

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO GET SIGNED?

This is a series of extracts from expert articles about how to improve your chances of getting signed. You are also encouraged to read the three companion articles - Why is it so tough to make a decent living as a musician? and Record label contracts and Explaining the income streams.

"Record labels today are attracted to acts that have built a strong following and have proved to the industry that they are a solid investment" (Christopher Knab). Much more so today than 5-10 years ago, artists/bands have to provide plenty of evidence that they will probably deliver a substantial return on the financial investment the label plans to make.

Extracts from "5 important things Record Labels look for"

1. **Branding/Marketing**- Who are you to the world? Branding establishes a direct connection with the world. If you don't have a brand, why is a label going to be interested? A proper marketing plan is important as well since it's direct communication with your audience. Social media should definitely be included in your marketing plans.

2. **Sales/Draw**- This is why branding/marketing is number 1 because without it, you can't generate sales. Labels want to know you can sell units (songs) on your own, without their help. Numbers matter. Giving away 40,000 downloads impresses nobody. Earn money and stop selling yourself short with €5 albums.

Keep solid records of ALL sales, both gross and net from singles, albums and merchandise because this information is going to do a lot for you in the future when seeking a label or should one approach you.

Draw means fanbase, it's that simple. How many fans do you have? How many people are coming to your shows? Make sure to get a head count from ticket sales and if the door person isn't counting heads, tell them they're not doing their job right. You should have a relatively consistent number -- add up how many shows you've done that month and take an average. You'll want that number to grow. Twitter and Facebook also count for draw.

3. **Touring** - How often are you playing shows? Where are you playing them? Have you been invited out of your local area or out of the country? Play at the venues who will treat you right; free drink isn't pay. This may mean you'll have to get a booking agent but an agent can do wonders, securing good paid spots. Tour as often as possible; if you can get 10 shows a month, take them.

4. **Sonic Quality**- How does that album sound? Has it got depth? How about powerful drums? More often than not, mixes aren't label quality and are on the dull, cold, digital sounding side. €75 mixes get you nowhere. Like it or not, you have to spend money to make it. A sub par mix/master is obvious and you can lose out on this point alone.

Invest in your mixes/masters. The result will send a gigantic smile across your face and ears, as well as the faces of fans and label staff. If you can't afford to record/mix/master an album, release an EP or a single instead. It's about the **QUALITY**, not the **QUANTITY**. Demos don't exist anymore.

5. **Attitude**- Believe it or not, attitude matters. You can be a rude person and watch it get you nowhere. Or you can be a firm person, put your poker face on and do solid negotiations and talking. A good entertainment lawyer helps too, but before you need him/her you need to know exactly what you want and don't want from a label. Don't hop on the first deal that comes your way, if you're not a match. Another label will deliver what you want.

Keep pushing forward and you will find success in the industry. Stick with those who have the **EXPERIENCE** to help you in every way to become a better musician or band. Don't be the type that uses others because it **WILL** come back to bite you.

To read the full article by Josh Hayward of Astral Plane Studios from which these extracts are taken, see:
https://musicclout.com/contents/article-275-5-important-things-record-labels-look-for.aspx?goback=%2Egde_3259553_member_267576947#%21

Extracts from "How to get signed to a label - the top ten ways"

There are several things you can do to maximise the possibility of attracting a major label or production company and get them interested in signing you.

1. Be well prepared! Make sure your skills are developed to the point that they can compete with the best the industry has to offer.

2. You must look "sign-able". No one will want to sign you to a label unless you are going to make them money. As such, you or your band must be confident, experienced, dedicated and professional. You need to have great songs and to stand out from the rest.

3. Don't wait to be discovered. Promoting yourself and developing your own fan base is a great way to get noticed by major labels. It helps to have an established following, a good street team, and some strong independent sales when seeking a record deal. The more you do on your own, the less the label has to do, and ultimately the happier they are. In fact, A&R will often seek you out (e.g. come to your show to hear what all the fuss is about) if you've done a really good job of promoting yourself.

4. Get out and do live performances. Offer to play at clubs for free if they are reluctant to book you. If you win over the crowd (or bring a healthy crowd of your own) they'll have you back. To build a regional fan base, you should be doing shows, selling CDs, trying to get some radio support (even if it's just college radio), and doing anything and everything else you can to get some kind of following.

5. Be creative. Go where your audience is. Does your music appeal to high school students? Play lunchtime shows at high schools. Or shopping malls.

6. Put together a "street team" of fans in your local area who can help promote your shows, and spread the word. Many young, die-hard fans will work like crazy just to be included on the guest list and be considered something of an insider.

7. Use the power of the internet to create a buzz. Promote yourself online and expand your fan base even more. Set up your own website where fans can download your songs. Create a MySpace Music page and artist profile for free. Create a blog and network with other musicians. Have people sign up to your mailing list and build your database. Regular contact with your fans is crucial if you want to retain a healthy fan base. Give them regular news updates and information about gigs and CD releases.

8. Many artists sign up to an independent label first (or even start their own label) to develop their artistry, songwriting and performance, before getting signed to a major label. Consider doing this as part of your career development.

9. **One common misconception is that major labels develop artists. This is simply not true.** You need to bring the whole package, including performance ability, to the label. Having your own fan base, photos, press clippings or internet presence to add to your "demo" will certainly look more impressive.

10. A&R and managers receive multiple demo's every day and are subject to hearing some pretty awful stuff. If you can offer something that sounds amazing, along with a good promotional package, it should greatly increase your chances of getting signed.

So hone your skills, produce a tight product and creat a strong buzz. You will be well on your way to getting signed to a label.

While every success story is different, you will find that most successful artists share a sense that their music "must be heard" at all costs, so cultivate this mindset in yourself. This belief will help you to persevere and to make connections with others who share your vision.

The original full article by Sophie Curran from which these extracts are taken is no longer available online

Extracts from "How to ruin your music career in 10 easy steps"

1) Being inconsistent

Do you only work on your songs when you feel like it? Do you only play gigs when a friend mentions there's a free slot one evening? If you can't say when you practise and when you're next gigging, you are probably projecting a kind of 'hit and miss' approach to your career. Regular, predictable actions will help keep your fans engaged and help you to focus on the priorities for your career.

2) Putting out albums or EPs with no schedule for promotion

Paying to get an album recorded, mixed and mastered, but not planning tour dates, release dates and strategic promotion through radio stations, magazines, mailing list updates and social media promotion will lose you sales and mean that your recording, far from being an investment, has been a huge waste of time and resources.

3) Staying in and practising all day and nothing else

Learning how to play an instrument takes time and effort and it's really important that you practise regularly. However, staying in your room and practising to the wall does not a successful music artist make. You need to network with people, get out to gigs and generally get yourself known.

4) Avoiding using social media because you'd rather be 'mysterious' instead

This used to be a viable tactic. Back in the days before social media, there was a way in which you could work towards getting a record deal and have the record company do all of the promotional work for you. You could remain a mysterious artist putting out great music but not revealing much about your life.

Unfortunately, that just won't cut it anymore. If you aren't directly interacting with your fans, you can't build the kind of following that will get you noticed by companies willing to do some of your promotion and distribution.

5) Not defining your brand

If you are randomly posting on social media, however, with no kind of plan of what to talk about, you could be damaging your potential for building a fanbase. What do you represent to your fans? Artists who only post sporadically don't build up a sense of loyalty with their listeners. Use social media to have a conversation with your fans about the things that define the brand and purpose of your own music.

6) Not having an opt-in box with an appropriate incentive on your website

If you only rely on social media to 'collect' fans, you're leaving yourself vulnerable to losing that information because you're not in control of Facebook. You need to have your own separate mailing list and you need to have a good way of getting people on to it. If you have a great website - make it work for you! Offer a fantastic song of yours in return for signing up. That way, people have a really relevant and rewarding incentive and you'll steadily grow your list.

7) Not using an email marketing provider for your newsletter

If you don't use a proper email service provider that is designed for multiple address send-outs, you are actually doing something illegal in sending out mass emails. Use an email provider such as Mailchimp or Aweber.

8) Responding to others' success by comparing it to your own

This seems to be a real problem among certain musicians. If you think it's a competitive, heartless world and react to it as though it is, that's precisely what you will create.

9) Only contacting your newsletter subscribers when you're selling something

There's nothing worse than adding to the rising number of sales emails we all get in our inboxes. Make sure that you set aside time on a regular basis, each week or every couple of weeks to send out an email to your mailing list telling them about the meaning behind one of your songs, etc. Share stuff with your fans on your list like they are VIPs. Give them lots of insider info and videos or mp3 content before you even mention where they can buy something you've made.

10) Forgetting your creativity when taking music business ideas on board

Your advantage as a musician is that you're already overflowing with creativity. So use it in every newsletter email subject line, every video concept, every social media post. Do something off-the-wall or quirky that people will remember. In short, keep your creative genius alive even outside the studio.

*To read the full article by Rowen Bridler from which these extracts are taken, see:
<http://www.musicclout.com/contents/article-326-how-to-ruin-your-music-career-in-10-easy-steps--part-2-steps-6-10.aspx> AND <https://www.musicclout.com/contents/article-307-how-to-ruin-your-music-career-in-10-easy-steps--part-1-steps-1-5.aspx>*

Extracts from "Record Labels - Make them come to you"

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. The singer 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 Aguilera, 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.

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".

To read the full article by Chris Standring from which these extracts are taken, see:
http://www.musicbizacademy.com/articles/cs_labels2u.htm

Extracts from "How to make a living playing music" by Danny Barnes

- ⤴ If you are going into a deal with any entity, seek two things:
(i) the arrangement must be win/win. Win/lose is ultimately lose/lose. Avoid that. (ii) Make an agreement that either one of you can walk away at any time and everything is cool.
- ⤴ Don't be afraid to do other things to make money in the short term. This can be a very rewarding experience. Historically, musicians have been barbers and bartenders and all kinds of stuff to make ends meet. Do what you need to do.
- ⤴ Record labels: they can help or they can drag you down. Here's the scoop. If they expect you to be the primary distributor of the product, don't sign the deal. The typical deal is a 90/10 split, you get the ten minus every expense related to the project. Thus you are paying for everything and giving the label 90% of the gross. Read that sentence again.

If they aren't really really offering you something good in terms of promotion, or something - some tangible quantitized tie-in to something bigger - skip it. You can hire that stuff yourself easier. Talk to other artists on the roster and ask them what they think. Anyway, if you are an emerging artist, it's going to be hard to find a label home. They are losing so much dough they only want guaranteed money makers (or less money losers) on the roster, and they are dropping folks right and left.

So it's a 90/10 deal and you get the 10 and they want you to be the primary distributor of the product plus pay for the whole deal. Those are not very good terms. In addition, they will charge you eight bucks plus shipping for your own cds that you can make for either zero or one dollar. And they might complain about every little detail.

Again, if they really have an idea for a bang up thing they are thinking of, by all means have a go. If they are motivated and have a track record and have ideas and are workable, they can really help. However, you might want to have an out. Have an out clause in there. Shooting from the hip, I'd tell you to avoid the whole thing and do it yourself. It's very likely that the person that brings your act into the label fold will get fired. Then you can get stuck with four years left on the deal and no one will return your calls. They just hope you will get another deal and someone will buy out the rest of the contract. Lots of bands close up shop at this point.

- ⤴ There are some labels that operate with different models. I have had very good success with them. They tend to be more punk rock style outfits. You might want to investigate that. The standard deal referred to already is

pretty hard to profit from. The punk rock deal goes something like this: all the black ink goes in a list, all the red ink goes in a list, find the difference, split what's left if it's a positive number. Fifty fifty. These are really the only deals I ever made money on.

The point is, there are some other ways to look at stuff contractually. If the deal is win/win, great. If it's win/lose, skip it. If the label in question is locked into doing contractual things a certain way, this won't be for your benefit. You are creative, your business arrangements can be creative.

- ⤴ **The main business strategy is to build your own audience.** If you have a draw, agents, labels or investors will come to you. If you skip this step and start trying to talk to industry people and you don't have a draw yet, you are going to be sorry. Build your own audience. If you can sell your own records that you make yourself and do your own shows, you can attract the attention of industry folks and get your calls returned. Then you probably won't need them unless you want them. That's a better bargaining position for you. Work on your drawing power.
- ⤴ Don't expect to get paid more than you can bring in. If you draw ten people, and the cover is \$10 a head, you gross \$100, not \$500. You can't ask for more than you bring in the door.
- ⤴ All the trouble in the world is going to come for you in two ways: the things you say, and the things you agree to do. Be very careful about these items.
- ⤴ Build alliances. Let's say you play some weird kind of music. Make contact with someone in another city that does something similar and offer to set up a concert for them in your town. Maybe they will later help you to play their city or something. Work it out with them. If you can't get into a particular festival, why not have your own festival?
- ⤴ Don't keep saying "well if I had a label or agent or manager, then I could be happy." Forget that. Forge ahead with your music. Keep working. Develop the music. Come up with different ways to do an end run around conventional wisdom. If you are really called to be in music, the right people will present themselves at the right time. Build those alliances of simpatico musicians, writers, studio guys, label guys, radio guys. Be nice and help others.

To read the full article by Danny Barnes from which these extracts are taken, see:
<http://dannybarnes.com/blog/how-make-living-playing-music>

