



BOOKINGS

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The Boss' Approval

PARSONS AND VANDEVEN LURE SPRINGSTEEN INTO CURTAINED ARENA THEATERS

BY NATASHA EMMONS

Brad Parsons, ArenaNetwork Theatre Group, and Ron VanDeVeen, Meadowlands, East Rutherford, N.J., both have a low-key attitude about being voted co-recipients of the VT 2005 Hall of Headlines Award in the Bookings category for convincing Bruce Springsteen to play sized-down arenas on his 2005 theater tour.

Springsteen "was looking at theaters and all options when we got in touch with him and [asked] him to look at playing [arenas] in theater setups," VanDeVeen said. "We sent the ArenaNetwork Theater Group book...they showed it to Bruce and Bruce said, 'Okay, let's take a look at this.'"

VanDeVeen curtained his arena as he would for a theater show, and Springsteen and his entourage came in for a visit, did some whispering among themselves, and decided to go for it.

Springsteen ended up playing 11 ANTG setups, and an additional eight or nine more that were not members of the consortium, according to Parsons. "Obviously, it was really good for us. We can tell people Bruce Springsteen played in our theaters. That helps us when we talk to other acts. It gives us credibility," Parsons said.

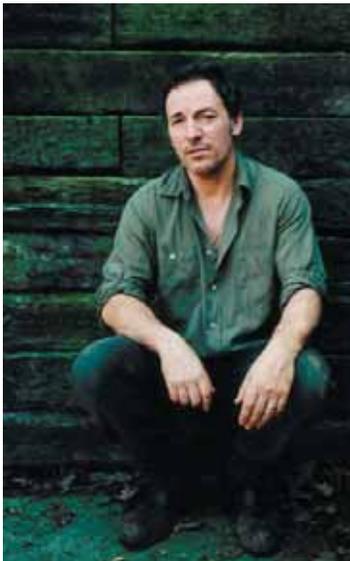
Springsteen ended up adjusting ticket sales at curtained arenas. For example, at Meadowlands, he started out selling 5,500 tickets in the spring, then upped that to 8,000 before the show. In the fall, he played a 10,000-seat theater setup there. "In the end, he was comfortable that it retained its intimacy or a lot of its intimacy, and he could sell more tickets than he could at the local theater," Parsons noted. "He could do 5,000 to 7,000 in these arenas as theaters."

For the next edition of the slick ANTG marketing book, Parsons plans to focus more on the artists that have played arena theater setups, highlighted, of course, by Springsteen, who has given them permission to use his image in their material. Dolly Parton, a show that ANTG actually purchased and promoted, will also be featured. As will Norah Jones, Matchbox Twenty, Trans-Siberian Orchestra, Kenny Rogers, Bill Cosby, Tom Jones, and Dave Mathews and Tim Reynolds together. "There's no doubt we're getting more and more people to consider this all the time and more and more are doing it all the time," Parsons said.

"The ArenaNetwork concept has already changed the industry," said Brad Mayne, president and CEO of Center Operating Company LP, which runs American Airlines Center in Dallas. "The facilities have the resources to do everything necessary to make events successful. It's a real shame that the industry has not recognized this up to now, and it's great that, once seen by an artist the caliber of The Boss, that he recognizes our resources and accepts the concept and creates another success story."

But Parsons, VanDeVeen and their consorts have more than artist perception to win over; they have to prove to the public that this is a true intimate experience. "With the public, frankly, it just takes time," Parsons said. And good marketing, he added, such as giving the theater setup a different name — The Theater at Continental Airlines Arena, for instance.

This will not be the last of Parsons' breakthroughs, according to Pat Christenson, president of Las Vegas Events. "When the ArenaNetwork was created, Brad Parsons was highly recommended by John Meglen and Paul Gongaware [of AEG Concerts West]. They clearly understood the importance of integrating a talent buyer with a personality capable of growing a new concept of venues taking control of their destiny. It is hard for me to fathom the ArenaNetwork having the growth and success they have had without Brad Parsons at the wheel."



Clockwise from top left, Brad Parsons, Ron VanDeVeen and Bruce Springsteen