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Unless you have major label money behind you, the ability to self-promote your music is one of the most important skills you can have. When you don't have money to hire PR people to run media campaigns for you, it is up to you to make sure people know about the music you are making. Getting started can be a little overwhelming, however. These steps will help you start out on the right foot, to make sure all of the right people are standing up and taking notice of you.

Identify Your Goals

When you set out to promote your music, don't try to cover too much ground at once. Look at the way larger artists are promoted - they have specific campaigns that promote specific things, like a new album or a tour. Choose one thing to promote, like:

Once you know what to promote, you will be able to make clear goals for yourself, i.e. if you want to promote your website, then your goal is to bring traffic to the site. With these goals in mind, you'll find it easier to come up with promotion ideas, and you'll be better able to judge the success of your promotions.

- A single
- A show
- A website

Target the Right Audience

With your promotional goal in mind, figure out who the right audience for your campaign is. If you have a gig coming up, then the right audience for your promotion are the local print publications and radio stations in the town in which your show is happening. If you have a limited edition single coming out, your primary audience is your band mailing list, plus the media.

Going for the right audience is especially important if you're on a budget. Don't waste time and money letting town X knowing about an upcoming show in town Y or a folk magazine about your new hip hop album.

Have a Promo Package

Just like when you send a demo to a label, to self-promote your music, you need a good promo package.

Your package should have:

- A press release detailing your news
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- A short (one page) band bio
- A CD (a demo recording is ok, or an advance copy of an upcoming release)
- A package of any press coverage you have had so far - press coverage begets press coverage
- Your contact information (make sure to include an email address - people may hesitate to call you)
- A color photo, or a link to a site where a photo can be downloaded. The press is more likely to run a photo if they don't have to chase it.

Find Your Niche

The sad truth is, every writer, radio station, website, or fan for that matter, you are trying to reach is likely being bombarded with info from other music hopefuls. You a reason to stand out. Try to find something that will make people more curious about you - give them a reason to want to know more. Being elusive worked wonders for Belle & Sebastian at the start of their career and people write about Marilyn Manson for being, well, Marilyn Manson. You don't have to devise a huge, calculated persona, but giving people a reason to check out your show or your CD before the others can only help.

Bribe 'Em

Another way to stand out from the crowd is plain old free stuff. Even press people and label bosses love getting something for nothing, and you'll whip your fans into a frenzy (and get new fans) by giving stuff away.

Some ideas:

Put some money behind the bar at a show and give free drink passes to all the industry people who come to check you out.

Give people on your mailing list an exclusive download once a month (be it a new song or an alternate version of a song)

At gigs, raffle (for free) mix CDs made by the band - everyone who signs up to your mailing list at the show gets entered in the drawing.

Branding

Get your name out there. Make up some stickers, badges, posters, lighters or anything else you can think of that include your band's name. Then, leave the stuff anywhere you can. Pass them out at your favorite clubs, leave them on the record shop counter, poster the light posts - go for it. Soon, your name will be familiar to people even if they don't know why, and when they see

your name in the paper advertising an upcoming show, they'll think "hey...I know that name, I wonder what that's all about.."

Keep Track of Your Contacts

As you go through all of these steps, chances are that you are going to pick up a lot of new contacts along the way. Some of these contacts will be industry people and some will be fans. Never lose track of a contact. Keep a database on your computer for the industry people you have met and another database of fan contacts. These databases should be your first port of call for your next promotional campaign - and these databases should always be growing. Don't write anyone off, even if you don't get much feedback from them. You never know who is going to give you the break you need.

Know When to Act Small

This step ties in with targeting the right audience and identifying your goals - you can save a lot of time spinning your wheels by keeping the small stuff small. While it's always useful to keep other people up to date with what's happening in your career, that guy from Rolling Stone doesn't really need to know every time your band is playing a half hour set at the local club, especially if the local press really hasn't given you much coverage yet. When you're getting started, the easiest place to start a buzz is your local area. Build up the small stuff to get to the bigger stuff.

But Know When to Act Large

Sometimes, a larger campaign really is in order. Go full speed ahead when you have something big brewing, like:

This kind of news warrants contacting both the media and people you want to work with, like labels, agents, managers and so on.

- A new album

- A tour

- An important piece of news, like an award or a new record deal

Find the RIGHT Niche

As mentioned, finding your niche is helpful in getting noticed. There is one caveat, however - make sure you get noticed for the right reasons. You certainly will get some attention for bad, unprofessional behavior, but the problem is that your music won't be what everyone is talking about - and isn't that what you really want to be recognized for? Don't do yourself the disservice of self-promoting a bad rep for yourself. Make sure you get noticed

for your talent instead. Also, don't be fake. If you're not sure what your niche is yet, don't push it. Stay true to yourself and your music.

Grow your Database

In addition to keeping tracks of the contacts you have, don't be afraid to help your database grow by adding some "dream" contacts to your list. Is there an agent you want to take notice of you? Then include them on your press release mailing list or promo mailing list when you have big news to share. Let them know you're still working and still building your career - pretty soon, they may be knocking on your door.

Take a Deep Breath

For many people, the idea of self-promoting their music to their fans is easy, but the idea of calling up the press is downright terrifying. Relax. Here's the truth - some people you call will be nice, some people won't be. Some people will never return your calls or emails. Some will. You shouldn't take any of it personally. You definitely shouldn't be afraid to try. Covering bands is the job of the music media - they expect to hear from you. Don't be discouraged by someone who is rude, or someone who is polite, but still says "no". Don't write them off, either. Next time, you may hear "yes."

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