



Photo: Courtesy of The Neal Agency

# AUSTIN NEAL BRINGS BACK *The Neal* AGENCY A FAMILY HEIRLOOM

By Liza Anderson

Tours and live shows unite music lovers everywhere. Connecting musicians with their fan bases as well as fans with one another, they've been a crucial part of the industry for decades. After pausing for the pandemic, shows are back in full swing. Artists have hit the road again, booking gigs and traveling to various venues all over.

As the lights hit the stage and music begins to coat every corner during each performance, the crowd comes together to take it all in. When swaying to the vocal stylings of Morgan Wallen, Ernest, Ashland Craft, and the other talented clients of The Neal Agency, it's likely you'll find owner and booking agent Austin Neal on the side of the stage, taking it all in, too.

A third generation industry member, Austin grew up around the music business. His grandfather Bob Neal was a disc jockey and one of Elvis Presley's original managers. He initially opened The Neal Agency in the mid-60s, and ran the company up until his passing. Although he was never able to meet his grandfather, Austin feels he has gotten to know the legendary industry veteran through stories of him and his career.

Austin's father Kevin Neal has over 30 years of music industry experience, having guided the careers of Jason Aldean, Colt Ford, Parmalee, and more. Kevin joined The Neal Agency in 1981 and then moved to Buddy Lee Attractions (BLA) in 1983. He served as President of BLA, starting in 2009, until he joined WME in

2014, where he is currently a partner.

In February of 2022, Austin officially launched the 21st century edition of The Neal Agency with the intention of developing a boutique business that reflects the meaningful relationships he has with his artists and his team. The booking firm's current roster includes Ashland Craft, Chase Rice, Ernest, Hardy, John Morgan, Morgan Wallen, Riley Green, Seaforth, and latest signee Lauren Watkins.

Despite his life-long affinity for music, Austin did not follow in his grandfather and father's footsteps right away. While attending the University of Mississippi, he was on the pre-med track. Graduating with a degree in chemistry, he accepted a job at a Nashville-based chemistry lab and found himself rising quickly through the ranks. Ultimately, he came to the conclusion that corporate life wasn't for him and decided to enter the entertainment industry. Having been an athlete for most of his life, he started in sports and eventually joined the world of music after his father suggested he might have a knack for the business.

"My dad is my biggest mentor. I've learned from watching him treat people right while also being fiercely competitive. If you ask anybody in [Nashville], my dad has always been fair to everybody, fought for his artists, and taken the time to meet with anyone in the business," Austin shares.

Austin started at BLA, signing acts with his father. At the time, BLA was considered to be a boutique agency and Austin often stepped in as the signees' manager until one was brought on board, helping to build websites and develop social media accounts as platforms emerged.

As a result, he became interested in management and moved over to Oswald Entertainment Group, where he worked with country duo Big & Rich. While out a bar, Austin met friend and current client Chase Rice, who connected him with then-Triple 8 manager Bruce Kalmick. Kalmick hired Austin and he stayed with the Triple 8 Management team until he transitioned back to being an agent, landing at WME.

Austin's time as a manager allowed him to see the industry through a different lens, helping him to build his business approach as he moved forward in his career. He also found he enjoyed getting to know his clients on a more personal level and valued the deep bonds he developed with them. He continued to establish close partnerships within his roster at WME. Those relationships assisted in guiding his artists' careers as well as his own.

When Austin left WME at the end of 2021 to start the new Neal Agency, artists Ashland Craft, Chase Rice, Ernest, Hardy, Morgan Wallen, Riley Green, and more followed, solidifying their relationships and their trust in him.

"All [my clients] are really great people who make really great music. I think they know that I will go to bat for them. When you leave to start something on your own and they're willing

to go with you, they're signifying their belief in you and your relationships. What we've been able to accomplish is an ode to them for taking a risk and branching out with me. That's a testament to the relationships that we have and it's really special. It's honestly what I am most proud of," Austin says.

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**"THE CORE OF BEING AN AGENT IS TRULY BELIEVING IN AN ARTIST AND BEING WILLING TO SEE THEM THROUGH UNTIL THE END, THE GOOD TIMES AND THE BAD. IF THEY DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE, EVERY ARTIST KNOWS NOW THAT I WILL COMPLETELY UP-ROOT MY LIFE IN ORDER TO STICK WITH THEM, BECAUSE I KNOW WHAT KIND OF PERSON EACH ONE TRULY IS." - AUSTIN NEAL**

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## AS AN ARTIST, YOU'RE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD.

Finding a partner who gets that is rare. Banks usually want to **PLAY** it safe. But that's not your style. You've taken the **HARD** road. You need a **BANK** that's driven by dreams of what could be and not just what is. Is it **EASY**? No. But that's the road we've both taken.

**Pinnacle**<sup>SM</sup>  
FINANCIAL PARTNERS  
PLAY HARD, BANK EASY.





Pictured (Top Left): Austin Neal, Morgan Wallen, Andrew Greene; (Top Right): HARDY, Austin Neal; (Bottom): Andrew Greene, ERNEST, Austin Neal. Photo: Courtesy of The Neal Talent Agency

When it came to hiring staff members, Austin wanted to make sure the best people for the job were walking through the door. He grew up playing team sports and brought that mindset into formulating the business.

“Everyone has a position on a team. Everyone is important. It just takes one weak position to cause a real problem within a team. You’re in the trenches together and you’ve got to know that everyone on your team has your back. There are also sacrifices that have to be made, just because you might be the best at one position doesn’t mean that’s the position you’re going to play. You’re going to do what’s best for the team.”

Over the past year, he’s garnered team members he feels have potential and work well together, cultivating strong bonds with them just as he has with his clients.

“Helping our young agents that I believe in so much to build their brand while reaching new levels of success together is my ultimate goal now,” he states.

For The Neal Agency logo, Austin took elements from his grandfather’s original design and made it his own, incorporating the colors of a Shelby Mustang.

“I love [Mustang designer] Carroll Shelby. I think there are a lot of parallels between him having a little team of hot-rodders competing with major car manufacturers and my team and I.”

He emits genuine excitement as he talks about his clients and

their career milestones, such as Morgan Wallen’s “The Dangerous Tour,” the largest country trek in North America this year, and Riley Green’s sold-out shows across the nation, which Austin believes speaks to how his team builds artists as well as hard tickets, which is the center of the booking business. He’s enthusiastic discussing Ernest’s fall tour announcement, Hardy’s three sold-out Coyote Joes’ performances, Ashland Craft on Marcus King’s tour, John Morgan on Jason Aldean’s tour, Seaforth’s success on the road, and more.

“I’m on the road so much because I never want to miss these moments with the team,” Austin says.

He encourages all team members to travel to the shows so they can experience the magic they’ve helped create together.

“The core of being an agent is truly believing in an artist and being willing to see them through until the end, the good times and the bad. If they didn’t know before, every artist knows now that I will completely up-root my life in order to stick with them, because I know what kind of person each one truly is.” **MR**

