

15 Things You Must Do to Make it in the Music Industry

Wondering how to make it in the music industry? In this guest post, TakeLessons Teacher and music industry veteran Nick Gunn shares 15 tips musicians can't afford to ignore...

I'm not particularly famous (in most people's eyes) and I'm certainly not financially wealthy (in Wall Street's eyes); I'm just a guy who has pretty much done it all in the music business with some major successes, and some even larger major flops!

Just so we are all on the same page: I am a part of the approximate 98% of all music artists, music producers, and other music professionals who didn't wake up one morning and put on their famous pants.

Yes, we exist! In fact, we are the majority. Sure, I can boast about my great track record in sales and the awesome albums I've produced, but the truth is I struggle like most music artists.

I've sold close to two million records but no one would recognise me, and the bulk of those royalties are all gone now. I also owned and ran a 75 artist roster label that died in the 2008 recession with the closing down of record retail.

Basically... I'm the perfect guy to write this article. I'm a music industry survivor and I'm still doing it!

Not only am I still doing it, but, shockingly, I'm still extremely optimistic and still finding new successes from what I have learned. So with pessimism aside, here are my top 15 tips on making it in today's music business.

1. Be Optimistic at Every Turn

It's the only true survival tool you have that you can control. If you start with undying optimism you will be more resistant against the neglect you may feel when first starting out. Trust me, this will be tested! Try not to take things personally, as the barrier to entry in the music business is set incredibly high.

There are approximately 80,000 albums released every year, of which Billboard and other associated charts report on a revolving Top 200. That's 0.25% of the total releases each year that are moving and shaking enough to get on the radar. Still feeling optimistic? Keep reading....

2. Observe Excellence and Be Excellent at Your Craft

This applies to everything you do! It all starts with the music you listen to. Sometimes, society can train us to lower our expectations by convincing us mediocrity is acceptable. It is not. Excellence is at your fingertips, it simply needs to be understood and observed.

Study carefully from music teachers who are well versed in music theory and music appreciation. Study those who are successful in music and what they have done. Listen to everything, no matter what the genre, and try to see the beauty in everything that is music, despite your personal preferences. The foundation you lay now with your acceptance and understanding of these basic essentials will define who you will be in your own music career.

3. Be Careful Who You Take Advice From

People often tend to seek advice from those who have been unusually successful. It's a natural human tendency to do so. But remember, the best advice always comes from those who have failed and are painfully aware of their mistakes.

4. Form a Strong Professional Peer Group as Your Sounding Board

Family and friends are great but they are often too biased to give proper guidance and advice when it comes to your music. Music professionals tend to give more constructive guidance and can set more realistic goals and expectations. Remember: Grandma will most likely love everything you do, no matter what, so don't take her advice too seriously!

5. Know That No One Simply Gets Up and Puts on Their Famous Pants

The road to success in the music business is never a straight one. By the time an artist breaks into mainstream consciousness there is always a story to tell about how and when it all happened. Unfortunately, the bulk of your new fans will never experience this part of your journey. The illusion is, to the general public, that one day you woke up, wrote a song, and put on your famous pants. Don't let the long and winding path to your success get you down, it's totally normal!

6. Understand What the Top Revenue Streams are in the Music Business

Touring, Publishing, and Branding - These top three revenue makers in the music industry encompass a wide range of sub-topics, but it's important you understand how you can make money from these three main sources.

Touring: Touring and playing live is self explanatory. Festivals in particular are currently at an all time attendance high. It's about getting the fans to your shows and having the promoters wanting you on stage.

Publishing: Writing and recording original music can ensure you own both your master rights and your performance/mechanical rights, giving you the ability to publish and control your own works.

Branding: Branding requires that your image and likeness – your logos, who you are and what you represent – are clear and aligned with similar products that aggrandise your musical mission.

I highly recommend reading “This Business of Music”, which is currently in its tenth edition, as a reference guide to your business future.

7. Incorporate Your Brand

At first you most likely will be pinching pennies at every turn, so be smart about your cash flow and your spending! One way to do this is by incorporating so you can receive tax breaks and manage your cash flow and expenses properly. It can also protect you as an individual and be more effective in financial growth. Honestly, it's not that hard. Just go to LegalZoom.com and spend the \$500 to start your own LLC, or whatever structure company you want.

8. Learn How to Produce Your Own Music

Let's face it, the days of needing big recording studios is long gone. I have constantly given this advice from the beginning and the result is always the same. Those who learn how to produce their own music have a much higher chance at success. Not only does it make you well versed at your craft but it makes you highly authentic with your sound. Yes, there is a learning curve. Sure, it's gonna take some time and money.

But if you are serious and passionate about your music, this will be an amazing experience for you. Gear today is accessible and affordable and you can set up shop in your parents closet, if need be. Make it work for you! Your recorded music is your calling card to your artistry, so start producing now.

9. Register Your Works

If you are writing and recording your own music then you need to have a clear understanding of what Performing Rights Societies are and how they collect money for you!

In the United States you primarily have ASCAP and BMI (which collect on the same thing, so only register for one) and also SoundExchange. These societies monitor performances of your works (ie. when your song is played on the radio, TV, a film, etc) and pay you – the writer/composer and/or publisher/administrator – according to how you have these works registered with the society.

If you are the sole writer then you will receive the entire share of the writer's revenue stream. If you are also the Administrator/Publisher (which you are if your works are original and you're putting them out yourself) you'll collect the entire share of publishing revenue stream, as well. So make sure you register as both a writer and a publisher! Yes, this requires some investigation but it's important you do the work – this is money while you sleep, people! So, if you haven't already, you should look up ASCAP, BMI, and SoundExchange. Registering is easy; it will seriously take you less than ten minutes.

10. Understand What a Copyright Is

Copyrighting is a process used to protect your works from theft. The United States Copyright Office offers a verified method that is used universally to acknowledge protected works. However, in today's age, time stamps on computers (that created the work) or using your originating publisher information, as well as sending self addressed, date stamped copies through the mail to yourself, can all suffice as proof of ownership.

Contrary to popular belief, deliberate music copyright infringement is quite rare. It often mistakenly occurs as we all emulate what we have heard over our lifetimes. Also, choosing to flagrantly rip off music does nothing to benefit your career in the face of your peers.

11. Distribute Your Music Effectively

It used to be that having your music distributed was reserved for signed artists to large record labels. That is no longer the case! There are many distributors, large and small, now operating in the music and media business. Some are harder to establish relationships with. However companies such as CD Baby are now at your fingertips and offer emerging artists a way to get their music in stores such as iTunes, Amazon, Beatport, and many others.

Music streaming platforms are now an integral part of how people listen to your music, so be sure you are well represented at sites such as iTunes, Spotify, and Pandora for streaming services. Also, make sure you are visible on apps such as Shazam, as it's an extremely effective way for fans to locate your music without knowing your name or the song.

12. Have a Clear Focus on Social Media Platforms

This is a topic that rarely needs significant discussion, as everyone today is a social media pro. However, it's important you separate personal social from business social, even though they may appear to be the same. Make sure your social media platforms are engaging fans and representing your overall brand.

You don't always have to post about your music. Make sure you are talking about related topics to the music industry, your favorite artists and things you love as an artist too! Social media is a lot of work and can consume hours per day for most professional musicians. Try using tools that blast all social platforms at the same time or buffer posts throughout the day. Having a great team player for your social media will soon become a top priority for you.

13. Create an Amazing Team

This takes time and can be in constant flux. However, you can't do this all by yourself. If you look carefully at the most successful music careers you will see that it's the team that creates the success, not the individual or band alone. Labels, managers, booking agents, publicists and social media all go into making a well oiled team.

Recognise talent in others and hold them close to your chest. It's about surrounding yourself with talented and highly motivated people that believe in you and bring resources to the table. Granted, getting the attention of the right team players is a difficult task. However, Rome was not built in one day and staying the course is part of what makes you attractive to influential team players.

14. Stay The Course

There's a saying I often use that relates to success in the music business: "If you play golf long enough in a lightning storm you will eventually get struck by lightning." This basically means that you must stay the course, not deviate, and have faith that eventually your hard work will pay off. This is the same for artists that have already received success. Sooner or later, every artist must redefine their path moving forward. As in most businesses, every five years you should take inventory of where you are in your career and map out the next five years with your team.

15. Don't Bite the Hand That Feeds You

I am actually a perpetrator of this one. Music artists, including myself when I was younger, can have a slightly egotistical view of their music and persona after they receive some success. We often think that the success we are receiving is the result of "my music," "my hard work," "my talent," etc and make unusual requests of labels and team players. There is no positive outcome here. Being a diva never results in long term success, it simply results in having a bad reputation.

BONUS: Give Back and Mentor - The generation behind you needs your support and wisdom. Reach out, donate money to arts and education, teach, mentor! There is nothing more gratifying to the soul than watching a young person flourish from what you have shown them. If you are experiencing success, donate to a cause that provides opportunity to underprivileged kids so they can experience something larger than themselves – the gift of music!

Well, there you have it. I hope you soaked some of this in and can use it on your musical journey. Good luck and keep on rocking!

Nick Gunn teaches audio engineering, songwriting, and music composition in Chicago, IL. Nick is a multi-platinum selling composer and producer.

Article source: <https://www.musicclout.com/contents/article-538-15-things-you-must-do-to-make-it-in-the-music-industry.aspx>