

HOW TO RUIN YOUR MUSIC CAREER IN TEN EASY STEPS

By Rowen Bridler

The good thing to note about realising you've made a few mis-steps in your career is that this is a perfectly valid entrepreneurial business tactic – it's called 'testing'. If something didn't work, you know not to do it again and that way, you learn what does work. However, far too many musicians spend too long doing things that aren't working without realising it, and that adds up to tedium, frustration and a major lack of progress. So, stop for a moment and check if you've been doing any of these things:

1) Being inconsistent

Do you only work on your songs when you feel like it? Do you only play gigs when a friend mentions there's a free slot one evening? If you can't say when you practise and when you're next gigging, you are probably projecting a kind of 'hit and miss' approach to your career. You can fix your inconsistent behaviour by setting aside certain non-negotiable times when you'll definitely be working on your music. Try getting one regular gig night at your favourite live music jazz bar or post a new demo every 1st of the month. Set aside at least one day a week for songwriting, when you pull back from the business work and then post the results on a Friday on your soundcloud account. These kinds of regular, predictable actions will help keep your fans engaged and help you to focus on the priorities for your career.

2) Putting out albums or EPs with no schedule for promotion

Paying to get an album recorded, mixed and mastered, but not planning tour dates, release dates and strategic promotion through radio stations, magazines, mailing list updates and social media promotion will lose you sales and mean that your recording, far from being an investment, has been a huge waste of time and resources. The way to avoid this is to decide on the kind of release you want (single, EP etc) and write a list of all the small tasks you'll need to do to complete it. Then plot those into a monthly overview, showing which things you need to complete for every week for the next three, six or 12 months. That way you can see clearly how long you'll need to get things done and you can set aside enough time to do the necessary research in order to promote the work you're releasing in the lead-up to that final date.

3) Staying in and practising all day and nothing else

Learning how to play an instrument takes time and effort and it's really important that you practise regularly. However, staying in your room and practising to the wall does not a successful music artist make. You need to network with people, get out to gigs and generally get yourself known as 'that great keyboard player' or 'amazing singer' that people want to work with. Try going to venues that people have recommended to see another artist play and check out if it would be right for your music too. While you're there, talk to the promoter about what you need to do to get a gig. And if you need some new photos for your site, you could ask the photographer who was taking photos of the band whether they would be available to do a shoot for your next gig.

Making yourself known to other musicians helps you to support and be supported by a network of people, which will enhance your own career.

4) Avoiding using social media because you'd rather be 'mysterious' instead

This used to be a viable tactic. Back in the days before social media, there was a way in which you could work towards getting a record deal and have the record company do all of the promotional work for you. You could remain a mysterious artist putting out great music but not revealing much about your life. [I personally used to love this approach! I was totally into moody photos where I hid myself altogether...]

Unfortunately, that just won't cut it anymore. If you aren't directly interacting with your fans, you can't build the kind of following that will get you noticed by companies willing to do some of your promotion and distribution. You have to make it possible for fans to interact with you, so that they can do some of the promotional work for you! If you have a great fan page where your fans comment on the regular posts you make, that is a relationship that can not only lead to gig attendance and sales, but to further industry interest. Just post once a day about competitions for your fans, or ask which of two new demos your fans would most like to see finished first. If people are being asked to give their opinion about something, they are far more likely to follow-up to find out the result and even buy the EP or album that you're about to release.

5) Not defining your brand

If you are randomly posting on social media, however, with no kind of plan of what to talk about, you could be damaging your potential for building a fanbase. What do you represent to your fans? Artists who only post sporadically don't build up a sense of loyalty with their listeners. If you simply look at the kind of music you're making and the message behind it, you can get an idea of what kind of person listens to your music. Is it dark, edgy, angry songs about break-ups? Then post about the latest arthouse film you watched about a couple who broke up and how great the acting was in the scenes where they're yelling at each other. Use social media to have a conversation with your fans about the things that define the brand and purpose of your own music.

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6) Not having an opt-in box with an appropriate incentive on your website

If you only rely on social media to 'collect' fans, you're leaving yourself vulnerable to losing that information because you're not in control of Facebook. You need to have your own separate mailing list and you need to have a good way of getting people on to it. If you have a great website – make it work for you! Don't make the sign-up incentive a pdf of your lyrics or have no incentive at all other than a big 'subscribe!' button because that's not going to appeal to music-lovers. Offer a

fantastic song of yours in return for signing up. That way, people have a really relevant and rewarding incentive and you'll steadily grow your list.

7) Not using an email marketing provider for your newsletter

If you don't use a proper email service provider that is designed for multiple address send-outs, you are actually doing something illegal in sending out mass emails. You can't afford to spam people and have others be able to access your friends and fan's addresses at the same time. It's just sloppy and simultaneously violates people's privacy. Try using an email provider such as Mailchimp or Aweber.

8) Responding to others' success by comparing it to your own

This seems to be a real problem among certain musicians. Somewhere along the line some of us got so focussed on the industry and our own ambition that we forgot about the music. Remember that delicious feeling of hearing the latest mix of your own song? There's room for that sense of love and enjoyment alongside others too. If you find yourself commenting on another musician's FB post about how they've done three gigs this week with, "yeah, I did FOUR last week!" then there's something wrong. It's not all about you. And it's not a competition. I'll say that last one again. It's NOT a competition. We may all be working in the same industry but we're not all doing the same kinds of songs in the same genre of music with the same outlook and experience. The music industry may choose to pit us against each other but we have a choice not to. Try posting 'Great!' or 'You go girl!' or just hit 'like' when you read about another musician's achievements, because that's how we support each other and honour the value in the work we do. If you think it's a competitive, heartless world and react to it as though it is, that's precisely what you will create.

9) Only contacting your newsletter subscribers when you're selling something

How effective was the last email you got from a musician who you hadn't heard from in months, saying, "Hey! I've got a new album coming out next week! Buy it here!" You probably deleted that email. And maybe even unsubscribed. There's nothing worse than adding to the rising number of sales emails we all get in our inboxes. Make sure that you set aside time on a regular basis, each week or every couple of weeks to send out an email to your mailing list telling them about the meaning behind one of your songs or how funny it was to do an interview and run into the kind of mis-reporting you get in tabloid newspapers as a result. Something that the people who follow your music will find entertaining. Share stuff with your fans on your list like they are VIPs. Give them lots of insider info and videos or mp3 content before you even mention where they can buy something you've made. It stands to reason that the people you build a relationship with will be far more likely to click through to watch your latest video or check out your new website if you've been having a friendly chat with them over the previous months.

10) Forgetting your creativity when taking music business ideas on board

Most business tips in articles like these are mainly focussed on standard, mainstream business approaches adapted to fit the music industry. Getting a solid 'small business' mentality around your work as a musician is a smart move, but don't let it suck you

into being boring and standard in your approach. Remember, the iPod wasn't the first kind of mp3 player, but it was the first with such a remarkable design and user-friendly functionality. Your advantage as a musician is that you're already overflowing with creativity. So use it in every newsletter email subject line, every video concept, every social media post. Do something off-the-wall or quirky that people will remember. How about writing an email to your subscribers with the heading, '3 things I learned from...[insert the name of your biggest musical influence]' or make a video to send in an email to the venue you want to get a gig at, singing an introduction about why you want to play there? In short, keep your creative genius alive even outside the studio.

Rowen Bridler is a singer-songwriter, actress and voice coach. She currently lives in South West England, but coaches clients all over the world via Skype. She specialises in coaching singers and actors to build their confidence, take risks in their performances and quickly fix any song or speech problem areas using simple and systematic techniques. She recently acted in the Ole Bornedal '1864' film playing the role of Johanna von Bismarck, speaking in German, and shot her latest music video for her next single release in Prague. In her spare time, she can be found wearing Cookie Monster t-shirts, performing her 'tea and chat' mini-concerts for subscribers and reading old copies of British Vogue.

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