

How an Indie Musician can make \$19,000 in 10 hours using Twitter

(by Amanda Palmer, June 2009)

About a month ago, I was at home on a friday night (loser that I often am when i'm not touring, I almost never go out) and was, of course, on my mac, shifting between emails, links and occasionally doing some dishes and packing for a trip the next day. just a usual friday-night-rock-star-multi-tasking extravaganza.

I twitter whenever i'm online, I love the way it gives me a direct line of communication with my fans and friends.

I had already seen the power of twitter while touring...using twitter i'd gathered crowds of sometimes 200 fans with a DAY'S notice to come out and meet me in public spaces (parks, mostly) where I would play ukulele, sign, hug, take pictures, eat cake, and generally hang out and connect. This was especially helpful in the cities where we'd been unable to book all-ages gigs and there were crushed teenagers who were really grateful to have a shot at connecting with me & the community of amanda/dolls fans.

i'd also been using twitter to organize ACTUAL last-minute gigs...I twittered a secret gig in LA one morning and about 350 folks showed up 5 hours later at a warehouse space...I played piano, filmed by current.tv, and then (different camera crew) did an interview with afterellen.com.

the important thing to undersand here is that the fans were never part of the plan..I basically just INVITED my fans to a press day, the press didn't plan it...I did.

I was going to be playing in an empty room and doing q&a with afterellen on a coach with only the camera watching.

it was like...why not tell people and do this in a warehouse instead of a hotel lobby or a blank studio? so I did.

it cost me almost nothing. the fans were psyched.

but back to the bigger, cooler story....

so there I am, alone on friday night and I make a joke on twitter (which goes out to whichever of my 30,000 followers are online):

"I hereby call THE LOSERS OF FRIDAY NIGHT ON THEIR COMPUTERS to ORDER, motherfucker."

one thing led to another, and the next thing you know there were thousands of us and we'd become the #1 topic trend on twitter.

zoe keating described it as a "virtual flash mob".

the way twitter works (if you don't have it) is that certain topics can include a hashtag (#) and if a gazillion people start making posts that include that hashtag, the topic will zoom up the charts of what people are currently discussing. it's a cool feature.

so anyway, there we were, virtually hanging out on twitter on a friday night. very pleased with ourselves for being such a large group, and cracking jokes.

how do you "hang out" on the internet? well, we collectively came up with a list of things that the government should do for us (free government-issued sweatpants, pizza and ponies, no tax on coffee), AND **created a t-shirt.**

thank god my web guy sean was awake and being a loser with me on friday night because he throw up the webpage WHILE we were having our twitter party and people started ordering the shirts – that I designed in SHARPIE in realtime) and a slogan that someone suggested: "DON'T STAND

UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT, STAY IN FOR WHAT'S WRONG". neil gaiman and wil wheaton joined our party. the fdnas felt super-special.

by the end of the night, we'd sold 200 shirts off the quickie site (paypal only) that sean had set up.

I blogged the whole story the next day and in total, in the matter of a few days, we sold over 400 shirts, for \$25/ea.

we ended up grossing OVER \$11,000 on the shirts.

my assistant beth had the shirts printed up ASAP and mailed them from her apartment.

total made on twitter in two hours = \$11,000.

total made from my huge-ass ben-folds produced-major-label solo album this year = \$0

a few nights after that, I blogged and twittered, announcing a **“webcast auction” from my apartment.**

it went from 6 pm – 9 pm, my assitant beth sat at my side and kept her eyes on incoming bids and twitter feed.

while we hocked weird goods, I sang songs and answered questions from fans. we wore kimonos and drank wine. it was a blast.

people on twitter who were tuned in re-tweeted to other fans. the word spread that it was a fun place to be and watch.

we had, at peak, about 2000 people watching the webcast.

at the suggestion of a fan early in the webcast anyone could, on demand, send us \$20 via paypal and we would chew, sign and mail them a postcard. we sold about 70, and we read all those names at the end of the webcast and thanked those people for supporting us. here's how the sales broke down:

all the items were signed by moi and hand-packed by beth and kayla. the items and highest bidders were as follows: _hilary, ukulele used on the european tour: \$640 _jake, “guitar hero” plastic guitar controller used in album promo shoot: \$250_ lary b, copy neo2 magazine, plus two post-war trade slap-bracelets & a crime-photo set: \$230_ devi, glass dildo, with subtly-sordid backstory: \$560 _liz b., “hipsters ruin everything” t-shirt, made by blake (get your very own here!!!!):

\$155.55_ shannon m., my bill bryson book, a short history of neary everything: \$280_ nikki, huge metal “the establishment” sign, used at rothbury festival for the circus tent I curated: \$450 _j.r., purple velvet “A” dress used in the dresden dolls coin-operated boy video shoot: \$400_ jessie & alan: who killed amanda palmer vinyl: \$100_ nikki: wine bottle, auctioned BY REQUEST!!! \$320 _shannon w., torn-to-shit vintage stockings used in the who killed amanda palmer/ michael pope video series: \$200 _jodi,

school-note-book break-up letter, written to amanda from jonas woolverton in 7th grade (I still haven't emailed him about that....): \$250_ daryl, ANOTHER wine bottle, by request, that we had LYING AROUND: \$320 and.....reto emailed, having barely missed the wine bottle, and asked us to send him “something funny” for \$129.99. we sent a heath ledger statuette.

total made on twitter in 3 hours, including the postcards, was over \$6000.

again, total made on my major-label solo album this year: \$0

a few days later, I twittered a guest-list only event in a recording studio in boston, to take place a week later.

the gig lasted about 5 hours, all told, with soundcheck and signing. I took mostly requests and we had a grand old time.

first come, first served. the first 200 people to ask got in, for free. I asked for donations and made

about \$2,200 in cash.

I gave \$400 back to the studio for the space and the help. we sold some weird merch. I think we should call it an even 2k.

total made at last-minute secret twitter gig, in about 5 hours = \$2000

major-label record blah blah blah = \$0

....and for fun, and to thank my fans for being awesome, i've been doing some twitter performance art, including answering their questions by magic-markering my body until it's covered, and displaying time-lapse make-up application advice....but that's another story.

TOTAL MADE THIS MONTH USING TWITTER = \$19,000

TOTAL MADE FROM 30,000 RECORD SALES = ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.

turn on, tune in, get dropped!!!!

love,

amanda palmer

<http://www.amandapalmer.net>

<http://www.dresdendolls.com>

A comment from Richard Edward Horner Jun 23, 2009

I'm sorry but this story really misrepresents some major facets of reality.

I know many truly independent musicians and if they did this, they would not make anywhere near this kind of money. It's the same deal with Trent Reznor being able to make a lot of money with his alternative distribution model.

She states, 'total made from my huge-ass ben-folds produced-major-label solo album this year = \$0' but, really, the prior exposure, touring and marketing form these major releases is what made this possible.

I'm not saying this post is without merit or that it doesn't make a very important point, it's just that it draws attention to the wrong one.

The post is titled 'How an Indie Musician...' and makes a direct comparison of total dollars supposedly made from a major label album and then from hanging out on Twitter. This framing is highly misleading and ignores the facts that if you've ever put out an album on a major label, you've had major label visibility (and in this case, a following from it) and thus this sort of thing is mostly inapplicable to the vast majority of independent musicians.

So, what does this post point out? The post points out that going forward, revenue streams that aren't album sales may be much more important than the revenue stream (or lack thereof) that is album sales and here's how a holdover from the old model is making it work in the new model. I don't think this comes as much of a surprise to any musician today. What would really be useful to musicians are studies in how to garner attention or following comparable to those formed in the old model coming from nothing.