assistants every week to make our workload easier and more flexible. And we choose to travel and teach overseas regularly and this imposes increased travel expenses on the business. We also receive significant benefits from the business paying for expenses which most other people wear as domestic expenses, for example our cars, telephones, internet and some rent.

Any assessment of costs must take these 'lifestyle' decisions, and reductions in domestic costs, into account. Those 'costs' come off our bottom line, but they also allow us the flexibility to teach/holiday in other places, to engage in other creative (and not-so-profitable) pursuits, and to surf most mornings. It is about what other things these conscious decisions enable us to do, not about accumulating lots of dollars in the bank.

3.5 The Uketen, our prepay system

The vast majority of our revenue is paid directly into the bank courtesy of our prepay system called a Uketen. This is a set of 10 attendances offered at a discount price that must be used within a year. Unlike a term fee, it does not have to be used up within one 10-week period, very different from similar term-based classes such as music, yoga, pilates, whatever. This has clear advantages for ukestrans as they can pay in advance without feeling obliged to attend weekly, thus giving them flexibility to attend to other life events, be they hip replacements, travel or school children duties, etc. It also sends an important message: this is not a term-based classroom situation. Rather, we want people to think of it as a reliable social learning environment that people can count on occurring every week (except Christmas and Easter).



We encourage people to transfer money directly into our bank account, and when they have two sessions left on their Uketen, we invoice them for the next Uketen. The Uketen involves less money-handling, and ensures that administrative time during the session is focused on recording who is there, rather than chasing money.

When we made the switch to prepays, some people thought we were crazy, exchanging a cash economy for money in the bank. But, as should be apparent, it was our choice to be in business, not to have something on the side, or to earn ‘beer money’.

3.6 Other pricing considerations

Encouraging greater participation (or rewarding repeat customers)

Very quickly we found that people wanted to attend more than one session each week. To foster and reward this repeat custom, we offered a reduced price for their second (and sometimes even third!) attendance in any one week.

This not only saves money for students, it also helps to keep group numbers up which generally improves both social and musical enjoyment. Of course rewarding repeat custom is also a way to boost income.

The reduced rate does not apply to ukesters who attend ‘non-ukestra’ sessions such as our weekly choirs, the One Song Sing, and other one-off projects (such as advanced ukulele classes, or banjo circle).

Discount and compassionate discretionary pricing

There are some individuals to whom we give special discounts. For example, we have a policy of allowing recent refugees to attend for free. Others may ask for discounts, or even complain about price, whilst some say that we charge too little. However the vast majority are happy with what we charge, and they continue to come. How these variations and price challenges are met is entirely up to our discretion. One thing that we have not engaged in is ‘pensioner’ or ‘senior citizen’ discounts since the vast majority of students are in that category!



Refunds

Sometimes (about one person a year) people's circumstances change and they don't want to return to ukestra and request a refund of their Uketen amount. When we get this request we recalculate their attendances based upon the casual rate (\$16), charge a \$20 administration fee and refund the difference. It's easier to refund than it is to have an argument or bad feelings.

3.7 Critical mass

If you look at our mailing list statistics above, you will see that more than half do not even open our emails. This demonstrates the importance of 'critical mass' where we rely upon a larger pool of people to draw upon because sickness, holidays, study and competing interests all take their toll on regular ukestra attendance. So it is important to maintain an awareness of the following:

- How big is the pool of regulars from which we are drawing?
- How often do we expect them to come?
- How reliable are they?
- How reliable are our predictions of attendance?
- Do the 40 people on the mailing list equate to an average of 4 turning up regularly, or is it more like 14 people?
- How flexible are we in our ability to withstand income fluctuations (e.g. 4 people attending one week, 20 attending the next).
- How flexible is the teaching plan, and our teaching skills, to fluctuations in attendance?

Some of the figures in Table 4 illustrate aspects of the critical mass issue.

How many people you *want* to attend will be heavily influenced by your decision as to whether this is a hobby or a business. This in turn determines how much effort you put into marketing, and your pricing strategy. In our experience, a dozen regular people in a session is a minimum average class size that is musically, socially and financially viable.

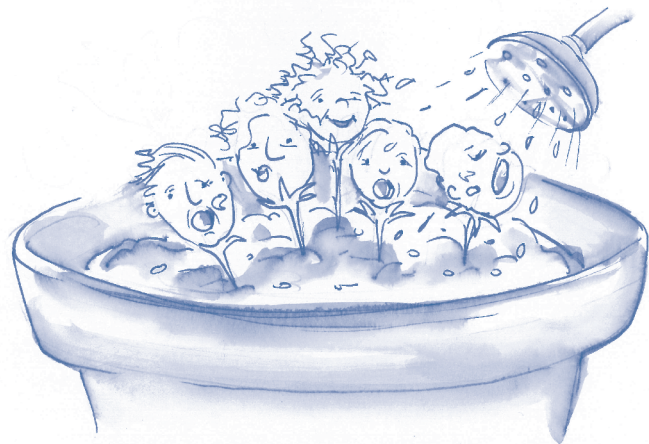


The role of pricing in controlling demand

Of course, our price is higher than volunteer groups, and the numbers in the groups reflect that. It is not uncommon to see 'once a month' groups have much higher numbers. For instance, BUMS (the Brisbane Ukulele Musicians Society) seems to attract 80 people each month. In contrast our nine weekly ukestras attract between 12 and 50 people. These smaller numbers allow people to get a more focused and intimate learning experience with a teacher, whilst still getting the social experience they desire.

Equally our USP is that people come to our groups for a continuing and regular quality teaching session, *and this necessitates playing fewer songs*. Other non-teaching/more strum 'n' hum sessions will often complete 25+ songs in a 2-hour session. In contrast, our sessions will often do, at most, 16 songs in two hours.

Our pricing clearly discourages some people, but it also creates a situation where demand is managed. Our approach (and pricing) thus results in smaller class sizes (rather than big free strumalong sessions), fewer songs and increased learning opportunities.



Chapter 4

SPECIFIC ADMINISTRATION TOOLS

Five different computer software packages help us manage our weekly administrative tasks. Four of them are cloud-based, that is, they are only available as online programs. This gives us flexibility in where and when we can do administration work, and who can assist us. They are:

- Xero – online bookkeeping and accountancy software
- Dropbox – online and cross-computer file storage software
- The Ukestras database – our purpose-built CRM (Customer Relationship Management) package
- Mailchimp – online mailing list platform
- Wordpress - website content management system

Joshua Waldman's recent book *How to Start and Grow an Ukulele Group* (2017) also details many of these tools.

4.1 Xero

Xero (www.xero.com) is an online bookkeeping program that is simple to use, provides professional invoicing, accurate and reliable reporting and is relatively inexpensive at less than \$50 per month. The fact that it is web-based has three primary advantages:

1. It can be used across an infinite number of computers and platforms. This has distinct staffing advantages in that we, administration staff, bookkeepers, and our accountant can have simultaneous access, no matter where in the world we are located.
2. The 'software' automatically and regularly updates.
3. Data is automatically backed up. If our computer or house blows up, then the data is safe somewhere else in the world.



A disadvantage is that it only works when we are online (a disadvantage far outweighed by the above advantages in our opinion). Our administration person is local, part of our ukulele community, and works from her house while our bookkeeper (another ukulele player) and our (non-uke-playing) accountant live interstate.

There are a few other similar options available, including BillyApp (less expensive) and Wave (free).

4.2 Dropbox

Dropbox is another 'system' through which we share files (including the database) with other staff. Dropbox is a very intuitive file storage system which completely integrates into our computer's own filing system. When we save something in a folder on Dropbox, it automatically saves on the computers of others who are also subscribed to that folder. These are people to whom we (as owners) have given access.

It works very smoothly for us, but also requires some work protocols around who accesses what files when, as conflicting copies can be created. Other than that, it is an amazing system of file storage and sharing. Google Drive and Microsoft's One Drive offer similar services.

4.3 The Ukestras database

The vast majority of music/dancing schools (primarily catering for children) have a term-based class structure, and so have a fee based upon that reality. Whether a child attends or not is immaterial to the term fee and attendance records, and hence there is plenty of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software available for that market.

When we introduced the Uketen, we commissioned the creation of some specific CRM software to keep track of all attendances and customer details. We had to create our own as we could not find an existing CRM package that could accommodate our desire to have a flexible Uketen prepay system. Our purpose built CRM made Uketen administration so much more efficient than the previously unwieldy and time-consuming spreadsheet which we gladly retired.

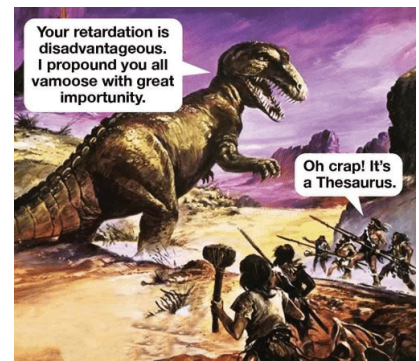


4.4 MailChimp

After trying several bulk email programs, we settled on MailChimp as the most efficient, snazzy and inexpensive way to send out emails to our list of students. It is free up to a certain size of list (roughly 2000 subscribers).

We send out an email about twice a month, depending upon impending events. It contains details about ukestra times or changes, festivals, visiting artists and new songs. It is important to keep the emails entertaining, informative, attractive (use good images) and succinct. Unfortunately Mark often flagrantly contravenes the succinct rule.

MailChimp provides numerous advantages: online access wherever we are; confidentiality to recipients (no accidentally sending everyone's email address to everyone else); simple and flexible layouts (even for graphical dummies like us), good reporting and powerful analysis tools (for instance, who has or who has not opened emails – hence we were able to provide the statistic in Table 4); and easy list signup tools that can be embedded in the website.



4.5 Wordpress

Remember. Set up a website. Have a website ... (we can't emphasise it enough – make sure you've got a website!)

We are fortunate to have had our website comprehensively redesigned by a web developer who is one of our students. Our first website was put together by Mark, using a simple template. But as the business developed it became necessary to become more professional and to have functionality that was not available on the initial site.

The template and more complex functionality is managed for us by our web developer www.proweb.services. We manage the content and keep it current, often through scheduling posts and ensuring that it remains active, up-to-date and relevant.

Joshua Waldman describes more comprehensively the ins and outs of using Wordpress - one of the most popular online content management systems.

Chapter 5

STAFFING

Only so much can be achieved by one person without compromising lifestyle and health. Delivering and expanding community music-making programs can be a full-time job, yet the administrative demands of a small business can be overwhelming. Employing an administrative person is a great division of labour and a way of sharing revenue with good people of our choosing. If administrative tasks are not one of your strengths, or if you have a low attention to detail, then it is important to have someone organise this for you. We have met all of our staff either through the ukulele community, or through recommendations. We feel this is important for us to help secure competent yet compatible people.

For many years we have had a ukestran as our administration assistant. Susan Gleeson works from home using some of the cloud-based software described. Susan's primary role is to record attendances through our database, to invoice those who need to renew their Uketens, and to reconcile these payments through Xero.

However we have found the greatest challenge to be finding appropriately skilled teachers who also can handle the more nuanced role of community leadership. Usually it takes a musician some time to adjust to the more community-minded approach we require.

We have been really lucky to have one regular teacher, Danielle Scott, with us for over six years; her commitment and knowledge of the ukestras is invaluable. She has, in fact, greatly assisted us in our thinking, writing, proofing, design and layout of this manual. Danielle has also made significant contributions to our ukestration repertoire and community building, and has built up her own small business, taking private lessons, writing related books and creating useful tools. Danielle's online book, UBASSics has been her most popular and is available at her website www.ukulelecentral.com.au where you'll find good quality and useful resources, some of them free.

We usually find our teaching assistants from our ukestran community because they understand and are committed to our relaxed teaching format. We have a number of teaching assistants who are invaluable and we rely on each week.



Unexpected occurrences...

Finding and retaining good staff is the difference between creating ourselves a 'job' (like a full-time commitment), and having a sustainable 'business' that can operate without us and give us the flexibility to tour for short to medium time periods.

Ironies abound. Danielle resigned as a teacher/leader whilst editing this manual. So we now, for the first time, find ourselves in a situation common to many small businesses – that of losing a key staff member.

Do we indeed have a sustainable business that can function in our absence? Can we actually find someone (or train someone) who has Danielle's rare suite of skills? Critical to answering these questions with a big YES is having a sufficient quantity of replacement staff (and staff-in-training) who can cover for such eventualities.

Danielle suggested that the manual needed more detailed staffing considerations and offered the following, from the perspective of her experience.

When you need people to help run your ukestra/s

You may get to a point where you need to employ others to assist, relieve while you're away, or regularly run one or more ukestras for you. If so, having systems in place for running the sessions and maintaining effective communication with assistants and leaders is as important as choosing people suitable for the work. With good systems, people understand the importance of their role, what it requires and the support they can expect to receive which will help them do their job well.

These are the main points to consider:

1. Choose assistants/leaders based on a combination of their musical abilities, teaching skills and/or a certain level of empathy, and confidence being in front of and instructing a group. Some aspects of ukestra leading will be learned on-the-job, but good people-skills and an approachable presence are essential.
2. Make sure the person is aware of and understands the philosophy or mission statement underlying the establishment and running of your group/s. That way, they can see the bigger picture and know how they will be contributing to something of great value in the lives of individuals and communities.



3. Prior to a new leader/assistant being involved in a session, let them know how you program the sessions, choose the songs and what it is about particular group/s that influences the curation.

For a ukestra leader, decide whether you will prepare session programs for them and provide all the songs and arrangements, digital files, printouts and any sound equipment required, or let them make some or all of these choices themselves. This will largely depend on the experience of the person leading and their ability to access or produce resources.

4. Work with a leader or assistant for a few sessions to see how they are managing and interacting with the people in the group. Discuss how they feel about the work and if there is anything troubling or unclear.
5. For ukestra leaders, have a straightforward process for them to take names and money, bank payments and send through a record of payments and attendances for bookkeeping purposes. This may be simply what you do, but it has to be easily transferable.
6. If you are not providing all the programs or material to a ukestra leader, set up a regular two-way communication which might be a weekly or per-session report from the ukestra leader and a weekly or monthly communiqué from you, in which you share songs and arrangements, including sound files if necessary, any issues that require discussion and helpful information.

As well as being a supportive role on your behalf, this can benefit everyone involved by reducing the often time-consuming work of ukestration, curation, planning and preparation. It also gives a unified basis for curation and performance preparation across groups and maintains the integrity of the business by providing consistent messages to your customers.

7. Schedule informal get-togethers two or more times a year to play possible ukestra songs, discuss ideas, and share some of the fun and frustrations of being involved in community music!



Chapter 6

ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

During the life of our business the advertising and marketing landscape has tectonically shifted. Social media has become a leviathan which we ignore at our peril. Nevertheless the fundamental principles and goals of marketing remain the same. For us there are two aspects to our marketing processes:

1. Making our existence known to the general public, and letting them know about relevant events (such as concerts or beginners courses).
2. Maintaining contact with existing students and ensuring they know of regular ukestra sessions (and occasional changes), and other events we run or choose to support. This contact is primarily through MailChimp, although we also maintain some mailing lists for individual ukestras.

As a small business we aim for free or low cost advertising to attract the attention of potential new starters, to maintain our profile with our regulars and importantly, stay on the radar of our irregular attendees. To maintain ukestra numbers at viable levels, we need to ensure that people successfully transition from beginners sessions into weekly ukestra sessions. Those in the marketing world would equate this with ‘making the sale’.

We largely rely upon our Google profile to bring in new enquiries, but we do occasionally spend money on Facebook advertising for beginners workshops. However, a recent partnership with a new local venue – The Edwards – has proved to be positive, largely relying upon their excellent social media profile and their willingness to advertise our events through that. This has helped market ourselves to a newer and younger demographic with a moderate level of success. Obviously, piggybacking on someone else’s marketing is a great strategy.

Successful marketing and sales strategies target their audiences. For us, with a small marketing budget, it is largely a case of learn as we go, make mistakes, and stumble onto successes.



6.1 Our marketing successes (and not so successes)

When we reflect on our growth spurts, and our periods of stable attendance, seven strategies stand out (in order of importance):

1. Our website
2. Regular newsletter (sent via MailChimp)
3. Social media
4. Mainstream media
5. Radio interviews
6. Word of mouth
7. Postering

It is a commonly told marketing adage that you want to create three points of contact to successfully engage the public in your activity. Each of the above strategies achieve different marketing outcomes, but they all interact. They either create a PR spike that attracts people to specific events and/or maintain a constant presence in the public's eye.

1. Website

Undeniably, the vast majority of our initial student contacts come from Google searches. Our 'The Sum of the Parts' website still remains our dominant presence in the digital world and we are pretty certain that we always rank at the top of any search that involves using the words 'Newcastle' and 'ukulele'.

Recently though some internet/marketing savvy ukestrans have challenged whether a Facebook presence can replace our own website as the dominant internet presence. But for the time being, if people hear about us through the media, the quickest way for them to follow up is on the web. The important thing is that we are there, **right from day one**.

When constructing your own website, make sure you have the words ukulele, lessons, classes, singing, music, etc., optimised. Again, Joshua Waldeman (2017) details a lot of the how-to's in this regard.



2. Newsletter

Once or twice a month we ‘send out a MailChimp’ which is our regular newsletter to the ~1000 people that have registered with us (either through attending a ukestra or subscribing on our website). We also post the newsletter onto our Facebook pages and our website which gives it a wider audience than subscribers. The newsletter has information such as new classes, venue information, upcoming ukulele festivals, future performance opportunities (including set list, rehearsal time and venue details), notifications of our next gigs as performers (Jack n Jel), and any relevant information we see fit, such as visiting performers.

We try to make it easy to read, informative, a bit humorous and littered with graphics and relevant photos. The aim is to keep our community informed about our activities, but also to give a sense that the reader is part of a musical community, either as an audience member or as an amateur performer. As previously mentioned though, our newsletter is read by fewer than half of the people who receive it. Nevertheless, it is a strong marketing tool, especially among ‘baby boomers’, who are more inclined to use email compared to younger generations who seem to be more reliant on social media.

3. Social media – the views of a practising amateur

Social media, and how to use it, is very swiftly moving terrain, with different social media proving useful for different demographics. The reflections below are just based on our experience of using social media. If you would like expert advice there is plenty out there, both free and expensive.

Facebook

We use Facebook a lot, with varying impact. Facebook tends to have an older demographic profile these days and within it there are various possibilities. At this stage there are three dominant Facebook arrangements - your personal Profile, Pages, and Groups. James Hill is an interesting case-in-point – he has a personal profile, but only so he can operate his promotional pages. Have a look! The message is pretty much ‘nothing to see here – go over there--->’.



We are still grappling with the distinction between each of these, their relative impact, and how each is best used. When approaching the enigmatic qualities and uses of these media it is vital to be aware that you have two tools for using Facebook:

1. **Pages** - to provide a public face to the work and activities that you and your students do.
2. **Groups** - to build a community of people by facilitating communication between students.

Facebook is vital for both marketing a projection of your own character or persona, for information (e.g. for events) and for communication between your members. Make sure you have a clear understanding of the difference between Pages, Groups, and your own Personal Profile, and how you wish to use these different Facebook mediums.

Personal Profile

Your personal Facebook Profile is the key to accessing the variety of Facebook media. As the James Hill example demonstrates, the personal profile is obligatory but it does not have to be public nor do you have to 'use it'. But, as previously suggested, 'personality' plays a large part in demand for your services, and your personal Facebook Profile is potentially an important part of letting people know what you are like and how you are in the world, both personally and musically.

But it becomes easy to blur the lines, and to inadvertently damage your reputation and image. Generally it is recommended to be respectful, and leave out much of the inevitably difficult aspects of life. Mark has had a Facebook Profile since 2007, posting about musical, political and personal endeavours, themes and interests. Jane is active, but less so. For more on this see the discussion below about politics and your online persona.

Pages

Where the personal Facebook Profile is for portraying your personal self, Pages provide a forum to promote your business personas. From here we create and promote events (such as our monthly beginners ukulele workshop) and provide news about things that we think are relevant to our ukestrans and wider customers. We have created a range of Pages, some of which are now redundant, because, as already confessed, we are still learning through trial and error.



We have two main pages – one for the wider [The Sum of the Parts \(music\)](#) persona (established in late 2009 by Mark’s then 15 year old daughter), the other for the Ukastle Ukestra (early 2010). The latter is more for uke-specific and Ukastle Ukestra performances. The former provides information about both ukulele and wider activities, and titbits about music and its effect on health and community.

The problem with Pages is that, as Facebook has monetised its enormous databases, they have choked off a lot of the ability of these forums to reach people who like a Page. Postings of ours on Pages may simply not be read by a majority (or even a minority) of Page likers. The aim of this is, of course, to encourage you to pay to ‘boost’ the post; that is, to ensure your information gets out there through paid advertising.

Groups

Facebook Groups are the most effective way to communicate with a membership on Facebook. People ‘join’ (as opposed to ‘like’) and can, if allowed, be equal members in the forum with equal access to communication rights. Facebook does not (yet) seem to choke off communications in Groups as much as it does in Pages. Where a Page is your public business face to ukestrans and curious members of the public, Groups are essentially a way for existing groupings of people to communicate with each other. Our experience with the One Song Sing in particular reinforces the potential of Facebook Groups to foster a sense of belonging that helps maintain demand for related activities. See page 42 for more details.

Instagram

A (young) friend described [Instagram](#) as a bit like reading a glossy magazine full of photos. By comparison, Facebook is a large, flexible, diverse, informative and sometimes unwieldy platform. Although Instagram is just a stream of images, it can be very powerful and generally appeals to a younger demographic.

Our partnership with The Edwards primarily uses Instagram, and their promotion of our activities has been very instructive. They understand the importance of the image, how to use it for marketing, and the aesthetics of the youth market they are targeting. Join us on Instagram at [@ukestra](#) (there are lots of beach pictures, and not too many of uke-related activities. Hey! We’re still learning!).



YouTube and Video

Video is strengthening its position as a dominant format on social media. [YouTube](#) has, until recently, been the traditional repository for video marketing, but Facebook, Periscope and Facebook Live have now shaken up YouTube's dominance. Whatever transpires in this space, the overarching lesson is that we need to keep abreast of how these tools can help with hosting and distribution of professionally produced marketing videos, as well as spontaneously short videos that are made with your phone. Again, see the breakout box about the One Song Sing.

Join us on youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/ukestra>

Snapchat, Tumblr, Pinterest

This is pretty much just a heading to list what seems to be an endless parade of possibilities in the social media space. It is mind boggling. Blogging, vlogging, ... etc.

Mark does have a blog about various musings linked to our work as community musicians - *[Must Wash Trumpet Today](#)*. This blog will evolve, expand and become more regular as the writing of this book you are reading gets out of the keyboard and into your daily teaching practice!

Twitter

We only mention [Twitter](#) because it is there and we are on it ever so slightly (@thesumofthepart). If communicating and building a fan base in 280 characters or less is your strength, then go for it! Joshua Waldman sings its praises as being a useful gateway to journalists, and its popularity does seem to be with them, and politicians.

...speak of the devil!

Politics and your on and offline persona

In the online world, and particularly on Facebook, we share our personal and political agendas through our personal accounts, but on our business Facebook Pages our politics are less overt.

Many people find strident political opinions to be off-putting and alienating. We certainly have experienced a change in the political demographic of our students over the years and we suspect, as people have become more aware of our personal politics, they either drop off or stay. Whatever the views on this, we feel that working in community (or earning an income from community music) is a political act in itself, so often it is a feeling of *c'est la vie*.



We recommend that when you conduct your life in social media, be clear within yourself about the social, personal, musical or business intent of the message you are conveying; and be clear, conscious and careful with whom it is being shared.

4. Mainstream media and local 'notoriety' spikes

During our first year we were featured in a "feel good" news story by a locally-based mainstream TV network. One of their popular journalists did a major feature, with a film crew attending one of our regular nights. We experienced an increased amount of enquiries immediately after this two-minute 'human interest' story. There were significant "oh isn't that lovely" moments throughout the report for the viewer.

Our biggest spike occurred with a very significant article in the local newspaper's Saturday edition magazine in December 2011. This was a four page article, with professional photos, many interviews and featuring a cover photo of Mark. The major feature story was entitled *Uke Power – How Mark Jackson is uniting communities through music*, and whilst centred on an interview with Mark, the content also featured positive personal stories from participants. This was ideal marketing, focusing upon the outcomes rather than the personalities, yet still highlighting Mark's vision and energy that was facilitating the boom.

Prior to the article we had a regular monthly beginners class attendance of around 20. In January 2012 demand for our beginners surged to 70 people. To date this has been our highest response to any media story.

Both of these notoriety spikes resulted from journalists coming across our wider presence in the community, through appearances such as at our local [TEDxNewy](#) talk, our social media profile, and our website.

5. Radio interviews

In Newcastle we are fortunate to have one of the (government funded) Australian Broadcasting Corporation's regional radio stations (1233 ABC Newcastle). Our initial interaction with the ABC benefitted from two locally specific attributes: the fact that the broadcast area for ABC Newcastle coincides with the area that we service; and the novel nature of the ukulele in Newcastle at the time that we started – no one else was doing it.



The first radio interview with ABC Newcastle (5 November 2009) was key to attracting our first students, but over the years there have been occasional mentions, interactions and interviews that have continued to help maintain our public profile. The local ABC has been a good friend, albeit with an obligation not to talk about the commercial aspects of what we do. Thus in our interviews we focus on what playing ukulele has done for others, for instance the places the ukulele has taken them, and the friendships they have made. We have been involved in a number of local public ABC concerts and in each of these performances, audiences can clearly see how much joy mass music-making brings to its participants.

We have enjoyed a positive relationship with the local 'talk' radio station (2HD) which is popular with an older and more conservative demographic. However, this has been less successful than our ABC interaction.

6. Word of mouth

This should probably be ranked higher than sixth in our list, but it is hard to know how effective it is or how to control this form of advertising. One hopes that giving a good service means that 'word of mouth' works for us. It certainly seems to, based on feedback from people when they sign up for our beginner workshops. Giving your ukestrans a ukestra pamphlet to distribute to friends is one way to support this strategy.

7. Postering

We have posters and we have postered, but not consistently. This is possibly to our detriment. Posters in cafés, shops and community noticeboards have definitely brought students to us. A regular poster presence plays a significant marketing role in two ways:

- It attracts curious individuals to take action, to join a beginners class or approach us about joining a ukestra; and
- Helps us maintain a public profile and keep ukulele-playing as a prominent option in people's choice of hobbies.

Whilst online advertising options are now dominant, a consistent presence of posters in the community is key to letting people know that we are around and local. After all, we had to stick the bloody thing up!

6.2 Other marketing initiatives we have used

Maintaining a constant presence in the public eye is an ongoing task which uses multiple methods. We employ, to varying (or unidentifiable) effect, the following:

- Always having fliers available at performances and, if possible, somebody to hand them out.
- Occasionally advertising in micro local media. We ran a weekly ukestra in Paterson, a town of fewer than 500 people. So whilst our word-of-mouth and website drew people from the nearby regional city (Maitland), an occasional (\$20) advertisement in the *Paterson Psst* informed and attracted locals who could walk to their pub on a Monday night for ukulele.
- Doing one or two talks at local Probus and other service clubs each year. Fliers, a singalong and a song or two, and a talk about the health and social benefits of music-making round out a relevant PR exercise to this retiree demographic.
- Conducting letterbox drops in the immediate vicinity of our venues. It is a good exercise, but we now have limited availability to do this rather time-consuming task.
- In recent years we have had car door magnets designed. The production of these is *very* cheap, and they are surprisingly durable. People have contacted us after seeing them, and when pulled up at traffic lights it is obvious that they draw attention.
- In 2016 we successfully completed our third biannual Newkulele Festival. We helped initiate this, but were not on the committee for 2016. Nevertheless we have a vested interest because a successfully executed ukulele festival is an incredibly powerful marketing tool, both directly (through our presence and workshops at the festival), and indirectly (through the general popularisation of the instrument and participation in music-making).
- Paid radio advertising, which was very expensive and got us one irregular student.
- Creating a publically accessible Google Calendar (which is linked to our website).



Chapter 7

ADDITIONAL INCOME STREAMS

This is a manual about ukestras, and how to set up systems which can help you become more sustainable in delivering those. The adult ukestras provide our primary, regular, sustainable income, which is supplemented by incomes from related activities. Initially (for 2-3 years) we had great success in ukulele sales. Next we had a healthy and thriving school income for about 4-5 years. Now we make extra income from touring workshops and festivals. It keeps changing for us and we keep evolving. This evolution is propelled by our own interests and by keeping an eye on what the market is demanding.

There are a variety of possibilities for other income streams, but these are the obvious ones that can be used.

7.2 Private tuition

Providing private tuition is always an option, but it is potentially a distraction from our main role and focus when seeking to offer community music services. Despite this caveat, many potential synergies clearly exist between private individual tuition and public group tuition. However, in a limited fashion, we have found it useful to offer it in the following circumstances:

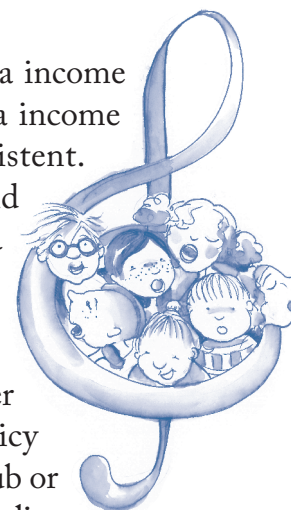
- It did provide us with important supplementary income when we first started out and were experimenting with the business model and income streams.
- When it helps with building the skills of individuals who have requested it.
- As a short-term strategy for a really nervous person prior to them entering a ukestra.
- For an occasional ukestran who needs or wants targeted development not possible in a class. This may also help with student retention in the ukestra.



Private musical tuition is a different business model to the one that we run. When doing it we were careful about it derailing our predominant goal of helping people to play music together. These days we are pretty much too busy to do private teaching. As a result we usually refer enquiries onto other teachers, particularly our own staff, who enjoy the extra income.

7.2 School ukulele groups

Our adult ukestras keep us alive financially, but much of our extra income has, historically, come from teaching in schools. The adult ukestra income is not term-based, therefore the income stream is fairly consistent. In contrast, the teaching of ukulele to children is term-based, and therefore fluctuates. Nevertheless, it allowed us to save a bit of extra money at the beginning of each term as we received a significant injection of term-based fees.



We found ukestrations to be great for teaching children. However teaching in the school environment is fraught with many more policy and procedural obligations than teaching adults casually in a pub, club or church hall. Chief of these requirements is obtaining the relevant police or welfare checks; in our state (NSW) this is called a Working with Children Check. Teaching children has nuances and requirements that we are not going to discuss further here. Suffice to say that in terms of income and compatibility with The Ukestra Method of teaching adults, it is worth further consideration for those seeking to expand income and teaching opportunities.

7.3 Other musician projects (aka maintaining your creative mojo)

As mentioned above, we find it important to have extra creative musical projects to satisfy our desires to play music with peers who are equivalent to ourselves (or better) in professionalism and skill. This income is less reliable and, frankly, not well paid. However it is rewarding to put yourself out there as a musician, work with others and satisfy your creative drive. Releasing our duo album *Jack n Jel*, in 2016, was a real personal achievement for that year.

Writing and releasing *The Ukestration Manual* and *The Business of Being a Community Musician* has been another related creative project that has met our need for personal expression and achievement beyond the ukestras.



7.4 Hospitals

Prior to establishing ukestras, we were already established working as community musicians in hospitals. We have facilitated weekly 1-hour group music sessions in a number of mental health wards with this work initially coming about through prior professional connections.

We are not trained music therapists, and as a consequence of the growing professionalism of the music therapy field, we cannot use this title. We thus call our services recreational music services. We have found it a useful and regular income supplement for nearly a decade. In the absence of music therapist positions in your local area, you might consider exploring this casual contracting option if it suits your temperament.

7.5 Paid ukestra gigs

Getting ukestras to perform requires a lot of effort, but it is great publicity. Ukestrans also get a lot of joy from it, and it is often a key motivational catalyst for learning and attending class. We earn income from such gigs in two ways:

- Endeavouring to charge the organisation requesting the performance
- Requesting a rehearsal fee from the performers that is additional to the usual ukestra session fee

We get enquiries from a multitude of potential audiences (e.g. local festivals and markets, cruise ship welcomes, art gallery openings and nursing homes). Most of these are seeking free entertainment. We generally explain our situation as professional musicians, and that the ukestra is not necessarily a free service. We have smaller splinter groups from the ukestra that are often willing to perform for free and who we recommend.

It is also worth remembering that when doing gigs, often the engaging organisation will value you as much as you are paid. If you do gigs for free, it can be the case that your relative position (either in terms of location or timeslot) will vary in relation to how much you are paid!



We have also decided to value the significant efforts we go to in order to get ukestrans together (musically and logistically) for high profile festivals. As a result we charge rehearsal fees for specific events. The amount varies depending upon the amount of work we estimate we have to do to achieve a suitable performance level (usually \$5 per person per rehearsal).

7.6 More possible income streams

There are many other related community music endeavours that can be added on to the ukestras model, or with which you can experiment. For example we have two choir sessions per week that attract 20-30 people each, and have been a very successful adjunct to The Ukestra Method. We have also tried banjo circles, stringed jam sessions, and advanced music reading ukulele sessions.

Whichever of these complementary strategies you choose to pursue will depend upon your own interest and skills, the amount of time you have available, and the success or otherwise of a new initiative. Some of the following income streams have been very successful for us at different times in the business.

Paid performances – for instance we often get asked to play *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* at wedding ceremonies. Even once at a funeral.

Merchandise – although retail is a rather different skill set to community musician, we are in quite the box seat for selling ukes and uke-related things, especially tuners, uke bags and books. In our early days, we had great success with the sales of ukuleles and related merchandise. The world wide web and local music shops eventually caught up with us and could offer more range and better prices, so retail sales are not so important to us now.

Educational workshops - teaching one-off workshops at festivals, schools, and ukulele clubs. This has become a good income stream for us when we travel and tour. Our reputation for delivering dynamic and fun workshops has grown both nationally and internationally.



Educational ukulele books and courses - we choose to sell the James Hill ukulele books (*Ukulele in the Classroom* and *The Ukulele Way* amongst others) as well as others books that we find really useful such as *Kiwi Ukulele* (Mike Dickinson).

Organising one-off concerts by visiting artists for which you can expect 15-20% of the profit for promotion, management and ticketing.

Servicing ukuleles – this is a specialised skill, but we do know of some teachers who do it (including repairs and installing pickups). Simply re-stringing ukuleles is something many new players are reluctant to do.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY & FESTIVAL PERFORMANCES

TedxNewy 2011 - talk by Mark Jackson, followed by leading a Ukestra performance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld63ubCOmSk>

Melbourne Ukulele Festival 2014 - Ukastle Ukestra - *How to Make Gravy* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8ufPu6_RI8

Lions National Convention 2015 - Newcastle Civic Theatre <https://youtu.be/flHuBf3Mkqk>

A variety of photos from our community and festival performances <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ukestra/>



THE ONE SONG SING

Our latest non-ukestra endeavour has taken us by surprise. We discovered Canada's [Choir! Choir! Choir!](#) through their online videos. This 'instant choir' model involves getting people to learn vocal parts for a song within about an hour. The song is then performed, filmed and the final product is broadcast on YouTube and Facebook.

We held our first in June 2017 and attracted 120 people. In August we held our second with 160 people attending. We later discovered that there is a very successful similar initiative in Brisbane which began in April 2017 and regularly attracts 300 people. Clearly the model is popular, but one of the most fascinating aspects of it is the role of social media in building an audience and community. The right step we appear to have made is connecting the power of videos with the power of individuals linking together through a dedicated Facebook Group. Here they express their joy in the activity, and are able to tangibly share their joy through sharing the video. This is true viralness - infecting others with their joy or acknowledging the joy of others.

The tagging of friends (either in a way that reflects 'I saw you! (tagged)', 'This is me!', or 'Isn't this wonderful!') helps spread the word rather quickly through the media of the One Song Sing Facebook Group, but also the One Song Sing Page.



Chapter 8

COMPLIANCE ISSUES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Copyright and licensing

This is a fraught and extraordinarily entangled area for community musicians. The recent ukulele boom has largely forged an exuberant disregard for copyright issues, and we are neither qualified nor confident to give accurate guidance. Approaches to copyright also vary between nations (e.g. the USA – from where most popular songs originate, versus Australian law), formats (e.g. written, performance, videos) and situations (e.g. concerts, rehearsals, gigs).

Despite the existence of large corporate interests and systems of payments and licencing, the amount of songs, lyrics and chords available on the internet is utterly vast, as are the videoed renditions of songs. Most of this is probably technically illegal, but remains largely unenforced. As Mike Dickison from *Kiwi Ukulele* says in response to this *Ukulele Hunt* article:

Copyright law has an enormous effect on the music community, including chord sites and YouTube videos. If it were actually enforced, much of the amateur music scene would simply disappear. Every ukulele group I know uses copyrighted songs.

Al Wood from *Ukulele Hunt* puts the problem in this way.

Copyright needs to strike a balance between the return an artist rightly deserves for their work and the right of society to its own culture.

As community musicians we see this paradox all too starkly.

Copyright for ourselves and for others is really beyond our ability to address here, and we direct you to higher authorities. In Australia that higher authority is APRA/AMCOS (with whom we are registered).

There are, of course, numerous published volumes of 'ukulele songs'. Whilst these are useful resources, they are not sufficient to provide the only resource for a creatively curated ukestra.



8.2 Workplace Health and Safety

Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) and the risks of any workplace (obvious or not) are a reality of modern business and community life. In relation to the ukulele these risks may be difficult to identify, but they are there. For instance, a rather well known ukulele group director recently retired partly because 30 years of group directing using a ukulele gave him a back injury and a pronounced hunch. Good posture is really important, and Alexander practitioners may be of assistance in remedying poor performance technique. Look after yourself! But also look after the welfare of others for whom you wish to create a safe and happy environment.

Remain constantly vigilant about potential risk situations. A few examples come to mind, particularly when working with an older age group:

- **Stow leads safely.** If setting up a PA, do your best to minimise trip hazards.
- **Paper cuts.** Seriously! You may not get sued for it, but just be careful when handing music to participants. Thin skin may result in easily delivered paper cuts.
- **Accessing stages.** When performing be aware of frailty and instability. Always be there to help people on and off stage, or ensure someone else is there to assist.
- **Adequate shelter.** Be careful about excessively hot, sunny or cold exposed performances with inadequate shelter.

In reality, many of the workplaces in which we find ourselves are venues owned by other people (pubs and clubs), so our duties are often limited to having a basic awareness of the location of emergency exits, fire extinguishers, defibrillator machines and muster points.

The second type of workplace in which we work are street fairs and festivals, etc. Here the ground might be uneven or ukestrans might be walking onto a stage strewn with cables. Apart from basic understandings, cautions and relevant warnings, these situations are often the ones where we are obliged to have Public Liability Insurance (PLI – see 8.2).



As the perceived or actual community leader, we may also find that ukestrans advise us of conditions which may require some emergency action, or medication. What are those potential actions or medication locations? Who is vulnerable to such events and do you know emergency contact details, or is it appropriate to invite people to arrange a 'buddy'?

CASE STUDY – LOOK AFTER YOUR UKESTRANS

We performed at a festival and one of our students/fellow performers advised us of the possibility of the recurrence of an intermittent chronic condition. We talked about the ins and outs of the condition, the precautions they normally took and the assistance they sought. We also read up a little on the condition and agreed to keep a watchful eye, and take the requested action if there was a relapse. Fortunately nothing happened (except we had learned more about this common yet debilitating condition).

Getting and maintaining currency in First Aid is something all of us should do, but is particularly a sensible skill to have as a community leader. We both have First Aid qualifications from other community activities that we undertake.

Ultimately the responsibilities of WHS could be encapsulated in the following:

- **Look after your own wellbeing**
- **Look after your ukestrans**
- **Encourage your ukestrans to look after each other**

8.3 Public Liability Insurance (PLI)

The preceding discussion highlights the increased awareness about duty of care that we all should have for others, regardless of the apparently low risk of our activities. PLI is the financial formalisation of that duty of care, and the associated risk. Despite the low risks involved in group ukulele tuition and related performances, Public Liability Insurance (PLI) for all sorts of musicians has



now become mandatory. Many public events and festivals insist on all musicians holding PLI in order to perform. Australian organisations such as Duck for Cover (duckforcover.com.au – a musicians’ cooperative insurance scheme) and the Folk Alliance (folkalliance.org.au) offer coverage for performers, and to a limited extent for music teachers.

However, once our income increased to a certain level, we found it more relevant to insure through an insurance agency designed to allow performances by students of dance schools. They accepted our business model as a ukulele school, and the coverage extended to general performance and work in related community music areas (such as hospitals).

8.4 Professional Development (PD)

One of the great joys of our work is that we are obliged to keep up to date with things in our professional world. These can be really diverse activities, bridging both the community and music fields. Festivals, concerts, private tuition and workshops, are all important for maintaining our skill and knowledge in the field of community music. All of this is tax deductible – so long as the work income is declared.

Professional networks (for instance through Facebook Groups) also provide us with suggestions and ideas for professional development opportunities. For us, many of our opportunities have come through the [James Hill Ukulele Initiative](#). We have also been instrumental in establishing a national network of ukulele teachers and leaders – [AUTLA](#) – the Australian Ukulele Teachers and Leaders Association. This organisation has been instrumental in establishing regular professional development opportunities for ukulele teachers.



Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

The Business of being a Community Musician is about successfully combining a commitment to helping others make music together, with relevant business systems, sustainability of income, and your personal energy and life priorities. You need to decide whether your sustainability solution is a business or a community organisation, whether it is a job or a hobby. Whichever, each of these require a clear statement of mission, and thorough planning with future goals and objectives in mind.

If it is set up as a business, planning time release from that business is really important for your health and the longevity of the enterprise. Therefore, early on, you need to identify and cultivate your future staff, and most of all design your business systems so that others can use them *in your absence!*

The Ukestra Method is different, sufficiently so that we are able to charge for our service, whereas volunteer-run community groups charge little or nothing. However, even running four ukestras a week using ukestration will guarantee only a modest income. This is because there needs to be 20 hours of administration to support this 12 hours of direct teaching. Therefore, you will need either a greater number of ukestras, or more diverse income streams. Historically, we found that teaching in schools was a good supplement for our adult ukestras, but now we prefer to supplement our ukestra income with that from our local choirs and the income we receive from workshops at festivals.

Finding free or very cheap venues is another key component to both our financial, social and pedagogical success. We search for venues that provide the right infrastructure for our ukestras; good parking, serving drinks and/or food, well located within the city, no sound spill, and often a sunny aspect for a morning session. Maintaining good communication with management is vital to a productive and mutually beneficial relationship.



Most importantly price your ukestras so that you can afford to be a community musician. Don't undervalue yourself and the work that you do as it takes a lot of energy and organisational skills, not just good musicianship and a sensitive community worker attitude. If you employ staff at some stage, ensure you've got the budgeting AND the training right.

Effective administration is both the bane and the vital lifeline of any small enterprise. The tools you select will vary according to your skillset and preferences, however it is important to set up business systems that staff can operate in your absence, or that can be accessed remotely. We are fortunate to be surrounded with good staff (albeit casually employed) that can run many aspects of the business for us so that we can also do creative projects such as producing our *Jack n Jel* CD or writing these manuals and travelling.

A diversity of income streams is important as a community musician, so that you can enjoy the diversity of work that you take on, while maintaining your creative enthusiasm for the ukestras. Retaining your vitality is crucial to avoiding 'burn out' and to remain sufficiently flexible to follow the different musical and business trajectories you may travel over time.

Ultimately it is about these nurturing these fundamentals - vitality, passion, creativity. Retaining these essential ingredients of life are also central keys to your business of being a community musician, for it is your enjoyment of this life that ultimately will attract others to what you do.



ARE YOU READY TO BE A COMMUNITY MUSICIAN?

AN ESSENTIALS CHECKLIST:

1. Be regular, reliable, predictable, consistent, weekly.
2. Set up a website. Make a website. Have a website. It cannot be stressed strongly enough. FROM DAY ONE! HAVE A WEBSITE!
3. Offer a Uketen from the very beginning. It encourages commitment, and gives the message that you are here for the long term.
4. See which way the wind is blowing – constantly reflect on the demand that you detect. Expand the number of sessions as demand warrants. Cater for the different geographies and timetables of your customers.
5. Experiment with different formats (advanced music reading, singing, beginner sessions) to explore the differing demands.
6. Have a public performance after the first three months of starting, then regularly after that. It gives ukestrans a goal to work towards, and it provides publicity opportunities. Ensure you have business cards and fliers available on the day of performance.
7. Gain as much ongoing and free publicity as possible. Perform at school fetes, carnivals and markets, etc.
8. Communicate regularly inside and outside of class. Establish a regular (fortnightly or monthly) newsletter which details opportunities (performances and your own other classes) as well as observations, playing advice and tips, and news about ukestrans.
9. Establish a one-off monthly beginners class separate from the ukestras.
10. Identify allies and keen participants who are willing to casually assist with beginners.



11. Constantly monitor and reflect upon your stage of development. Remain focused upon how your group is going in terms of numbers, social cohesion and in skills. These elements need to be maintained or improved in order to achieve a sustainable level of attendance and income.
12. Keep on top of the revenues and expenses in your business. Check in with your profit and loss sheet every month or two and see what is working for your business. This will change over time, so be prepared to shift with 'what is working' for the business. But also be patient with some enterprises that take time to develop.
13. Enjoy yourself; it is your creative project!



REFERENCES

p24

(Thesaurus Rex) Find. Dank. Memes. (2017). *Meme generator*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://me.me>

p28

Waldman, J. (2017). *How to Start and Grow an Ukulele Group: An Easy Plan for Spreading Aloha in Your Town*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

p33

Newcastle Herald. (2011). 'Ukestras Make Beautiful Music'. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/440357/ukestras-make-beautiful-music/>

YouTube. (2011). *TedX Newy 2011*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://youtu.be/ld63ubCOmSk>

p36

Ukulele Hunt. 2010. *Why you should give a crap about copyright terms*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://ukulelehunt.com/2010/11/03/why-you-should-give-a-crap-about-copyright-terms/>

p42

Bandcamp. (2017). *Jack n Jel album release*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://jacknjel.bandcamp.com/releases>

p45

Hill, J. & Doane, J Chalmers. (2009). *Ukulele in the Classroom*. Crystal Lake Media.

Hill, J. (2017). *The Ukulele Way*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.theukuleleway.com>

Dickinson, M. (2008). *Kiwi Ukulele: The New Zealand Ukulele Companion*. Auckland: AUT Media.



