THE
NO-BULLSHIT
MUSICIAN’S
GUIDE TO DIY
SELF-PROMOTION
—

In this 30 page ultimate playbook of promotion, you'll learn everything you need to know about promotion to get your project started right. Period.

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The music industry has changed. Digital distribution, music promotion and sharing platforms have caused a complete rethinking of how music works—new ways to listen, new ways to create, new ways to share.
Sure, there is still a mainstream.

But the real changes are happening for independent music. Creators have more tools and freedom than ever. The rise of digital marketing has opened a giant door for independent artists.

Keeping the fires of success burning can be tough when it seems like things aren’t going anywhere. I’d get tired of being the stereotypical broke and struggling musician. I can’t even count the number of times I’ve considered hanging up the mic for good in my 15 years as an independent musician.

But music has hands down given me my most cherished memories. The type of experiences you’ve probably had yourself. Nothing’s better than that feeling of accomplishment you get from sharing your work.

The tricky part is making that amazing feeling a sustainable full-time job. But it’s not as hard as you think. With a solid music marketing plan and some self-promotion tips you can have a sustainable music career.

This self-promotion guide will teach you the essentials of how to promote your music right. It’ll give you more time and freedom to focus on what really matters. Creating.

You’ll find out everything you need to know about:

- Turning your music into a sustainable career
- Getting the exposure you need when you’re starting out
- How to sell music on your own
- Turning your hard work into real results (and how to work smarter, to reduce the amount of hard work you have to put in)
- Getting heard by tastemakers in the music industry
- The secrets of getting radio airplay, music publishing, digital distribution and music licensing
- Expanding your reach outside of your own community to a global level
- Booking bigger and bigger gigs - from dive bars to stadiums
- Marketing yourself and your music in the right way
- The essentials of effective Internet marketing

Making music a career isn’t far fetched. But getting started on the right path is the most difficult part. That’s why we’ve taken the time to explain how to do it right. This step-by-step guide will allow you to turn your hobby and passion into a music career.
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Starting Out
Something happened to me when I was younger that never should have.

I’m sure you can relate. It’s happened to everyone and it happens too often.

I’d go see artists that I loved. After the show I’d try and talk to them and they’d brush me off like they were way too cool.

Don’t be that artist.

Being marketable is about approachability and gathering a loyal following. Be available. Meet your fans, talk to people, ask questions.

**Be a human being first and an aspiring artist second.**

Don’t brush off someone who’s interested because they’re “not worthy” or you’re “too cool.” The smallest interaction can make the biggest difference.

Trust, Credibility and Authority is a direct result of being available. It’s the difference between success and failure — the difference between a one-time-listen and a loyal fan that will continue to come back again and again.

It might sound a bit too businessy, but your music needs to function like a brand. From touring, to distribution, to radio play, everything you do should be done through the lens of marketing.

Music is an artform. That’s obvious.

But remember, the music industry is a business.

Like any other business, some ventures fail while others flourish. Keep an open mind towards business marketing. There is valuable insight to be gained from the suits.

**I’m not a businessman... I’m a business, man.**

— Jay-Z

You already have a leg up on the competition when it comes to the business side of things: Creativity. Approach your marketing with the same unique vision that you approach your music with. This will fold the business side into your process seamlessly.

Don’t forget that the band is the brand. Make it count. Protect it.

Here are the promotion strategies every artist should have in place when starting out.
Talking to your fans face to face is the best way to connect. But the next best thing might be less obvious:

Emailing them.

Email sounds like an old hat way of doing promotion. But the power of email is real.

And the best part? It’s free to use.

If you asked 10 bands, 50 bands, 100 bands, if they had a mailing list, I would guess that less than 5% have them. It’s the most overlooked way to promote. But it’s also the most valuable.

Use your mailing list to keep fans informed about:

- New music
- Upcoming releases
- Music videos
- Tour dates
- Radio shows or mixes
- Even other music that you’re interested in
An email list is a direct link to your fanbase. Ask for feedback. Respond to people directly. And use it to understand who your audience is. Use it to sell your music. But also for building a base of T.C.A. Which of course stands for that all important...
**HOW TO GET EMAIL SIGN-UPS**

If you are playing live already, then have a sheet where people can sign-up. This can be at your merch table, or even at the edge of the stage. It’s a pretty grassroots way of doing things, but getting emails from someone at your show is a great way to keep them informed long after the gig is over.

If you’re sharing music on Soundcloud, Bandcamp, or a standalone website (you should have all of these platforms, but we’ll get to that later) make sure you post a simple form that allows people to sign-up.

Not sure how to do it? No problem.

**Just get MailChimp. They have everything you need to set up an effective mailing list.** There are 13 year olds running email campaigns to massive lists. Do it.

Email keeps people informed on a personal basis. Talk to people like it’s face to face. And give them the option to respond to you directly.

Don’t put up walls around yourself. People respond to personal interaction very well.

Write your emails in the first person and make them from YOU!
Web Presence, Social Media and Streaming Communities
Social media and streaming platforms are a no-brainer for any artist. They’re easy to setup, easy to promote and great for self-guided exposure. But the truth is, most artists fail to use them properly.

An artist page or artist profile doesn’t automatically promote you. They are promotional tools. And like any tool, you have to use them properly to make them work. Here’s how to get the most out of all your platforms.

BUILDING AN AUDIENCE

If you make something, share something.

It sounds simple but it’s true. As a musician your best way to promote is to share what you make. And share it the right way.

There’s tons of platforms out there to choose from. But these are the main sharing outlets that every musician should be using.
Get a website for your project. It’s the most important asset to have.

It’s a space that is entirely yours. It’s the one place where you can cut through the noise of typical ‘feeds’ and give the clear and succinct info every potential fan needs about your work.

They don’t need to be complex or fancy—even just a simple Squarespace, Wordpress or Tumblr is fine.

If Facebook and other social platforms are meant to create exposure, then your website is where that exposure will eventually lead. Think of it like a home base that you’re inviting all your fans into via your other pages. Mi casa es su casa.
Create a Facebook artist page. It’s no secret that Facebook is a powerful sharing tool not just for artists, but for the entire world.

Be findable. Stick to your artist name and that’s it. Don’t get fancy with what you call your page.

The first thing a potential new fan often does is search for your Facebook profile. If you’re listed as something obscure, they’ll never find you. It’s probably a good idea to keep your personal Facebook and your artist page separate.

Creating a page is easy, but making your posts stand out is a little more tricky.
**WHAT TO POST**

The most obvious thing you can post via your fan page is your music. If you make something, let people know. Think of posting your music like telling your *music story*.

Build your voice, fans will come back for it.

If you simply post songs every now and then, you will get lost in someone’s feed in no time. But if you share often, and with a personal touch, you’ll get a way bigger response.

Use the first person when posting. “I just finished...” or “I’m really proud to share...” These types of approaches are guaranteed to give you a bigger response than just linking to your song.

Encourage feedback too. Nothing builds a mega-fan faster than responding to the discussions you’ve created. If there are comments, like them and get involved in the discussion. It matters.

**DON’T BE HUMAN SPAM.**

Post often, but don’t bombard your readers with pushy posts every 10 minutes. There’s so much content online these days that people have a ‘Bullshit Radar.’ Don’t be on it by spamming your fans.

Post as a person first, and an aspiring musician second — you’ll see results immediately. To keep people coming back, nurture the conversational environment around your posts. In-depth discussions keep your posts relevant for longer.

**THE OVERLOOKED ART OF BOOSTING YOUR POSTS**

Something that tons of artists overlook is paying for boosted content on Facebook. Think of boosting on facebook like paying to have posters printed and distributed for a show. You’re paying for higher visibility and a bigger audience.

Boosting ensures that your post stays at the top of a feed for longer.

It doesn’t cost thousands of dollars either. $40 or less will have your post in front of more eyes. And new eyes means potential fans.

Pro managers will often target and boost tastemaker cities (Brooklyn, L.A., Austin, Atlanta) before a tour or album release.

Here’s how to boost a post on facebook:

1 — Go to a post you’ve created and then click Boost Post in the lower-right corner.

2 — Choose your audience and budget based on how many people you want to reach and how long you’d like your boost to run. You can also change your payment method.

3 — Click Boost Post.

That’s it. 3 easy steps. And if you wanna go even deeper with it, you can target a specific audience. For example: if you’re playing a gig in another city, you can target your post directly to people from there. The future is now!
Producing new music takes time. So what do you share in between? Easy. Post everything to do with your music. Tell your story as it happens.

Here’s some savvy things to post in between releases to keep your visibility up and nurture your trust foundation:

- Gig Dates
- Photos (candid and show photos)
- Mixes
- Radio shows
- Other artists you like
- What you’ve been listening to
- Upcoming tours
- News about your group
- A photo of some new gear
- Your studio set-up
- New Merch
- ANYTHING about you

Post with the aim of getting people to share, discuss, and follow. Posting good, quality content that will get circulated around is free advertising. And the best way to get stuff shared is to make something that’s personal, honest and thought-provoking.

When you post ask yourself, “would I care about this if I saw it in my feed?” Share to others what you would like to have shared with you.
Soundcloud is the leader in setting up an artist-friendly streaming platform. They provide everything you need to make your music shareable and visible. Their feed/follow system allows your fans to keep up with what you’re making.

Soundcloud even provides an essential step by step guide on how to grow your community.

It also gives you the tools to keep in contact with your own community and see what other people are creating. Knowing what is trending within your niche is invaluable.

But most of all Soundcloud gives you shareable and streamable songs. Uploading to their service gives you the ability to post your music anywhere. It’s great for your Press Kit, contacting blogs and other media outlets, your own social media pages, and your website.

Be sure to optimize your Soundcloud page with links to your website and mailing list. Simply update your profile information to include this info in the artist profile column on the left side of your page.
The one thing that Bandcamp does that other streaming platforms don’t:

**Lets you sell your music.**

Bandcamp pays out over 3 million dollars to artists every month. And their album sales far outweigh their individual track sales:

*Albums outsell tracks 5 to 1 on Bandcamp (in the rest of the music buying world, tracks outsell albums 16 to 1).*

Bandcamp isn’t specifically a “social media” site. It’s more of a private distribution platform—which is valuable for any artist hoping to get paid from their music. It helps with your social strategy overall. Their player is easily embedded across the web.

And remember that mailing list we setup earlier? Bandcamp is one of the BEST places to get email addresses from fans.

Every time someone downloads your album, Bandcamp automatically saves their Email. Retrieving them is as easy as going into the ‘mailing list’ section of your account and exporting the entire list.

**Selling your album on BandCamp**

Bandcamp gives you *all sorts of options* for how people can pay for your music.

In addition to flat rates for albums and songs, Bandcamp allows artists to offer their music for ‘pay-what-you-can.’

**HOT TIP: Use the pay-what-you-can option when you’re starting out.**

You’d be surprised by how much people are willing to support your music. If the buyer feels like giving you a bit more than free, then let them. But leaving the option open to have it free means more listeners early on. Look at charging for your albums as a goal to reach for.
Press Kits: The Ultimate Calling Card

Think of your press kit like a little satellite you deploy that will broadcast your signal to everyone that matters. It’s the most versatile tool a musician can have. You can send them to blogs, promoters, festivals, news outlets venues, even other artists you want to play with.
Nothing says ‘look at me’ quite like a well made press kit.

**ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT (EPK)**

Make sure that your press kit is organized and easy to follow. All of your documentation should be prim, proper and well edited. That means no typos (e.g. its and it’s).

All text should be in an easily readable PDF format (kind of like this Ebook). Try your best to keep everything you are providing in one document. Include hyperlinks to your website, streaming profile, and recent press.

**High-res photo of the group or musician**
Don’t cheap out on this one. Iphone photos won’t cut it. Hire a photographer to take a few high quality snaps. They will end up representing you across the web. So make them count.

**Short bio**
Your Bio should be thorough but succinct. Don’t tell your entire life story. But also don’t just list off your name and birthdate. Find an engaging balance.

**1-2 recent pieces of press**
Including press if you have it. It can be as simple as a blog post or a show review. Make sure it’s always current.

**Stable links to your music**
This is where your Bandcamp or Soundcloud profiles come in handy. Soundcloud even lets you post tracks privately. Sharing privately for your press kit is a great way to add some exclusivity to your Press Kit.

**Upcoming tour dates**
Keep these current! If someone is reading your press-kit chances are they’ll want to see you live as well. Don’t miss that one big chance.

**Past shows**
Detail your past performances and be sure to mention who you have played with. Drop some names but keep it tasteful.

**Solid contact info (most important)**
An EPK is like a business card: it should have your phone number, Email and mailing address. The more ways to get in contact the better. Don’t miss out on opportunities because someone couldn’t reach you.

Your EPK should also contain recordings of your music as well as live recordings. Press kits should give the reader a keen sense of who you are, what you do and what you sound like. But don’t overdo it. Keep those deepest darkest secrets to yourself for now.

Your bio should be clean, current and high level. If you’re not comfortable writing one on your own, this would be a good time to pay to have one done. Or better yet, get that one friend who went to university to do it for you :)

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PRESS KITS: THE ULTIMATE CALLING CARD
Now that you have a press kit, who do you give it to? I’m sure you already have a pretty good idea, right? If not, here’s a few killer places to extend your feelers.
HOW TO CONTACT BLOGS AND OTHER OUTLETS

Blogs power the underground. Before anything goes mainstream, there’s a good chance a super savvy blogger blogged about it years ago (before it was cool…) so getting your music into the blog stream is vital for creating some buzz.

The number one thing to keep in mind when you’re contacting bloggers is: they are writers, and writers have writing egos, and they are usually really big.

So push the ego button.

Tell them that you have been following their blog for awhile and you really enjoy it. This shouldn’t be a lie. The only way to know what a blog can do for your music is to know their blog intimately. Make reference to specific articles that you read and enjoyed (great for the ego angle).

After you’ve laid all that out, THEN you can get to the part about your own music. Leading off an email with ‘check out my song’ is a one way ticket to the trash bin. Keep in mind that bloggers probably look at 500 emails per-day, so their filter is going to be pretty ruthless.

But also remember that every site is looking to have the scoop on the next big thing. So be their jackpot in a humble way.

HOT TIP: don’t put a full Soundcloud or Bandcamp link in your email. Make it a hyperlink instead. Emails that have full Soundcloud links will get closed immediately because it will look like every single other artist email they have ever received.

Be prepared for the success rate to be quite low. Your first try isn’t always the one that wins them over. Try to get a dialogue going about other music you like, their past posts, or something that has been influencing you.

Basically just be a fellow music fan.

All of your emails should have a watermark at the bottom with link info and contact information. In fact, you can leave the linking work up to your watermark if you really don’t want to seem overbearing. Most curious bloggers will check you out anyways. Especially if you made a good impression with your message.

THE WHO’S WHO OF PROMOTION

Technically you don’t need any of these services. To be honest, you can do most of it yourself these days (way cheaper).

However, there are a few key players that will always be around the music industry. Get educated on what each person does for you, and what their interests are. This will ensure you don’t sign a bad contract somewhere along the line and get fleeced later.
What Does A Record Label Do For Me?

The days of record label A&Rs scouring the country for new talent are over. Getting signed usually means you’ve already gotten your project off the ground yourself. That means promoting, gigging, marketing and everything else that comes with making it all work. Again, labels are a good thing to aim for in the long run, but in the early going it’s in your best interest to do everything yourself.

What’s A Booking Agent?

Booking agents are people who take care of all your gigs and appearances. But you don’t go to them, they come to you. Getting a booking agent is a good goal to aim for. It’s what all the hard work leads to while you’re still making things work on your own.
WHAT’S A PR AGENT?

PR agencies are responsible for the promotion of your music. To be frank you don’t need one. At least not yet. Everything they do for you—social media, setting up interviews, press, etc.—you can simply do on your own. All of those things will come naturally with a little bit of hard work and how-to knowledge (that you’re getting from this article) so keep the cut that they take (typically 15%) for yourself.

WHAT’S A PROMOTER?

Get on any promoter’s good side. They’re often responsible for booking openers for bigger out-of-town acts. Promoters are in charge of promoting a venue or set of events. The number one thing to remember is that a promoter’s bottom line is how many people come to an event. If you can sell them on how many people will turn up and buy drinks, you can book a show pretty much anywhere. Convincing them that your music will bring in a crowd is the best thing to focus on. If you’re not throwing your own parties, promoters are your best ticket to playing live.
You’ve worked long and hard on your new record, right? Toiling in the studio with no sleep. Sweating out all the little mistakes. Perfecting every little sound.

It’s great. So it deserves a good debuting effort. Don’t just throw it up on Soundcloud and call it a day. Debuting is hard work that takes time and diligence. But if you do it right, it pays off.
PUT YOUR BEST MUSIC FOOT FORWARD

Release your best stuff. This is the most valuable advice I can give you when it comes to putting music out there. Just like meeting new people, first impressions of music are crucial.

Releasing your best stuff means honing your craft — not cutting corners. Make the best version of you that you can possibly create. Your music should also be optimized for all the thousands of situations it’s going to get played in. It should sound good on laptop speakers all the way up to a massive PA. Mastering is the best way to make sure your tracks are ready for all types of playback. Save some time and money and use LANDR to make sure your tracks sound their best everywhere.

Ok, so you have your best stuff ready to go, right? Good. Now that that’s out of the way let’s continue...

CROSS-PROMOTE

Cross-promote with other artists. Post something of theirs in exchange for them posting your new project. Make it a mutual backscratch.

Shareability is key when it comes to releasing new music. Make sure you have nice stable links. Bandcamp and Soundcloud provide a handy shareable player that fits just about anywhere. Perfect for sharing your new release.

HYPE BUILD

If you’ve been telling your music story with your social media, then people should already know you’ve been working hard at creating a new project. But it’s still good to set a little release date for you to stick to. This gives your fans something to look forward to and a date for you to work towards. Or you could be like Beyonce and release your record in the middle of the night when no one expects it, but that’s no fun anymore.

BLOGS, NEWS SITES AND RADIO SHOWS

The online world is driven by content. Bigger sites like blogs and online music magazines always want the inside scoop. So let them know in advance that you’ll be releasing new music and give them the option of having an exclusive. This way, you’ll get the traffic from their community as well as yours. Just use the blog contact strategy I outlined above.

MORE THAN JUST AN ALBUM

An album release date is a great time to release other content as well. Music videos are a great way to augment a release. Use them as promotional tools for a bigger agenda. Plug your album in the description of the video. 78% of people watch videos online every week. Now that’s a lot of eyes and ears.
Playing Live
START GRASSROOTS

Start with what you know. And who you know. The best place to get things going is right in front of you. Start local and grow a following from the ground up. Chances are you already have a network around you. Nurture a proactive and co-dependent community.

Here’s a few things to keep in mind if you’re wondering how to get a gig:

**How to work within your network**
If you’re already making music on your own, you’ve probably met a few people along the way that are part of the local community. Ask them, and observe how they do things when it comes to booking shows. Having someone to vouch for you helps a ton with booking local.

**How to book your own show**
If you want to get a show, *then make a show*. Shopping a demo CD to venues won’t cut it anymore, so skip it. Contact venues that have a reasonable rental fee. (Usually between $0-$300 depending on capacity and policy). When starting out, slow nights at venues are your best bet. Venues are always looking to fill seats, so booking gigs on these nights can be easier than on weekends.

**How to get on a bill**
Remember your promoter friend? This is where they come in. Get an opening slot. Bigger artists always need openers. It’s a great time to get in the trenches and do some work with building a following. They don’t have to be local artists either.

Touring artists need opening acts as well. Be aware of who is coming through and where they are playing. Get on a local promoter’s radar. Or if you are feeling saucy, cold email your favorite artist. Include a personalized message and attach your EPK. It might not always work, but you can’t win the lottery if you don’t buy a ticket.

**Book a DIY tour**
I’m not talking about flying all over the world and trashing hotel rooms. This is the type of tour that happens tank-of-gas to tank-of-gas. It doesn’t even need to be big or long. Just three local cities. This will expand your reach and create some nice local buzz. *Make sure you return the favor to artists you play with. It’s a network you want to be a part of.* To find venues that will fit your sound, check to see where other artists have been playing in cities around yours.

**Merch**
Merch is an overlooked way to make money off your music. Think of it this way: You make 100 shirts for $6 each. Then you sell 10 shirts per show for $15 each. That’s $90 of pure profit every show. Perfect for gassing up the van to get to the next city, or buying that new Mic you need for your album. And why stop at just shows? Use your website to offer merch year round using a site like Big Cartel. Even Bandcamp has the option to sell merch. *Bottom line is: Merch is a cheap and versatile way to make money off your music.*
Getting any project off the ground will always take a bit of cash. Here’s some great ways to leverage your musical prowess to make a bit of dough on the side.
Licensing refers to the rights you have as the composer of your songs. Every time your song is publicly played or preformed you are entitled to royalties. Large organizations handle the collection and distribution of royalties. The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) is the largest US organization. No matter where you are it’s good to register your music with the copyright collective in your area.

Obviously you won’t be raking in the cash right off the bat, but when your project takes off down the road they’re good people to have in your corner.

**Get Sync Deals**

Syncs, sometimes called placements, means music in other media. Think TV shows, commercials, movies or anywhere else that needs music. These placements are normally handled by someone called a Music Supervisor and they are typically employed by most production companies. The best way to get involved in this world is to educate yourself about the bigger production companies near you and get in contact about syncing.

There are also pay services like CDBaby that offer placement services for a small fee. One small placement can lead to tons of cash flow, especially if you’re unsigned. Get yourself a piece of the sync pie.

**Use Aggregators**

Streaming services are the future of music. Sites like Spotify, Apple Music and Tidal are the leaders in music streaming. Getting your music onto all of them is a great way to make some money off of streams.

Aggregators are bundling services that place your music onto multiple streaming services at once. For a small fee, aggregators like CDBaby and Tunecore get your music on streaming platforms right away.

But remember, the number of streams you get are dependent on your own promotion. Aggregators will get your music out there, but promoting it is up to you.

The payouts from streaming are significantly lower than other means of selling your music (Bandcamp, physical album sales, gigging). But they’re great for exposure and accessibility to potential fans.
Budget your Promotion Time
Self promotion is vital. That’s clear. It’s easier than ever to get your project off the ground—and do it on your own. But as you embark on boosting your band or project it’s important to keep in mind that you need something good to promote first.

Budget the time you spend on promotion. Set aside time to be creative and make new work. Don’t neglect making new music to create the perfect Facebook page. The number one promotional tool you should be using is Good Music.

Create as much as you can and the best that you can. Hone your craft. With a keen sense of self-promotion you’ll be able to get it out into the world properly when you do create that perfect sound.