

How I "Made It" in the Music Industry: My Top 10 Tips

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First off, by "made it," I don't mean filling up arenas or the sort of unlimited abundance that could "make it rain" everyday. I mean making music a full-time focus that pays bills, so that you can start doing what you love.

With all of this talk about Female Hip Hop Artists failing in the music industry and less and less female rappers being signed, I have been inspired to write this article and share what worked and what didn't ... and a lot didn't. I'm still applying these new discoveries myself and learning everyday from them, so I can make no guarantees, but my hope is that this helps a next generation of conscious artists trying to let their voices be heard.

Who am I? I am an unsigned rapper and singer from Pittsburgh. With Licensing, Shows, MP3 Sales, and a Toyota Hybrid Sponsorship, I can do music full-time and focus on evolving my sound and my self, building a team and working more in my community. Most importantly, I am building a fan base.

1. Don't Do Free Shows

I love to perform and connect with people, I've probably done around 150 free shows over the years. It's amazing practice, but once you get to a point where you feel like you have confidence in creating an engaging live show, I suggest not continuing to do it without some compensation. Unless, of course, it's for a cause you care about. The sound systems at most shows asking you to perform for free can poorly represent your voice and generally folks won't know your music, so there will be little engagement. Especially if you are a rapper, your lyrics might be hard to understand. You may get a few die hard fans from a show, but that same effort you put into an online marketing campaign could yield thousands of new die hard supporters. At the same time, be sure to perform once a month, to keep you limber and in touch.

2. Don't Contact Music Blogs

Smaller music blogs (that are still influential) like Gorilla vs Bear, Pigeons and Planes or Pretty Much Amazing get about 10,000 visits and 200 music submissions a day. How are you supposed to make your email to them stand out?

When I started reaching out to blogs many years ago, the volume of emails coming to these sites wasn't as large. I definitely received some blog love, and it helped my SEO a great deal, but more and more folks are making amazing music and this marketing strategy of emailing music blogs is now over-saturated. Just imagine how many submissions Stereo Gum and Pitchfork get? And, getting no response can be a discouragement that you don't deserve. But don't worry, blogs will start reaching out to you, once you build a fan base.

3. Don't Worry About "Getting Signed"

95 percent of signed artists fail. With those odds, it makes more sense to learn the music business on your own. You can stay Independent and keep control of your music by learning and applying the principles of marketing to your music. You'll have a better shot at sustainability than if you sign somewhere and let a label with a 5

percent success rate manage your career. (Not to mention the control they will have over your creativity and image.)

If you're not into learning business/marketing, get someone on your team that wants to learn it while you evolve your music. Having my own marketing and events firm didn't hurt, but it was through making many financial and PR mistakes (and learning from them) that I created the sustainability. Give your marketing person a piece of your potential profits and all the love you can muster, as this type of support is such a precious gift to an artist. There is a ton of great music and lots of talented artists out there, but there seems to be very few talented marketers in the music industry.

4. Give Your Music Away For Free - The Legal Way

Don't just give away your music for free -- assign a Creative Commons (CC BY 3.0) License to your music. Creative Commons is a copyright license you put on your music that lets others download your music for free and use it for whatever they want. They just have to give you credit for it. This is a very unique and new marketing strategy that will get you many new fans.

If you are not comfortable doing this, that's understandable, because I was not at first. Why would we spend hard-earned money and time writing, recording, mixing, and mastering my music only to give away for free? In the end I trusted his instinct and gave away all 5 of my albums for free. For more information, see https://wiki.creativecommons.org/Main_Page and also consult this handy graphic - <http://images.huffingtonpost.com/2014-03-25-creativecommonslicenses.jpg>

5. Submit Your Music to Jamendo, Frostwire & Free Music Archive

Assuming that you now have chosen a Creative Commons license, it's time to submit your music to some of the best Creative Commons sites out there. Check out Jamendo, Frostwire and Free Music Archive. These sites host CC music and have large member bases so you'll immediately start to see plays and downloads. Congrats! You have begun to build a fan base! (There are definitely more of these types of sites -- Google them.)

6. Charge For Your Music

Wait, I thought I was giving my music away for free? You are, but there will still be people that want to support you by purchasing it. Then there are the people that won't even know your music is free - they'll also buy it or stream it on Spotify. Even though Spotify only pays less than a penny a stream, don't worry about money, just be happy that you actually get streamed and are growing a fan base for your art!

You can use Tunecore (it's expensive since they charge you around \$30 yearly per album, but easy to use) or CD Baby (a one time \$49 fee for an album and no yearly fees) to get your music on pay sites such as iTunes, Amazon, Spotify and Rdio. Those are the only ones that really matter in my opinion.

7. Let Others Make Money Off Of Your Music

This may seem strange and make some feel uncomfortable, but yes -- let others make money off of your music, without paying you anything.

What does this mean exactly? Remember that Creative Commons license you signed up for? You already agreed to this. You're letting others use your music for their own financial gain as long as they give you credit. Good news -- this will get you even more fans! Here's how you can let others make money off of your music:

Just upload all of your CC BY music to a Youtube channel with a picture of you/your album art and your CC License in the description. Next, start messaging content creators on Youtube and let them know your music is licensed as CC BY and provide a brief explanation of it just in case they need it.

What's a Youtube content creator? Search on Youtube how to paint your nails, how to grow tomatoes, how to downgrade windows 8, how to learn karate! **There are tens of thousands of content creators with millions of videos, and these videos need music!** In most cases, Youtube will not allow them to use traditionally copyrighted music, and these content creators risk getting their video deleted, or even worse, getting their account banned. Music that is licensed by Creative Commons allows these Youtubers to use your music and credit you in the description.

I guarantee that people will be watching a video on how to do X, Y or Z, and they come across your song, like it, google your name since you are credited in the description, and end up following you on Twitter or Facebook, and buying your song on iTunes. And yes, that Youtube content creator will be getting ad money from Youtube on the video they made using your music.

How can I message all of these Youtube content creators about using my music? Sign up for Tubeassist.com and follow their really simple instructions.

Also, an added bonus ...Since you uploaded your music to Jamendo, Frostwire and Free Music Archive - many content creators go to those sites to find music for their videos. Youtube search your name and sort by latest upload date and see if any videos using your music are popping up. (Make sure you contact the video owner if you aren't properly credited.)

8. Use Social Media To Turn Your "Followers" Into Friends

Twitter, Facebook, Instagram - These all get lumped into one but they are not as important as you would think. They won't actually get you new fans, but they will allow you to interact with them. Here's what I suggest when starting out:

Answer every person's tweet, comment & message to you. Follow them as well (only follow people that mention you). Build long lasting online relationships with them. These people believe in you and most likely care about what you care about.

On Facebook, post about your personal life. On Twitter, do the same. On Instagram, post really cool pics. Respond to everyone that comments or tweets and try to create ongoing discussion. Do this at least daily.

You will start to see repetitive questions. Keep a log of your answers for easy cutting and pasting, but also respond to the personal part so that fans know you did actually read what they wrote. This is also a great way to spread the word about whatever

current campaign you are doing online. In the response, ask kindly to share, download, etc.

What about Youtube? As far as Youtube goes, don't make a music video until you start to get some fans first. The song you want to make a video for might not be the song your fans like. Download data on all of the CC sites mentioned above and it will reveal what your fan's favourite song is. Then, make a music video for it and share it with them!

Again, social media doesn't seem to really get you new support but giving away your music for free will. These listeners will become your base on your social media and will want to interact with you. Be ready for them and reply to them -- build a community.

9. Make sure you have a great electronic press kit (EPK)

Sonicbids is expensive. You have to pay a monthly fee and then a fee for submitting for each gig. It seems to be over-saturated and less and less effective these days, especially since their latest platform update.

Make your own EPK. Update it every time something awesome happens. The beauty of having this readily available is that the media (and fans) will love a one stop shop where they can get everything they need about you and spend less of their precious time searching. Your bio, your latest accomplishments, your pics, your music and links to important places should be included.

10. Email is the Holy Grail

Email is still, by far, the highest converting online marketing tactic. From my experience, your number of fans is determined by the number of emails you have. Not your Facebook fans. Not your Twitter following. Not your number of Instagram likes on your cute puppy. And even crazier is that your number of fans equals your email list opens, not your total email list. That number will probably be around 50% ... so for every two emails you get, consider that one true fan. How do you get these emails? If you ask, you shall receive.

Once you give away your music for free and post it on all of the Creative Commons websites (make sure you put your social media links in all of the descriptions), you will begin to see new fans on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc. Engage with them, authentically and from your heart. Ask them for their email address so that you can continue to send them free music / concert updates / anything that isn't spam. Since you now have someone on your team that is devoted to marketing your music, every new marketing idea you come up with should have an end goal of getting an email address.

CONCLUSION

This entire process will have an exponential effect. The more fans you get, the more fans you will get. Here it is, again:

1. Make music
2. Give it away for free using a CC license
3. Free music = new fans

4. New fans will reach out via social media and engage. Be grateful and love them!
5. Collect emails from your fans
6. Make more music and give it away for free
7. Email your current fans and ask them to share it
8. Free new music + Current fans sharing that music = more new fans
9. Repeat 1 through 8 over and over again.
10. Magical things will happen

Blogs will start posting your music

People will want to book you

Your mp3 sales will start to appear

You will get licensing opportunities

Brands that align with you and your music will want to help you.

Again, I can make no guarantees and also could share a lot more about what worked and what didn't but I know time is limited. I also believe heavily in putting focus and intention on what you want (the laws of attraction) and could suggest various things that helped me creatively, but if you have a method that works, keep it up. Every mistake is a lesson learned and no way is ever the right way. For example, if you are a busker or living and playing on the festival circuit, I admire it so much! I hope you find something of value from my suggestions. May the force of amazing music and love always be with you!

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