



# getting RADIO Airplay

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

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**Nothing can beat the instant widespread exposure that radio can offer, so it's no wonder artists are always asking, "How do I get played on the radio?" But what does "radio" even mean these days?**

With so many diversified outlets for music listening, the term "radio" is being defined more broadly now than ever before, including commercial terrestrial radio, college, indie, non-profit, and community stations, satellite and internet radio, and the kind of customizable, interactive listening experiences enabled by sites like Pandora.com.


Getting your music played is still a daunting task, but the fragmented state of modern radio does give you the ability to target a smaller, more realistically achievable niche market without having to spend big payola bucks on an old-fashioned, corporate-radio campaign.



# RADIO re-defined



The term “radio” gets used in so many different ways. Here is a list of all the different formats that get referenced as radio.

- **Commercial Radio:** These are the big powerful stations that line up on your AM/FM dial. Typically they are owned by large media groups and program their music playlists based off the billboard charts.
  - **College/Non-profit Radio:** Usually completely independent entities, these stations hearken back to the day when DJ’s created playlists with music they loved. Some of these stations like KCRW in Santa Monica and KEXP in Seattle have become big tastemakers in the music community.
  - **Community Radio:** Similar to the college radio station, but with an extremely local flavor. Usually has mixed formats with a variety of programming (not just music).
  - **Satellite Radio:** SiriusXM is the giant of satellite radio. In this format, radio works much like your cable TV subscription in that there are numerous different stations all with their own unique programming.
  - **Internet Radio/Podcasts:** The Internet is a wild frontier with plenty of ways to enjoy radio. Pandora is definitely the standout in this bunch, but there are numerous other worthy contenders who broadcast completely online. Some broadcast 24/7 like traditional radio; others can be found in the form of podcasts.
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# so HOW do you get PLAYED on Radio?

With so many varied radio formats, it makes sense that there are also many different ways to get airplay. In this section we'll look at a handful of radio promotion tactics from the big blanket campaign to the grassroots personal touch and what types of artists would benefit most from each of them.



## TO CRACK COMMERCIAL RADIO, YOU'LL NEED A RADIO PROMOTER

Right off the bat, we should say that even with the help of a radio promoter your chances of getting repeated commercial airplay without a major label's backing are slim to none. Much of commercial station's playlists are dictated from on high by the central corporate office.

That being said, if money is no object, or your band is willing and able to make a big financial investment, by all means, hire a radio promoter to target commercial, college and community radio stations. Radio promoters are experts who have developed relationships with DJs and have the ear of program directors across the country.

Despite the high price tag (usually between \$1500-\$6000 for 3-12 weeks), a radio promoter cannot guarantee you any kind of tangible results. Like most things in the music industry, your chances of success are part talent, part endurance, part hype, and part luck. But if your music is really good, you will have a better chance of getting sustained and meaningful airplay with the assistance of a well-connected radio promoter.

**Please note:** Before hiring a radio promoter, you should always check their credentials, their previous successes in promoting indie artists, get some testimonials, and make sure you can check up on their work to ensure they're giving it their all. And most importantly, make sure it's affordable and that they really are enthused about your music. Otherwise, you'll pay too much for someone doing too little.

# HOW TO RUN YOUR OWN DIY COLLEGE RADIO CAMPAIGN

If you've got a great new release that you really believe can get some serious college radio play, but you just don't have the budget to hire a professional radio promoter, don't let that stop you! With a good plan and some free time, you can do a decent job as your very own radio promoter. Here are the steps to get it done:

## 1) PLAN TO ASSEMBLE 100-200 MAILINGS

This package should include 1 CD (remove the cellophane wrapper!) along with an artist One-Sheet. Do not add extra photos and articles about your band, as this will be perceived as clutter and unprofessional. Also, don't send extra copies of the CD and ask the recipient to pass them around the station.

## 2) DEVELOP A TARGETED LIST

Put together a targeted list of college, community, and public stations, as well as commercial specialty programs (like local or unsigned feature hours) that are appropriate for your genre. You'll have the most luck if you limit this list to a geographic area that you can realistically tour through at least 3 or 4 times a year.

## 3) KNOW WHOM TO CONTACT

It's important to address your package directly to the person you are trying to reach at the station. In most cases it will be the program director (some stations also have a music director). If the station has a specific show featuring music like yours, go ahead and send that DJ a package as well as they might have some input when the show's playlists are assembled. Never send your package just addressed to the station as that would either get lost in the shuffle or thrown in the garbage.

## 4) BE CLEAR WITH YOUR INTENTIONS

Are you promoting a specific song? Are there certain songs that work better for radio? It's important to be clear to the program/music director, as they don't have time to listen down to your album and decide what will work.

## 5) FOLLOW UP TWO WEEKS LATER

After you send out your CDs to radio, check back in a couple weeks by phone or email to make sure they received it, had a chance to listen, and ask if they'll be adding it to their playlist. Don't put up a fight if they say NO. Just politely ask "why" and say thanks if they tell you the reason. If they say yes, give them a quick thanks and casually ask what their preferred protocol is for you to check up on the actual reception your album is getting from their listeners. Feel free to check back every few weeks to see if it's still in rotation. You might feel like you're being a pest, but we've actually heard from college radio DJs that they appreciate when someone calls to remind them to play a certain song. Otherwise, they tend to feel like they get into a programming rut and just start playing the same old things.

## 6) SO YOU GOT PLAYED

If you hear that a station has added your music to their playlist, it's important to follow up with a thank you. Ask them if there is anything that YOU can do for THEM. Maybe they'd like you to record a bumper for them (one of those little radio plugs where a band says "Hey, we're Led Zeppelin and you're listening to KLED!") Perhaps you could send them free discs for them to give away in a station promotion. The options are unlimited.

## 7) KEEP IN TOUCH

If a station has shown interest in your music, be sure to keep them up to date with your music career (outside of pitching your music to them). A quarterly email highlighting tour dates and recent career achievements should suffice to keep you in their consciousness. Don't add them to your fan email list unless they ask to be added!

## 8) TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Make sure you're ready and willing to do all these steps in a short period of time. Just like the press, your big chance to make any significant splash with radio is when your CD is new (1-3 months old), so all your ducks should be in a row come the time of the release.

# PODCASTS, SATELLITE, and INTERNET RADIO have a POWERFUL REACH.

Non-traditional forms of radio (satellite, internet, and podcasts) are growing in popularity every day. Many of the popular music streaming sites like Pandora are even jumping from the internet into people's mobile devices and cars. The good news is that getting significant play on these new types of radio formats is a far easier task than the commercial campaigns of yesteryear. The trade off is that you will have to do a little more research, as each individual station/program/podcast will have their own submission guidelines. The best part is, they actually want artists to submit their music!



## WHERE DO I FIND PODCASTS AND INTERNET RADIO?

For podcasts, a good place to start is the podcast section in iTunes, where you'll find music podcasts of all shapes and sizes featuring just about every genre you can imagine. That will give you more than enough to get started. For internet radio, iTunes can be useful as well. It's easily overlooked, but there is a Radio link under the Library header in your iTunes navigation menu. Click on that link and you will be taken to a vast catalog of hundreds of internet radio stations, all of which are categorized by genre. Just so there is no confusion, iTunes does not produce the podcasts or internet radio stations that show up in their directory, but merely provide the directory to bring many stations and podcasts together in one place. Locate the shows that are right for your music and then hunt down their submission guidelines on line.



## WHAT IS PANDORA?

With over 50 million users worldwide, Pandora uses the Music Genome Project to deliver customized radio stations to each of its listeners. Once the Pandora system learns the user's musical preferences, it serves up a continuous stream of music that should be exactly what the listener likes. For many, this has been the #1 place to discover new bands. Check Pandora's submission guidelines here – <http://submitmusic.pandora.com>

# LOOK for the HIDDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Sometimes you just don't have the time, money, or inclination to pull off a giant radio campaign, but the truth is, there are still plenty of opportunities to get your music a little airplay if you're paying attention or know where to look. These commonly missed opportunities won't make a career, but can be the little extra push needed to get the promotion ball rolling.

### ))) BE THE BIG FISH IN A SMALL POND.

Don't overlook the small markets! Many off-the-beaten-path towns have community radio stations that would be thrilled to have you stop by while on tour. Even if your music doesn't exactly fit their format, in many cases, these stations will welcome you for an in-studio performance or a short interview while spinning tracks off your album. Remember, even if the listenership is minimal, in-studios make excellent video and photo opportunities that make great content for the web!

### ))) BE SURE TO CHECK THE STATION'S WEBSITE.

Many commercial radio stations have an internet radio component that can have a broader reach with more daring programming choices than you'd hear over the airwaves. If you do find this to be the case, be sure to follow their submission guidelines.

### ))) KEEP YOUR EARS OPEN FOR OPPORTUNITIES.

When the DJ asked listeners to submit their 5-song Perfect Playlist, Portland band Hello Morning submitted their playlist which included one song off of their new EP. The DJ loved their music and thought it fit perfectly, so not only did their song get played on one of Portland's largest rock stations, but Hello Morning was asked to come into the studio to talk about their playlist which gave them an excellent opportunity to promote an upcoming show.

### ))) USE SOCIAL NETWORKS TO MAKE AN INTRODUCTION.

There's a good chance that many of the DJ's in your town are on Facebook and Twitter, so use that as an opportunity to get to know your local radio scene. Interact with them, and as you get to know them, introduce them to your music. Oftentimes these folks are very interested in the local music community even if they're station format does not allow for indie music on a regular basis.



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