

WHEN DOES A MUSICIAN NEED TO FIND A MANAGER?

From Brian Epstein, Tom Parker and Peter Grant to Simon Fuller, Scooter Braun and Troy Carter, the music manager has not only played a massive part in the shaping of every major musician and band of recent times, but has also helped to define the very landscape of music itself. With the rise of the internet-empowered DIY musician, the finer points of the job description may have changed somewhat since the good old days of baseball bats, cash-stuffed suitcases and trashed hotel rooms, but the manager is still as indispensable as ever, for almost any artist or band looking to actually wring a living out of the music industry.

WHAT DOES A MANAGER DO AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?

To answer the second question first, having a manager by your side enables you to focus your efforts on making the best music you can, rather than spending half your time dealing with the industry that necessarily exists around it. A talented, committed, well connected manager can open doors you wouldn't even know existed, getting you far bigger gigs than you would under your own steam, maximising your income and perhaps even securing you a record deal.

The manager handles pretty much everything beyond producing the music itself. They're the representative middle man between you and the entire music industry, from record labels and promoters to media and merchandise manufacturers. It's their job to organise the design, packaging and distribution of demos to record labels and media (if you don't have a record deal); take care of all negotiations with the record label (if you do); book gigs (and make sure label A&Rs are invited to them); do everything they can to promote you and your music to the public at every opportunity, through every available channel; aid in the recruitment of agents, lawyers, accountants, etc; and liaise with those parties once they're onboard.

A manager might also want to get involved with the actual development of their acts, depending on their creative nous, how established the acts are already and how the acts themselves feel about it.

Ultimately, the manager's sole purpose is to work every industry angle they can find in order to make as much money as they possibly can – for you and, consequently, them – out of your music, both recorded and performed live. The standard management commission is 20% of gross income, which obviously means that it's entirely possible for a manager to earn considerably more than any individual member of a band. If that sounds like a big slice of the pie, however, bear in mind that any manager worth their salt will bring in more than enough cash to justify their cut. We'll come back to this later...

WHAT MAKES A GREAT MANAGER?

A good manager needs to be clearly focused and resolutely goal-orientated, a fantastic negotiator, and extremely business-savvy. They should also love your music, or at the very least fully appreciate and understand its market viability.

Perhaps the most important single quality of any manager, though, is their contact book, which will ideally be bursting with direct lines to movers and shakers in all

areas of the industry. After all, without bringing a panoply of professional acquaintances to the table, all a manager can really do is talk to the same ‘level’ of the industry you already have access to, thus merely saving you a bit of legwork... like a glorified personal assistant.

A great manager is also always on the lookout for new revenue streams and analysing the performance of existing ones. From film and TV sync opportunities and mutually lucrative collaborations with other artists, to merchandising tie-ins, YouTube monetisation and fan funding, they need to be exploring all avenues all the time.

Of course, when it’s all boiled down, the truest measure of your manager’s abilities is your income. No matter how grand and inventive their ideas and processes, if your bank balance isn’t moving significantly upwards, they’re failing.

HOW DO YOU FIND A MANAGER?

Hopefully you’ll just ‘know’ when you need a manager. You’ll have reached a point in your musical journey at which real commercial success at last seems like a real possibility, and more and increasingly sizeable business-related tasks and planning are cropping up than you have the time and/or acumen to deal with. You may not even be that far into your career – indeed, the sooner you can get a manager along for the ride, the better. But that’s not to say it’s something you should rush into, biting the hand off the first eager administrative wannabe that comes along. The selection of a manager is one of the most important decisions you’ll ever make as an artist, and if you get it wrong, escaping a bad contract further down the line can be a nightmare.

First of all, then, your best mate, who’s in between jobs right now, probably shouldn’t be on your list of prospective managers, no matter how passionate their insistence that they’re the obvious choice because they’ve “been to all your gigs”. Having said that, if that same mate really is up for it in a professional, realistic sense, has qualifications in business studies and/or anything music related, and is prepared to dedicate pretty much their entire waking life to your cause, then by all means give it a go. Every manager has to start somewhere, and as long as you have a very easily escapable but non-exploitative (on both sides) contract drawn up, that more ‘personal’ relationship and shared history can be beneficial. That’s ‘can’, not ‘is absolutely always’, though – hiring a buddy as your manager can also result in a failed career topped off with a broken friendship. You need to be very confident in their natural ability to manage, and if you’re not, don’t go there.

So, assuming you’ve sensibly elected to go for an established, proven manager, how do you get them onboard? Ideally, having heard your music and seen you pull it off live, one will approach you – but we wouldn’t advise waiting around for that to happen. If you don’t already have a list of candidates in mind, hit the music industry forums and canvas recommendations from others. Then, send each one a digital package of music (just a few representative tracks) and press clippings, with a well-written, succinct biography and covering letter, cross your fingers and await their response. If you’ve not heard back after a few weeks, give them a call and politely ask if they’ve had a chance to check you out yet; and if that doesn’t elicit a reply, leave it another month before asking again. Beyond that point, they’re probably not interested, and you should move on.

If, after approaching numerous potential managers, you still haven't had a bite, it's time to consider the possibility that something about your music or its presentation is missing the mark, and that you might need to go back to the drawing board before starting on your next round of mail-outs. Should you be able to open a line of communication with any of the disinterested parties, ask them what it is about what your act that's putting them off so that you can address it – and be prepared to take the criticism that comes back at you as 100% constructive!

Finally, although the intricacies of music business law are way beyond the scope of this article, we'll wrap up by strongly emphasising the need to get a music lawyer involved when negotiating a management contract. There are a few reasons for this, but the main one is to establish a legally enshrined list of 'expenses' to be deducted from your gross income before the manager takes their commission. Without this, you could end up seriously out of pocket, as recording and touring expenses eat into your 80%, while the manager banks his full pre-expenses 20%. Also, don't ever give a manager any copyright or ownership of your music – they shouldn't even be asking for it, so if they do, take it as a warning sign that they either don't know what they're doing or they're out to fleece you.

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