

Guidelines for Presenting A Demo Recording

Many record companies can receive upwards of fifty demos a week. When you consider this statistic, sending an unsolicited demo can seem a futile exercise. An unsolicited demo is one that has not been requested by someone within the record company. There are several guidelines for sending a demo to a record company that can help your recording get listened to.

1. Ensure that the demo is of a reasonably high production standard.

It is important that the demo is of a reasonably good standard. It is not essential to re-mortgage your house in order to produce a high quality CD in an expensive studio but remember when mixing the tracks to make the best of any facilities you have. It is vital that the vocals and lyrics are clearly audible as they are usually the main focus of the recording.

2. All discussions with the record company are conducted by your manager.

This may seem like an obvious statement when you are negotiating a record contract but it is also important to have a manager to deal with the record company from the outset. It differentiates your band and gives an air of professionalism to any discussions. Record companies also often prefer to deal with a manager as opposed to a band as managers are perceived as being business orientated and therefore easier to deal with than a musician who is creatively oriented. If you do not have a manager, it can be a good idea to get a music industry professional or an enthusiastic friend with some knowledge of the music industry to "shop" the demo for you. This means that they talk to record companies on your behalf but do not take on a full-time management role.

3. The demo must be solicited.

It is important that someone in the record company, usually an A&R representative asks for the tape to be sent in. (A&R stands for artist and repertoire. It is the A&R department that sign bands and are the primary contact for a band within the record company.) Therefore, the first stepping stone is to open discussions with the A & R representative. One way of doing this would be to send a press release to the A & R department informing them of a gig. They may decide to come to the gig or they may want to hear the recording first but either way your band may receive some interest. Once interest has been shown, you can tell them you are sending a demo in for their attention. When sending it, you should mark the envelope "Solicited demo CD for the attention of.....". This will mean that your CD has a much higher percentage chance of getting listened to. It is also worthwhile noting that many record companies in the UK and USA have a policy of not listening to unsolicited demos; therefore you are wasting time and money by sending them demos they have not asked for. It is also worth noting that you should send your demo to suitable labels, e.g. sending a recording of German influenced techno music to an easy listening label is a waste of your time and money.

4. Presenting the demo.

There are several points that you should remember to check before you send the demo.

i. The demo should consist of three tracks only with the best track first. It is rare that an A&R rep will listen to the full three songs. They usually make a decision on the first song and confirm that decision on the second song. If they want to hear more of your songs, they will ask.

ii. Also ensure that the recording and box are correctly labelled with the tracks in the right order.

iii. Include a contact name, address, phone, e-mail address for any correspondence.

iv. Include a short biography of the band and if possible, include any gig reviews or write-up the band may have had in local or national press.

v. Include a band photograph.

The above information may seem obvious but any record company executive will tell you that many people forget one or more of the above points when sending a demo.

5. Marketing

To sum up, it is important that the demo CD be of reasonably good quality, well packaged and well presented to ensure that your chances of success are higher than your competitors. A list of Irish, UK and US record companies is available to IMRO members. Should you wish to view these lists please make an appointment to visit the IMRO office in person.

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