

Title:

How to Become a Successful Independent Artist or Songwriter

Word Count:

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Summary:

The main steps you need to take in order to learn and perfect your craft. Tips on organising your career as an Independent Artist, so that you are more likely to be noticed. Some promotional ideas to get you started on the road to success.

Keywords:

Successful Independent Artist, songwriter, attitude, first step, musician, hobby, rewarding, business, techniques, skills, creative, instrument,

Article Body:

By far the most important skill to have if you wish to become successful with anything, is ATTITUDE. An old Chinese proverb once said, "90% of the journey towards success is over once you have stepped outside your front door." The reason many people fail, is because they'd rather stay in and watch the TV.

Of course, that first step outside is a philosophical one. As a musician or songwriter, you spend the vast majority of your time being creative. If you think that writing a great song, or playing an instrument well, is the hardest part of being a successful artist, you are wrong.

Despite all the skills you need to know and perfect in order to make your music shine, these pale into insignificance compared with the hard work and other skills you will need to learn in order to record, market and sell your art successfully.

Fortunately, most creative people also seem to excel at other things. The term "Jack of all trades" could quite easily apply to most musicians or artists. After all, the first thing most artists have to learn, is how to find time for their art whilst running a home AND holding down a Day Job in order to pay the bills! It is therefore not unusual to find musicians who are also Physicists, Engineers, IT Professionals or Teachers, to name but a few.

Most of these people are quite content to keep music as a hobby, at least whilst bringing up a family. However, we all get to a stage in our lives (usually once the kids have grown up and left home), where we want to cease working for a

"Living", and instead, work for our own "Satisfaction".

There are few things in life more satisfying than being admired for something we created. If our creations also manage to influence others, then it is even more rewarding.

This "first step outside your front door" is taken when you decide to pause from the creative aspect (the ideas), and take a positive step towards learning new skills, or employing others who can do those things for you.

There has never been a better time in the history of mankind, to take those steps, either by yourself, or with others who would help you.

--Where you used to have to pay for tutoring, or buy books, in order to learn the techniques of songwriting, or playing an instrument, you can now find scores of articles on the Internet (like this one!) that will help you for free.

--Where you used to have to save up a considerable amount of money to pay studio costs and hire session musicians to make a decent demo recording, you can now find all the necessary tools, and even the musicians, on the Internet who would help you for little or no cost at all.

--Where you needed to sign a record deal in order to be able to afford a producer and a master quality studio, you can now buy your own PC and some music software, and collaborate with a producer online, who will give you the capability to make radio-ready recordings.

--Where you needed a record company with a huge advertising budget to market and sell your recordings, you can now (with some hard work), market and sell your CDs to the Whole World for next to nothing.

The Music Industry doesn't like the changes that the Internet has brought to the business. Digital media can be freely copied by anyone with a PC, anywhere in the World. No longer do the record companies just have to worry about the CD pirates who manufacture illegal copies to sell on the black market; they also have to now worry about every PC-literate man, woman and child, making their own copies too! This has led the music industry into a perpetual fight against filesharers (making enemies of many consumers in the process), instead of embracing the business advantages that the Internet brings to us.

The Music Industry still believes that 8-16 year-olds buy most of the records,

so they are still catering primarily for that market. Recent industry figures are telling a different story, and the secret is the "Baby Boomers".

Yes ... The same people who created the above market perception in the 70's by buying the largest proportion of records ever, whilst they were teenagers, have now grown up! The largest age group to buy CDs TODAY, at 26% of the population, are over 45. Not only that, but they still like the same kinds of music as they did then. So there is no need to change your art to fit today's teenybopper market if you aren't that way inclined.

Now that we know the secret, we also know that the next big thing in music, isn't going to be another form of Hip-hop, Techno, or R'n'B; but a return to real music, such as was made during the 60's and 70's. However, we'll be creating it with modern tools on a Home computer DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) system, instead of in a multimillion pound studio complex!

So, whilst the Music Industry is still hesitating by trying to shun the new digital era in favour of antiquated business models, hardware in the form of CDs, and markets that still only cover limited territories; we can now jump ahead of them onto a more level playing field, find our own markets, and sell to the Whole World with only a simple website!

Sounds easy, doesn't it? ... Well, that is the first hurdle you will face. So many musicians think it is easy, that there are millions already doing it! So to be successful you will need, like any other business, a proper business plan.

CONCLUSION

The road to being a successful independent musician, begins with ATTITUDE.

You need to find enough time in your schedule to drop the guitar & scoresheet and use your creative energies towards developing a proper BUSINESS PLAN. This means taking a step back and listening to your music through Joe Public's ears. You need to think up a business name, logo, and short slogan that encompasses what you are, and what your music is trying to say to people.

Register your business "name" by buying a domain name that suits you as soon as possible.

Pages on free MP3 sites and Free domains do not give you a professional image. You MUST have your own site, or at least something that offers you a unique look

and features of your own. If you want people to find your music unique & special, then you also need an image that is unique and special. That goes for your email address too. Genuine business people don't use their Hotmail, AOL, or Yahoo addresses for formal communications.

Make sure all your paperwork is in order.

If you are planning on making an eventual living from your art, you will need to be registered as a business or as a self-employed sole trader. You need to make sure your tax and income are all accounted for, so you may have to buy yourself an accounting package, or learn to use Excel Spreadsheets, or employ an accountant. There is also a lot to learn about how copyright systems work and whether you feel you need to form your own publishing company, record company, or register your copyrights with an agency. Much of this will depend on the laws of your home country. Alternatively, you can sign a non-exclusive deal with a small independent label or publisher to handle all the music-related paperwork for you.

You need to either take the time to develop some basic web design skills, buy ready-made templates, or employ someone to design a site for you.

Make sure your logo and colour scheme is fluent throughout your site, your stationery, your CD artwork, and any other communications device, such as email. Make sure your site includes some way of gathering a mailing list, such as a response form or a "double opt-in" form of registration.

Plan a marketing strategy.

Marketing is all about finding the right market for your product. This may involve a certain amount of consumer research. This can be expensive, so use the Internet as much as possible to find groups of people who like similar music to yours. Try to find out other things about these people so that you can get a clearer picture of who would be interested in your music.

Plan a promotional strategy.

Gather contact lists of magazines, local newspapers, TV and radio stations. Plan an 8-week promotional strategy leading up to the release of your CD. Use any press, or airplay you get as a news item on your website. If you have some money to invest, plan a set of concert dates in local venues for dates close to any publication dates. Plan a poster or postcard campaign. Contact local charities, hospitals, schools and shops, in fact anyone who might be prepared to play your CD in a public place. If you want local record stores to stock your

CD, you will also need barcodes and counter display boxes. Use the mailing list you have been gathering from your site to promote any news to your fans with a regular newsletter. Offer free tickets to gigs, or run competitions for free CDs. Use your fans as extra leverage to increase the momentum of your promotional campaigns.

Don't under-sell yourself.

Make sure that any music you decide to give away as a promotional MP3 is different in some way to the music you are selling. E.G. It will either be an early un-mastered mix (demo), or a different mix, or a song you are never going to release for sale. Otherwise, make sure all samples you make of your records, are either short clips, or low-fi mono samples. The price you set for your releases should never be too far below that of major record company releases. Your price tells your customer what "stage" you are at in the business. Price yourself too cheap and you are more likely to lose customers because they will automatically assume you are an "amateur".

Make yourself and your CD easily accessible to your fans.

Always answer any emails promptly. Check your emails at least once a day and reply to any new enquiries immediately. The average time expected by most people for a response by email is 12-24 hours. Do not SPAM. Make sure you only send bulk emails to people who have opted into your mailing list, and if anyone wants to opt out, make sure you delete them straight away (not several weeks and 10 disgruntled emails later!). To contact businesses, you will need to write individually and personally to each of them. Always use a business "signature" with your artistic or business name, slogan, web site address, and possibly your telephone number, on every email you send. If you have released a CD, make sure you add the link to that too! If you have had your CDs duplicated professionally and are barcoded, you can also expand from selling them in internet stores such as iTunes, Amazon, and CDbaby, to high street stores. You must also sell them from your own site or at least provide links to the stores where they are available.

Never stop "Networking"

Carry your business cards with you at all times. At every conversational opportunity, if someone happens to mention music, or gigs, make sure you advertise yourself as an independent artist. If you have a modern mobile phone or MP3 player, make sure your latest CD is on it! You never know who you'll bump into in the supermarket. The first thing someone will ask when you mention you are a recording artist is "What kind of music do you play?" If you have

your MP3 player with you, you won't even have to answer! (This is always a difficult question for an artist). You can just play it to them! Also make sure you frequent all the music-related newsgroups, forums, bulletin boards, MP3 sites, chat rooms etc. at every opportunity.

Finally, my "Promotional Tip of the Week"

Familiarise yourself with all the P2P filesharing systems that the music business hates so much. You can use them to your advantage. Make ads or lo-fi samples of your music or CD and label them like this...

John_Mckeon_Friends_SoundsLike_Simon_&_Garfunkel.mp3

Make copies labelled with every well-known artist you think you sound like, and keep all the files in your shared folder. Then, whenever you are logged onto the service and someone searches for music by these well-known artists, your music will be on their list of results!

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