

Record Labels: Make them come to YOU! by Chris Standing

Everyone knows how hard it is getting signed to a record label. It is a frustrating and all-consuming process. With the present state of the business, Internet piracy and lack of record sales in the music industry, it has never been harder for artists to get signed. And you might ask: *"Is there any hope?" "Should I even be looking to labels at all now?"* Well, let me try to lift your spirits if I may...

There is hope. A great deal of hope. I believe that opportunities are abounding in the present musical economy. I think it is all a matter of perception, and changing the goal posts. Look, it has always been near impossible to get signed. Nothing has changed there. And now, the record stores have never been more over-saturated with mediocre music than ever before. Don't think the A&R guys know any more about what "good" music is now, than they ever have. Gone are the days of artist development. *"Let's have a huge hit with the next Avril Lavigne and who cares if she's around in two years, we can finance all the other failed acts on our roster!"* seems to be the record label philosophy of the moment. So what should indie artists do? Here are one or two thoughts to ponder...

A tenacious unsigned indie band was interviewed as they seemed to be making waves doing one off shows, selling a ton of CDs at gigs and building their fan base. The lead singer mentioned that an A&R rep called him up and said, *"Send me a demo CD, I'd love to hear it"*. The singer said, *"What for? What are you gonna do for me? Do you know anything about the band? Why would I send you anything? Just so you can throw it in the trash with the other thousand CDs you get this week? Show me you are interested in this band, come to a gig, find out about us and then call us when you have something more to talk to us about. In the meantime, check out our tour schedule on our website."*

I fell in love with this band immediately. Talk about right on the money! He was absolutely right. Why SHOULD he send a demo? The fact of the matter is this: A&R guys are too busy talking to bands who have huge followings, are represented by heavyweight managers and lawyers, and are being produced by successful production teams. They are just too busy to realistically give five minutes to an indie band fighting for survival.

The only way to attract label attention is either: (1) Have a heavyweight manager and/or attorney; (2) Have a development deal with a hot production company; (3) Have a growing fan base, playing well attended shows and selling lots of CDs independently.

Any of the above scenarios will enable you to take it easy dealing with labels. The trick is to get them to come to you. Even the labels say this. They don't want to be bombarded by artists beating down their door pleading for a record deal. They want to do all the discovering.

If you are a young singer a la Christina Aguleira, you will need to have situation #1 and #2 in place. If you are a band doing live shows, you will need to have situation #3 in place.

Here's the reality. Labels WILL come scurrying out of the woodwork when there is something to jump up and down about. Usually, this is when all the work is done for them. A finished master CD with impeccable production or a huge fan base that labels can immediately sell product to will excite them. This, along with star quality, will keep them wide-eyed, trust me.

Finally, when this is all in place, people talk. When people talk, labels hear about it. They are connected. Before you know it, they are showing up to one of your gigs, looking to speak to you about a deal. Then, of course, you hold all the cards. A wonderful place to be.

For all those gigging rock bands out there, I would advise planning a strategy that does not involve approaching record companies. Have them seek you out. Build your street team and get working. If the band has what it takes, the A&Rs will abound. Make them come to you! It is simply the only way it works. You can read much more on the subject of attracting labels effectively in my e-book "So You Think You Want A Record Deal".

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http://www.musicbizacademy.com/articles/cs_labels2u.htm