10 EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO GET YOUR MUSIC NOTICED

PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR INDEPENDENT MUSICIANS

2ND EDITION

by Randy Chertkow and Jason Feehan
In music business schools, they used to give assignments that went like this: “Assume you have one million dollars. Come up with a marketing plan to promote a band.” Here’s a more realistic assignment: “Pick any band you find on the web. You have zero dollars. Now go promote them.”

Although most bands would like to have a budget that would allow them to promote their latest album across the Internet, on TV and radio, and even on billboards, they more likely have just enough to print up posters for the next gig. And yet, indie musicians can get the kind of attention that can build a real fan base and help make a career in music with the right songs and the right promotional approach.

Here are 10 effective strategies to get you and your music noticed. The good news is they’re easy on the wallet and can be acted on today. All they take is a bit of time and some thought about how to get your music directly in front of the people who are likely to be your new fans.

You have a few things to figure out before you get started, though: Who is the audience for your music? What are their ages? Where do they hang out? What do they do? What are their interests?

The better you know your target audience, the easier these strategies are to implement, and the greater the return on your planning. Once you know your audience, dig in.

10 EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

1. The Standing-Out Strategy
2. The Piggybacking Strategy
3. The Agent Strategy
4. The Multitasking Strategy
5. The Continual Release Strategy
6. The Street Team Strategy
7. The Engage Your Audience Strategy
8. The Keep On Truckin’ Strategy
9. The Alternative Gig Strategy
10. The Stay-Tuned Strategy
1. **The Standing-Out Strategy**

The first thing that jumps to mind for most musicians when they think music promotion is getting their album reviewed by a music blog or publication and get played on the radio.

You don’t have to start there. Publications and media that cater solely to music are probably the hardest places to get your music noticed. Plus, they won’t write about you or play your music if they don’t find something interesting when they do an Internet search on your name – which is the first thing they’ll do.

The competition for attention in music publications and sites is overwhelming. For instance, National Public Radio’s “All Songs Considered” receives hundreds of CDs a week. Out of that, only eight get featured – and those are sandwiched in between other songs, and played just once. The same is true with music reviews. Although a review is good for getting quotes for your press kit, it probably won’t get you many new fans on its own, since it’s just one music review in a pile of music reviews.

Instead of focusing on music publications and media, think in terms of audiences. Put your music where it will stand out from the crowd. Consider one of the biggest sellers in the early days of CD Baby: an album about sailing. Instead of following the crowd and sending the album to a music magazine, the band cleverly sent their album to a magazine about sailing.

The magazine, which wasn’t accustomed to receiving music, reviewed the CD. The band’s CD didn’t have to compete against stacks and stacks of others to get noticed, and because the magazine had a large audience and the CD got a great review, sales shot through the roof.

The great thing about The Standing-Out Strategy is there is room for everyone. While your music has a style or genre, just targeting the people who like that kind of music represents only one, highly-competitive channel for your music. By putting your music where there usually isn’t any, you can get noticed.

2. **The Piggybacking Strategy**

The quickest way to get the word out is to piggyback on something that people already know about. One of the best-known forms of piggybacking is listing the bands you “sound like” on your website and social profiles. This gives new listeners a clue as to what to expect by drawing on what they already know. Of course, another popular piggybacking tactic is to cover a well-known song. Often, these covers become your initial best-sellers, but they also act as a gateway. If listeners like your version of a song they know, they’re more likely to check out your original material.

But piggybacking on other bands or cover songs isn’t the only way to use this tactic. You can piggyback on anything that already has an audience.

For example, our band, Beatnik Turtle, wrote a song called “Star Wars (A Movie Like No Other)” It summarized the entire original Star Wars trilogy in a single song. Around the same time, StarWars.com released a video
mashup tool, so we decided to make a video for the song. The video ended up getting played over 15,000 times thanks to the active community at that site. That popularity led to it getting picked up by Atom.com (now Comedy Central: Short-Form) which in turn led to it being aired on SpikeTV to celebrate the 32nd anniversary of Star Wars.

Current events and popular culture provide opportunities for piggybacking as well. When a topic is hot, a large number of people will be searching for information about it. For instance, when the Monty Python musical, Spamalot, debuted, The Brobdingnagian Bards, a Celtic Renaissance musical duo, posted a blog entry about Spamalot and how they covered one of Monty Python’s songs. The post got a ton of hits from people searching the new musical, got them noticed by new fans, and resulted in sales.

But piggybacking isn’t always about how to get publicity. It can be for a good cause as well. Grant Baciocco of Throwing Toasters put together two compilation charity albums called Laughter Is a Powerful Weapon, with music donated by himself and many other well-known comedy artists to charitable causes. This compilation not only raised money for charities but also helped cross-promote the participating musicians’ fans to one another.

3 The Agent Strategy

Most bands start out promoting and representing themselves because they start out small. But it’s human nature to take an act more seriously when someone else promotes on its behalf. Even if you’re just starting out, find someone to represent you and you might just have more successes. It doesn’t have to be a professional – it can be a capable friend or family member.

Having an agent is also useful during negotiations because he/she can be as tough as you want them to be. If you negotiate for yourself and give the other side a particularly hard time, they might start to dislike you and your act, rather than your agent.

4 The Multitasking Strategy

Successful musicians we’ve interviewed don’t just rely on gigs, music sales, and streaming; they do many other projects such as video channels, music collaboration projects, and more. Not only can these projects produce revenue, they provide a larger spread of income. Plus, each of these projects provides more entertainment for fans and can feed into the promotion of one another. This also gives potential fans more places to discover you and follow your work, drawing them into your world.

5 The Continual Release Strategy

Today’s fans are hungry for fresh entertainment and are glued to their phones and devices throughout the day. Your music, videos, photos, and social media updates satisfies their need for new content and entices them to subscribe to your channels to stay up-to-date. Instead of disappearing into your studio for months at a time, try spreading your releases out, mixing singles, remixes, EPs, and full-length CDs with alternate tracks, videos, new merch, live shows, and live streams. If you plan it right, you’ll have a steady stream of things to promote. And once a new fan finds your work, they’ll have a lot to discover and will want to subscribe to see what you come out with next.
6 THE STREET TEAM STRATEGY

Today’s artists are more connected with their fans than ever. And in these days of social networks, word of mouth is many times more powerful than it’s ever been. Every fan you have is connected to many more people, and sometimes, all you have to do is ask in order to get their help in spreading the word.

In the past, a street team was all about putting fliers in coffee shops and around town. Today, with the web, they can distribute your music to new fans, get the word out about your shows through their social networks, and even get people to sign up for your mailing list or subscribe to your YouTube channel.

The key to a successful street team is to be explicit in asking what it is you want them to do. Then, be sure to give them the tools they need to be successful. And of course, reward them for their help.

7 THE ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE STRATEGY

No marketing plan today can skip social networking as a method to build a fan base. Think about it: each of your fans has hundreds of followers on Facebook and Twitter. If they start talking about your shows or your music, your fan base will grow. But you need to be active online and give them a reason to talk about you.

But most musicians want to spend time making music – not constantly checking their social networks – so here’s a helpful strategy to automate your use of social networking and start bringing fans to you.

First, put out releases often, whether it’s a new remix, video, merch item, or event. Second, use a social media dashboard and syndication tool like Hootsuite.com, so whenever you post a photo, video, or blog entry, your update will automatically post everywhere you have a presence.

Next, use a tool like Socialoomph.com to coordinate and automate your social media accounts and Google Alerts to let you know when your band, albums, or website are talked about anywhere on the web. If you do this right, you will only need to post content once, and it will get sent to all of your web presences; and any responses from fans will come right back to your email. You will be almost psychic about staying on top of every mention and can respond and engage with fans with minimal effort.

Then, just remember to snap pictures or video with your phone when you’re backstage, or at the studio, and share little pieces of your musical life. Give your fans reasons to talk about you, and your fan base can grow out of what you do naturally as a musician while you spend your time on your music, rather than social networking.

8 THE KEEP ON TRUCKIN’ STRATEGY

It’s easy to forget that playing live does more than just provide income and drive album sales. If you use it right, it’s also one of the best ways to build buzz, get publicity, and grow your fan base. In fact, when asked how they find out about new bands, music journalists Jim DeRogatis (Chicago Sun-Times, co-host of NPR’s Sound Opinions) and Todd Martens (Billboard magazine, The Los Angeles Times) gave the same answer: live shows. This shouldn’t be a surprise: music writers pay attention to bands playing in the larger venues in town because the bigger stages don’t take chances on bands without a following. It’s the most reliable way to filter through the huge number of new artists that appear every year.
The good news is that even if you’re not playing the larger venues yet, you can get there. If you are just starting out playing live, designate a single person to be a booker, and start with small venues and open mics. Then work your way up to the larger venues as your draw increases. If you haven’t yet, it’s time to put together formal marketing materials aimed at gigs. Create a one-page bio (aimed at your live music experience), band photo, music samples (especially live samples), live video, and a show history to give an idea of your experience.

In the past, the strategy for touring went like this: start in your hometown, build a local following, and then tour in concentric circles from your base. But today, with the Internet, you instantly have a global audience. If you use your web and social presence effectively, you’ll create fans in places outside your hometown. One new strategy for playing live is to find where your fans are and then determine if it’s cost-effective to go to them. Tools like Tweepsmap.com can map out where your Twitter followers are located, and free services like Eventful.com allow your fans to request you to play in their area.

But once you are touring and playing live shows, don’t forget the PR angle to playing live. To get the most PR out of your shows, put journalists and bloggers on your guest list, and invite them to come see your band. Also, remember that any time you tour, you create PR opportunities in every town you play in. For example, reach out to local radio (especially college radio), newspapers, and blogs when you tour, as that gives them a reason to write about you. If your tour is planned out ahead of time, you can reach out to them in advance to coordinate the campaigns, which gives them a much better chance of fitting your story in when you arrive in their town.

And once you get going, remember that each show is a potential press release, and each article written about your band can be sent to other journalists. After a few forwarded articles, journalists who ignored you before might start wondering what they’re missing and take advantage of the guest list spot you offered them.

9 THE ALTERNATIVE GIG STRATEGY

Gigs aren’t limited to just playing the usual music venues. Keep your eyes open for other places to play to help build your fan base and expose your music to new audiences.

For instance, the house concert movement involves people hosting live music shows in their homes. This is more than a gig opportunity, it’s a way to get fans directly involved with promoting your music. To explore this idea, reach out to your fans to see who might be interested in hosting a show, or try sites like HouseConcerts and Concerts In Your Home.

If you decide to do a house concert, work out sound amplification and set-up expectations ahead of time. Also, ask for a minimum payment or play for a flat fee: your take shouldn’t depend on your host’s ability to bring in an audience. Some musicians even tour by planning house concerts on the way up and the way back from major shows. This provides extra income, can provide places to crash for a night, and gives you a chance to promote your music in a very personal way.

Another example of an alternative gig is to perform live online. Once you put your music on the web, the next step is to try to gain a worldwide fan base. Many will want to see you live, even if you can’t tour where they live. The best part about these shows is they can be easily shared on social media, which gives your fans a reason to talk about you. Also, each online show can be recorded, giving you new material to use to promote in the future.

To put on a show online, try broadcasting your live show via Facebook Live or Instagram Live or through a streaming service like UStream or LiveStream. As long as you have a webcam or camera-enabled smartphone
or tablet, all you need to do is log on, point, and shoot. Treat these like any other gig: put them on your show calendar, and promote them to your fans so they know to tune in.

For more intimate shows, you can also use group video calling services like Skype or Google Hangouts since these services usually limit the number of viewers who can join in. Small online concerts like these are not only a way to mimic the intimacy of a house concert, they’re also a great way to reward your die-hard fans, supporters, crowdfunding patrons, and street team. Plus, they’re especially great at helping you connect with your fans – no matter where in the world they live.

10 THE STAY-TUNED STRATEGY

Before radio DJs head into the commercials, they announce what they’re going to play after the break. This keeps people tuned in during the break. You can adopt the same technique. Always talk about your next project when you talk about your band, whether you’re talking to the press, other musicians, or your fans (via Twitter, Facebook, or your blog).

Here’s why:
• Your fans will keep tabs on you until that next project is released.
• The press might ask questions about your upcoming projects and write future stories.
• It gets people involved: if you don’t announce what you have planned, you might miss out on a fan who can help.
• It keeps your own band members motivated and working toward the same goals.

There are no rules to promotion in the music business, so experiment with different ideas to see what works best for you and your music. When you find something that works, keep it up. The key thing to remember – and the thing that many musicians forget – is that a lot of what you do naturally as a musician can be used to help promote your work, grow your fan base, attract publicity, and get your music noticed.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Randy Chertkow
Randy Chertkow is an Information Technology specialist with a Bachelor’s in Business Administration in Information Systems and a Master’s of Science in Computer Science: Data Communications with a secondary concentration in Artificial Intelligence. Randy has played music all his life, including jazz, rock, and classical music. His instruments include baritone, tenor, alto, and soprano saxophones; flute; Bb and bass clarinet; guitar; bass; and anything else he can get his hands on. He writes, records, and performs with Beatnik Turtle as well as performing with theater companies around Chicago.

Jason Feehan
Jason Feehan is a practicing corporate attorney who works for a multinational executive search firm. He has a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and Psychology and a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree. He plays guitar, keyboards, sings, records, engineers, and produces. He founded Beatnik Turtle in 1997, growing it from a four-piece band into an eight-piece rock machine with a full horn section and a recording studio all its own. He is a prolific songwriter who has written close to 1,000 songs, three of which are actually not too bad.
Beatnik Turtle
The authors’ band, Beatnik Turtle, is a horn-powered pop-rock group based in Chicago. They have recorded 18 albums; released over 450 songs; written music for TV shows, commercials, films, podcasts, and theatre (including Chicago's Second City); and have licensed music to Disney/ABC Family.

(St. Martin’s Press; 390 pages)
The Indie Band Survival Guide: The Complete Manual For The Do-It-Yourself Musician is the ultimate resource for musicians looking to record, distribute, market, and sell their music. Musicians Chertkow and Feehan lay out practical steps to get your music heard, noticed, and sold — and win fans worldwide.

IndieGuide.com
IndieGuide.com is a free and open resource, based on the book, that shares practical information, gear, sites, and resources that are available to musicians – growing and changing as much as the new indie music environment does. Think Wikipedia, edited by musicians, with ratings and comments just like Amazon. Add to that an automated link checker to make sure you don’t waste time on resources and information that has disappeared. And since it’s open, it grows and adapts as often as the new indie environment does. Join up, keep track of and share your gear collections, and help your fellow indie musicians all at one site.

Making Money with Music
In today’s tech-driven world, it’s easier than ever to record, distribute, and market your own music – but what about actually making money? During this 15-hour online course, Chertkow and Feehan take you step-by-step through their proven techniques for establishing steady revenue streams in the music business. Drawing on their combined experience of over 32 years in the industry, you’ll learn how to land your music on popular radio stations, sell your albums in stores, make the most of digital distribution, and license your music for commercials and movie and TV soundtracks. You will learn how to maximize the money you make from your music and minimize the money you spend promoting it.