Music Industry How To

presents:

The Independent Musician's Survival Guide

By Shaun Letang
The Independent Musician's Survival Guide

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A special thank you to everyone who has contributed to this guide. Thanks to Christine Infanger and Chris Rockett for chipping in with additional advice, as well as all the Music Industry How To members who chipped in with snippets of advice which you'll see throughout this book.

I truly hope you find this book useful, and that it helps guide your music career in the right direction. All the best.

Shaun Letang
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Introduction

“A musician is successful when they reach any goal they have set for themselves - big or small!”

*Ann Marie Landry*

Welcome to the Independent Musician's Survival Guide, the number one resource for the modern day independent musician. In this guide you will learn what is needed to survive in the music industry, and how to approach it for the best chance of success.

My name is Shaun Letang. For those that don't know, I'm the owner of [Music Industry How To](#), a website full of guides and resources aimed at helping musicians and music industry figures alike. Through this website (and through my other music websites, more details on those later), I do everything I can to make the life of the independent musician simpler – whether this is in the form of one of the many guides I've written, whether they need help with creating a band or rap name with my band and rap name generators, or whether they need to find a music industry job on my job board. This website provides all of those things and more.

Despite all of this, I wanted to create this separate Survival Guide for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, I wanted to reach a new audience. While through my websites I reach hundreds or thousands of musicians and music industry figures per day, I know there are a lot more people who could do with the advice I give. I hope this book helps achieve that and gives more musicians the knowledge they need to start doing more with their music.

Secondly, I wanted to give a specific type of advice, all located in one place. This is the type of advice I feel could make or break a person's music career, as in without it, your chances of success are a lot lower then they could be.

You see, during my years as a music business adviser, I've seen a lot of talented musicians. I've seen singers that can hit notes many of the mainstream artists can't, rappers with more witty wordplay then a series of "Family Guy," and guitarists who both create and play some of the most emotional pieces I've heard in a while. Despite this, however, there's been a common theme I've seen regardless of many musician's talent level:

*Not knowing how to navigate the music industry.*

The thing is, many of us start doing music for the fun of it. It's a art form that is started through a passion rather then a necessity, and therefore most of us go in without a proper business plan of any sort. This leads to unrealistic goal setting when you do start aiming to push your music, which in turn can lead to frustration and ending your dream prematurely.

With the correct guidance, though, it doesn't have to be like that.

In this guide, I aim to share with you some of my best tips to getting your music career on the right track. **I will be doing this in the form of conversation and touch on some key areas I think all independent musicians need to think about in order to do well.** I won't be talking about how to market your music (although this is vitally important as we'll look at below), and I won't be
showing you how to play any musical instruments. What I will be showing you, however, are a few things:

- **What to Expect from Your Music Career.**
  As I mentioned, a lot of people go into the music business with unrealistic goals and aims. While it's not a bad thing to aim high, it's also important to realize what level of success you could realistically reach in terms of the money that's out there and how the market is going. I will tell you now that there IS money to be made from music, so don't get all demotivated or anything. Having said that, many independent musicians fail to get to that stage. Later we'll look at why this is true and look at what you need to do to overcome these common pitfalls.

- **Where You Should Be Focusing Your Efforts.**
  There are two ways to progress in your music career: The fast way, and the slow way. Most musicians do things that will make them progress the slow way, and focus their efforts in the completely wrong places. In this guide I will show you where your efforts should be focused, so you can get to where you want to be sooner rather than later.

- **How You Should Approach Your Music Career.**
  These days, being a talented musician isn't enough to do well in the music business. I'm sure you know a lot of talented musicians that aren't getting anywhere. Or furthermore, maybe you're that talented musician that still isn't getting the recognition you feel you deserve. Due to the levels of competition that are currently out there, there are a lot of other factors you need to work on in order to be successful. In this guide we will show you what those factors are and give you tips on building yourself up in all of these necessary areas.

- **Why Many Musicians Fail, And What You Can Do to Avoid the Same Fate.**
  This title pretty much speak for itself. I don't want you to go down the path of failure like many have unintentionally done before, so I will be informing you on what pitfalls you should be avoiding during the independent stage of your journey.

- **The Mentality Needed to Succeed in the Music Business.**
  Your mentality as a musician plays a big part in how far your take your music career. I've seen many talented people fall short of where they could be due to laziness, or reacting to a situation in the wrong way. The thing is, we're not generally taught how to handle things in the music business. Did you have lessons at school telling you what is and isn't acceptable in the music industry? Has anyone ever told you some of the things you can do to speed up your music career a lot quicker? No, we're generally not taught these things, and most of us learn them through trial and error. In this book, though, I aim to give you a big head start in terms of knowing how to handle things. I will help give you the correct mentality needed for success, a mentality that is free of laziness and is 100% professional. As long as you take what you learn on board and put it into practice, you will be ahead of the majority of musicians in terms of knowing what you should be doing. You will also be a lot more positive and able to tackle the journey ahead of you.

- **Where to Invest in Your Music Career, and Where You Can Save Money.**
  Regardless of what anyone says or thinks, if you want to do well, at some stage you will need to invest in your music career. This could be in terms of studio costs, buying
equipment, paying to travel to gigs, paying for musical education, or for any of the other things that cost money but could help take your music to the next level.

Now I know not everyone has a load of money to spend, and sometimes it's hard to get the funds together to invest in your music career. It's because of this, that I'm going to share with you some of the best places you can cut costs **without** sacrificing the final quality of your music. I will show you where you should be spending (when you've got the money of course), where you can get usually expensive things for FREE, and letting you know the places it's not really possible for you to cut costs. Knowing this is just as important as knowing where you can save money, as cutting too many corners will give you a shoddy sounding music product. Put together a poor musical package, and no one will want to listen to you ever again.

- **And Much More.**
  You will have to read on to see all of the cool things you will learn in this book. :)

Everything you read in this guide will help you navigate the music industry in a way that will give you the best chance of success. While some of the things I mention may sound obvious to you, I can almost guarantee you will pick up a load of good tips that you don't currently implement. After all, knowing something should be done and actually doing it are two completely different things. This could be, and often is, the difference between failure and success.

This guide will serve as a good reference to what you should be doing as an independent musician, and should be referred to any time you need a lift or want to be reminded of what you should be doing. Keep it in reach at all times, and never let go. :)

But anyway, I think it's time we get into it. The music business can be a brutal one, but with the help of this survival guide, you have the tools needed to make a success of your music career. Good luck.

Shaun Letang
Music Industry How To

**The Music BUSINESS**

OK, so I think it's important to mention this from the beginning. As you've read this far into the guide, my guess is that you want to do something with your music. You may still be playing your music in your bedroom, or you may already be past that stage and have played for other people at some point. Either way, you want to make something out of your music career.

This could either be in terms of making money from it, or in terms of playing to much bigger crowds and getting yourself known. Recognition or money; whatever your final goal, there is one thing you will need to remember:

*The music business is a BUSINESS!!*

Hence why it has the word "business" in it.

While you may have started off making music for the love of it, if you want to take things to the next level and do more then just play to your friends and family, you need to realize this important but often overlooked fact.
Does that mean you can't enjoy making music any more? Of course not, you never want to make it so you lose your passion for the music industry! If you don't enjoy making music but carry on being a musician, this is nothing but a chore, and for most people won't be worth pursuing any more.

Having said that, though, if you want to reach new audiences or you want to start making an income from your audio, you will need to do more then just play songs to your teddy bears.

But what exactly does success in the music business require from you? Well, it could involve:

- Promoting Your Music.
- Interacting with Fans on a Personal Level.
- Finding Gigs for You to Perform At.
- Setting Up Websites and Other Promotional Platforms.
- Networking and Building Links.
- And Much More.

Now I know that some of you may not want to do more then write songs and perform your music. You may not know how to effectively promote yourself, and you may not want to learn. If that's the case, know that most likely you won't ever form any type of music "career." You'll simply be a musician – with no real audience.

If you're making music for yourself and don't really care about recognition or a financial reward, there is nothing wrong with this. Keep doing what you're doing and building on your musical talent for your own personal reasons. If, however, you do want either of those two things, this is of course a problem.

So what do you do if you want to take your music out of the bedroom but aren't good at working on the business side of things? Well, you have a few options:

- **Learn It.**
  Probably the best thing you could do is learn how to handle the business side of the music industry. After all, this "barrier" to doing well is not going to go away. There's no way around it; if you want to get your music out there, you are going to need to know how to market yourself.
  While there are ways around learning the business side of things yourself (as we'll look at in a minute), some of these other methods have some serious pitfalls.
  Regardless of whether or not you always plan to be promoting your own music, it's important that all musicians know the way the music industry works, and can do what they need to do without relying excessively on other people.

- **Get a Record Label to Handle This Side of Things for You.**
  The next option is to let a record label handle the business side of things for you. This is what most musicians used to do, although with the rise of the internet and a changing music scene, things have changed a lot.
Regardless of whether or not you want to sign to a record label, it's still important for you learn how to navigate the music business yourself. We'll look at why this is in the below "Do You Need A Record Deal To Do Well? " section.

- **Get Friends or Other People to Help.**
  If you need help but aren't at the stage where a record label will come and sign you up, you can always try to get other people to help you out. This could be friends of yours that you already know, professionals you hire for a fee, or people you find by other means that want to help your music do well.
  While this can be helpful, it isn't a substitute for you personally knowing what needs to be done to progress your music career. At the end of the day you need to know what direction you want to head in, and how you can go about getting there. If you can't clearly direct people in terms of the steps needed to hit certain targets, people will usually end up going in different directions. They may start doing things you don't want to be done, or working on things that won't really help you in the long run.
  If, however, you know exactly what needs to be done and what results you want to achieve, you will be able to more easily communicate your ideas, and essentially build a stronger team around you.

So let's say you've decided to take things into your own hands and learn the business of music. How do you go about learning the music business? Well, there are two options.

First of all, you can learn everything yourself through trial and error. While this method doesn't always work (a lot of people get stuck doing things they think are benefiting them, but don't really help them anywhere near as much as doing something else would), if you're in the music industry for long enough, you will naturally pick up on certain things. You will realize some of the things that do and don't work, and it's possible to make a success of yourself using this method.

The thing with this, though, is it can be a time-consuming process, and not ideal considering you'd want to get your career moving sooner rather than later. This slow moving nature can lead to demotivation, putting in less effort, and eventually quitting. On top of that, you won't always learn enough to get you where you want to be.

The second option is to learn from people who have been through it all before, and who already know exactly what works and doesn't work.

Learning from other people's mistakes and successes is one of the best ways we as humans learn. This doesn't just apply to the music industry, but in anything we do. Our parents and the people around us teach us a lot about ourselves as we grow up. We are the people they've made us to be, and we've learned from the things we've seen them do.

When it comes to learning the music business, this is the same. There are courses like [the IMA Music Business Academy](https://www.imamusicbusinessacademy.com/) (which I put together and which has already helped hundreds of independent musicians move things forward faster) that can give you the music business knowledge you need. This saves a load of time over learning things through trial and error, as you'll have all the required knowledge at your fingertips.

We'll talk more about music marketing a bit later in this book. For now though, just remember that you will need to do more then just play music if you want to succeed in the music business.
Do You Need a Record Deal to Do Well?

Due to what I do, I'm always speaking to independent musicians. While a good percentage of them are happy remaining independent, there are also a lot that eventually want to go on and sign a record deal.

To many, obtaining a record deal is like a sign that they've "made it," that they are officially a talented musician, and that everything will be clear sailing from now on. In reality, however, a record deal doesn't really mean this anymore.

You see, it's possible to be as successful as an independent musician as it is if you were signed. Yes, this depends on what you mean by success, but if you're talking about financially, then this is definitely possible.

When you're signed to a record label, there are a lot more expenses involved. A lot more people will be working on your project, and therefore a lot more people will need to get paid. Record labels tend to use the "best" recording studios and music video makers, which not surprisingly are also usually the most expensive.

While all of these things might seem exciting while the label is splashing out cash on you, things will seem less exciting when you're not getting paid any additional royalties while the record label recoups what they spent on you. That's right:

*Anything that is spent on you during your record deal, you have to pay back through your record sales!*

And with the fact that a lot of deals for independent musicians are now 360 record deals, record labels will deduct this money from your show fees, download sales, merchandise sales, royalties, and in any other area where you're making money. This means you will be working for a long time without any additional money other then your advance. Hopefully you haven't spent it all already...

Now don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with getting a good record deal. If you get a good label behind you that understands your music and will do what is necessary to ensure you have a profitable career, this is a good position to be in. That said, getting this kind of deal isn't always achievable. As I like to say:

*It's a lot easier to get a record deal then it is to get a GOOD record deal.*

My point is this. In the same way there are risks and rewards in being an independent musician, there are also risks and rewards when signing to a record label. The difference, though, is that when you're independent, you have more control over the direction your music career takes. You get to
choose which songs you release, which gigs you play at, and what you do and don't do.

While it's sometimes good to have someone else's opinion and direction, it's also just as good to have the freedom of choice. Sometimes a record label may want you to make a type of song you're not comfortable with, but you'll have to do it due to your contract. This isn't the case when you are an independent musician.

But what about your reach? Can you get known as much when you haven't got a record deal? Well, that all depends. While some labels do have connections with media outlets such as radio stations and TV channels, it is still possible to get out there to a decent level yourself. You may not break certain mainstream outlets, but there are still plenty of platforms where you can get your music heard and seen.

The important thing to remember is this:

You do NOT need a record label to do well in your music career. You can still make money even if you're not signed, and you can still get yourself widely known.

In fact, I'd go as far as to say you shouldn't focus on signing a record deal at all! Let me explain...

**Why Signing a Record Deal Shouldn't Be Your Main Aim**

“A successful musician is one who knows what they really want from their endeavors, is able to find the resources that will expedite their progress, and is willing to do the work it takes to provide a living or better.”

Doug Garvey, Geiman Brother Records.

Before I go any further, I want to make one thing clear: There is nothing wrong with signing a record deal. Record labels play an important role in the music industry and have helped many musicians reach a lot further than they would have by themselves. Having said that, getting a record deal isn't something you should intentionally work towards.

Labels are no longer simply hearing talented people and going on to sign them. While it used to be the case you could send a label a demo and you could be signed without doing much more then that, this is far from the case now. Yes it can still happen, but the chances are extremely miniscule. And I mean **EXTREMELY** miniscule.

Due to the way the music industry currently is, record labels are being a lot more selective about who they sign. No longer will you get signed simply because you have a good voice and good look; label bosses are looking for a lot more then just your singing or rapping ability. If you want to get signed to a record label (even though that shouldn't be your aim at this stage), there are a few things you first need to have in place:

**An Established and Responsive Fan Base**

Before a record label thinks about signing you, they will often want to see that you have an already
established fan base that you've built up yourself. The music industry is a lot about personality, and record labels often want their musicians to have it in bucket loads.

Think about some of the musicians that you personally like; what is it that drew you into liking them in the first place? Chances are you like some of these musicians as a person (or what you've seen of them as a person), or you can relate to them in some way. Maybe they have a similar dress sense to you, or maybe they are living the lifestyle that you want. They probably sing about things that you have an interest in, or represent something you aspire to be.

While having a good personality can help increase your fan base if people take to you, it's not always easy to determine who people are going to take to next. Sometimes musicians find it hard to get their personality across to the fans. They either don't show enough of it, or they projecting it too much and give off the impression of "trying too hard."

If you get things right, however, and manage to build up a decent sized fan base on the back of your music and personality, this is a good sign to record labels. It shows them that you are a likeable character (at least in your genre) and that people take to you well.

As a musician's fan base is all important, having numbers on your side puts you in a good position, and makes you attractive to any potential labels. Say for example you release a new music video and want it shared. Having a responsive fan base you can share this video with is the perfect way to get a load of views in a short space of time. It'll also increase the likelihood that your video will go viral.

So how can record labels tell if you've got a big and responsive fan base?

First of all, they can look at the obvious numbers such as your social networking follower count. They'll also look at how interactive these followers are with your page to see if these numbers have been increased artificially but have no real value.

If you are already in potential talks with the record label, they may ask to see your mailing list subscriber numbers and statistics, as well as your website stats to confirm any data you may have told them about your fan base size.

Lastly, they may run a trial period with you, and attend some of your shows (they may have done that already when they were scouting you out). If they see you can bring in a decent amount of fans, this will be a good sign to them.

**The Ability to Draw In Crowds and Make Sales**

With the sale of physical CDs slowing down, performing live gigs has been one of the main ways musicians have continued to earn from their music career. It's because of this, that the focus on touring has become a lot more important to this generation of musicians.

If you want to have a good chance of getting a record deal, not only will you be able to put on a good performance, but you also need to be able to draw in crowds. What I mean by that, is that you will have a loyal group of fans that will follow you to your shows, and pay to see you perform.

Now of course, not every fan is going to be able to come to every one of your shows. There will be
distance barriers in place (you can't expect all your fans in the US to come to your shows in the UK), and people won't want to come to every single show you do if you're performing every week. That said, if you have a pool of different fans that are spread out all over the place, it's possible to get some of your fans down to some of the events in the bigger cities. If you can show you can do this, record labels are going to see dollar signs.

At a bare minimum, you will need to be able to show you can get a decent sized crowd down to one of your local home town shows before labels will become interested.

The Ability to Perform Live

As well as being able to draw in crowds, a lot of labels will often look for an artist or band to be able to perform well live. After all, if you get a load of people down to your show but your performance is really poor, how many of your crowd do you think will come and see you perform again? Not very many, if any at all.

While it's still possible to get signed if you aren't the greatest performer in the world, being able to perform will be more attractive to these labels. Record labels do sometimes train their signings to be better performers, but some labels simply won't put the effort into doing this. Either you can perform or you can't.

The Ability to Record Good Songs

Despite all the talk about declining CD sales, having your own recorded songs is still important. Not only will these be used for a number of different things such as radio play and digital downloads, but you can still make money from CD sales. You can sell them at your live shows along with any merchandise you have (one of the best ways these days), or you can sell them in stores or online like you usually would. Because of this, it's important that you are a good recording artist.

Just because you can perform live, it doesn't mean you can record a good vocal in the studio. This is the same the other way around; being able to record a good vocal doesn't mean your voice will sound good when you perform live.

Both of these things are skills in their own right, and both should be practiced so you are a good all around vocalist. If you can record a good song in the studio, that's another skill you have that will help tempt a record deal from a label.

So...

Don't have all of these things in place yet? Then most likely any record label you do approach won't give you any type of deal. Some may humor you for a while and say they like your music (which they may genuinely do), but that won't help you get a record deal or have them helping you out in any real way. So it's up to you to roll your sleeves up and work on the above mentioned points.

All of these things take time to achieve. To get all of these things in place, you will need to be responsible for making them happen. This is a big task. With all the things you will need to work on, a record deal should be the last thing on your mind.

Long hours will need to be put in to establish useful music business links, to create good quality
songs, and to get your fan base in place. You will find, though, that if you manage to get a good sized fan base and you can draw in crowds, you will be able to make money from your music career without the help of a record label.

You will start making money from CD sales, royalties, getting paid to perform live, merchandise, possibly publishing deals, and any other routes you decide to go down.

Once you are in this position, it's more likely that a record label will come to you. They can see you're making money (or have a proven potential to make money), and will want to get on board and make money too.

At this point, they will approach you.

You won't need to chase them up and call them for the 10th time after they've been avoiding your last 9 calls because they are "busy"; they will be the ones hounding you to get a piece of your action. This is why you don't need to focus on getting a record deal right now, even if you do want to get one eventually.

If you ever get to this stage, it's down to you what you decide to do. I'm not going to advise you on whether or not you should sign to a record label if you get that opportunity in the future, as for now you simply need to focus on you. This is a book for independent musicians, and I am going to help you succeed as an independent artist. As an independent, you need to realize that a label isn't going to help you at this stage, and accept that you need to build your fan base, draw in crowds, and make good songs all by yourself.

Don't promote your music or try and increase your fan base just so a record label will eventually take notice of you. Do it because you want to build up your music career for YOU.

It's possible for you to put yourself in a position to earn a full time or part time living from your music career. If this is one of your aims, don't count on anyone else to make that happen for you.

How Much Money Should You Aim to Make from Music? And How Much CAN You Make?

Ok, so on to the big question of money. How much can you expect to make from your music career?

This is a subject that everyone seems to have an opinion on. If you ask a relatively new musician that hasn't already tried their hand marketing in the music business, they will tell you that they aim to become rich from their music – that it's possible to make a bucket load of cash, and that they're going to achieve that. If on the other hand you ask someone who's tried to make a professional career out of their music for years, some of them will tell you it's impossible to make money from music and that it should only be done as a hobby.

Ask a big musician signed to a record label, and they'll tell you that you can make a lot of money if you put the work in. Ask a "successful" but not mainstream musician, and they could tell you the exact same thing.
But the truth?

**It IS possible to make a full time living from your music career!**

Now I'm not saying that everyone will achieve this or that it's as easy as simply wanting it so it will happen. A lot of work will need to be put in, and you will need to be doing the right things. You will need a load of talent; a good portion of luck wouldn't go amiss either. That said, it is possible to sometimes "make" luck.

Let me break things down for you a bit more. When it comes to making money from music, there are five levels you can reach. These levels are:

1. **Losing Money.**
   When you first start out taking your music career seriously, you will need to do a few things. You will need to get your songs made, get your promotional materials made, invest in your musical education, buy any required equipment, and the like. All of these things cost money, but are essential if you want to progress and get where you eventually want to be. This is the same in all types of business. If you want to get into buying and selling property, you first need to invest in buying a house. If you want to create your own shop, you first need to put in the money to rent the storefront and buy your stock. As a musician, once you know you want to make a career out of your talent, this is generally the first stage you will go through. You need to invest in your music career if you want it to take off, and you need to invest wisely. We'll look more at this later on.

2. **Break Even.**
   After the investing stage, you will want to start doing things to make back that money you invested in the first place. It will take a lot of work, but once you have made back the money you initially invested, you will be at the break even stage. Your new equipment and knowledge will give you the tools needed to start making your money back; now you just need to go out there and do it. When you start to make money from your music career, this is one of the best feelings ever. It's good to know your hard work is starting to pay off, and you have enough talent to earn from your music. The first time someone pays you for your talent, you will know you're on the right track. From here it's a case of rinse and repeat on a wider scale.

3. **Part Time.**
   If after you break even you continue to do the things that are working for you, you will get to this stage. You will be earning more money then you are investing (you should still carry on investing where it's needed), and you will be earning a more regular income from your music. It may not be enough to focus on music full time, but it helps with your living costs and gives you money to put back into making your career move forward even faster. This part time living wage is the level I truly believe **ALL** talented independent musicians can reach **IF** they put the work in. There are more ways to make money from your music then just selling CDs, so as long as you are willing to learn those ways and play to your strengths, it's possible to make more money then you spend on your music career.

4. **Full Time Wage Lower End.**
   A full time living. I'm sure most musicians would be happy with earning enough money from their music to not have to work at anything else on the side. After all, being a musician is part of a lifestyle choice: not having to wake up in the morning and work for someone
else, and being able to focus on your passion as a full time job. 
While you won't be rich at this stage, not having to work at anything else will seriously 
benefit your lifestyle. This level is harder to achieve then earning a part time living, but is 
still possible as an independent musician.

5. **Full Time Wage Higher End.**
At this level you have "made it." You are earning more then a comfortable living, and a 
year's music work will help you survive for years after that. You can afford more expensive 
things in life, and money isn't an issue for the short term future as long as you use it wisely. 
This level is only usually achievable if you get a **good** record deal and it works out well for 
you.

So, which of these wages should you aim for? And which are you most likely to reach? I know that 
if you're honest with yourself, you're going to want to reach stage 5, the full time higher end wage. 
We as humans all want to earn more money, no matter what we want to spend it on. We may not 
NEED this extra money and may be able to live a very happy life without it, but if someone was to 
give you a few million dollars without you having to do anything in return (no catch), I'm sure there 
would be very few people who would turn that offer down.

Unfortunately, though, earning a higher end full time wage from our music isn't what you should be 
aiming for. I'm not saying it's not achievable; just look at Jay Z or any of the other people that have 
made millions from their music. That said, though, the majority of musicians won't reach that level.

While you can still dream of getting there if you want (who knows, "it could be you"), you should 
take a more realistic and strategic approach to earning money with your music. This will help you 
see where you are, and help you stay motivated about what you can achieve in your music career. 
With that said, here is what you should **INITIALLY** be aiming for in your music career:

**To break even.**

Hmmm, not what you were expecting, right? Before you get demotivated, let me explain why this 
should be your first step. Later we can go on to aiming to make more money, but things should be 
taken one step at a time.

Like I mentioned before, you will of course need to invest in your music career. For example, you 
invested in this book to learn about how to get started as an independent musician (good choice, by 
the way). If you play an instrument, you will need to spend money to buy that instrument. If you 
want to make a rap song, you will need to invest in getting studio time. The list of expenses goes 
on.

Before your music career starts taking off and before people will want to buy your music, you will 
need to put your money into creating some kind of product that people will want to buy. Therefore, 
you will essentially be starting your music career at a loss. But that's OK, as we're now going to 
work on recovering those costs and breaking even.

Once you start promoting your music and getting yourself known, you will notice that more 
opportunities start coming your way (providing you have the talent and are doing the right things, of 
course). A trickle of income will also start coming in. Maybe not much at first, a CD sale or two, or 
even a small amount of royalties. As you start doing more shows and getting your name known 
more, though, things will start to pick up.
The important thing you'll be learning at this stage is how to make money from your music. When you have made your first CD sale, digital download sale or got your first paid gig, this is a big step in the right direction. You can see it can work, and you now know it's a case of refining the process and scaling things up.

Once you have done this enough to break even, make one more sale and you'll be at the stage where you are making more money then you are spending in your music career. Once you reach this stage and have made back your initial investment on equipment, etc., you are automatically from then on earning a part time living. You are after all earning more than you're spending.

From here, you can change your financial aims. You can aim to earn a bigger part time living as you already have a good base to work with and eventually work on creating a full time living as things move forward. You are making money from your passion, and you have proved to yourself it can work.

You may want to invest more money into achieving this goal, but that's only if it is necessary. We will look more at some of the things you can invest in the "When to Be Cheap, and When Not to Be" section later on, and at other times throughout this book.

There's no point aiming for the top right away as it's often better to take things in stages. As you hit each stage, you should adjust your goals to aim for the next stage up. Hitting each stage will encourage you to do better, and help you see what is really achievable for yourself.

It is not unrealistic to make a part time living from your music. If you have talent, marketing knowledge and are willing to put in the necessary work, this is definitely achievable. You will also need a small budget to get things started, though using the tips I will give later in this book, this budget can be kept to a minimum. This will make it easier to reach the break even stage, and then go on to earn a part time, then hopefully full time living from your music.

Aiming for the top and not getting there as fast as you wanted (or not hitting it at all) can be demotivating. In fact, it's one of the reason why many musicians stop making music in the first place, or why they feel that it's impossible to make money from music. In reality, though, there are many reasons why these people who preach that "you can't make money from music" may have failed.

**Why Many Musicians Fail**

"Practice hard and often, it WILL make you a better player."

*Ekow Armah, Biggroove Records.*

If you've spent any time reading experiences of musicians online, you will have come across many different stories. The ones I want to talk about now, though, are the ones where people say, "Music should only be done as a hobby, "" It's not possible to take money as a musician, "" You won't get your songs played on radio," and "You won't get a big record deal."

You may have heard people give comments similar to this. As a music adviser, I hear these kind of comments all the time. Some musicians don't get where they want to be in their music careers, so
they assume it's impossible.

Well, I'll tell you now, that it's NOT impossible!!

As well as hearing these negative and spirit crushing stories, I also hear the other side of things. I have people telling me:

- That they're regularly playing gigs and make money from these live shows,
- That they have received sponsorship from clothing companies and it's increased their visibility tenfold,
- That they've been signed up by a good record label,
- That they are making good digital download sales,
- That they only have to work a part time job or don't have to work due to their music,
- That their interest in the music industry has helped them work for a cool music related company,
- That being in the music industry has allowed them to teach people to play the instrument they love,
- And many other great stories besides.

As with most other areas in life, there are winners and there are losers. The current losers sometimes have a habit of bringing their failures down on everyone else, and can lead you to believe that because they haven't achieved anything, it's impossible for anyone else to achieve anything as well. They may genuinely believe this. But just because they do, that doesn't mean that it's fact.

I can tell you 100% honestly now, that if you have the talent, you can make at least a part time living from your music career. From there, you can work on making even more if you so desire.

But if this is the case, why are there so many musicians that fail to gain either money or recognition for their music? Well:

**They May Not Be Talented ENOUGH.**

This is a big reason why many people fail in the music industry; They simply aren't good enough. Think about it, there is a LOAD of very talented musicians out there. All you need to do is look online and browse YouTube for a bit and you will see a bucket load of talented musicians. Some of them are good at what they do, but some of them are great. Therefore, if you come along with a decent level of talent but it isn't as good as a lot of the other musicians out there, then you're already at a disadvantage in terms of making money from music. You can still do it if your marketing skills are really good, but it'll be that bit more of an uphill struggle.
Not everyone can judge how good a musician they are. Most musicians I've come across think they're the biggest things since sliced bread, whether or not they really are. They've often had their family and friends tell them they're good, and they may actually think that's true. If they then turn around and then as a "good" musician can't make it work, they'll automatically think it's the music industry that doesn't work rather then them. Like I mentioned, though, there is usually an underlying reason for their personal lack of success.

Having said that, even if you're not one of the most talented people in your genre, that doesn't mean your dream has to end there. It simply means that you need to improve on your talent before you try to get your music out there again, or you need to step up your marketing efforts. You may also need to give yourself a Unique Selling Point (USP for short). We'll look more at what a USP is later in this book, and how you can go about creating yours.

They May Not Be Good at the Business Side of Things.

Even if someone is talented enough to potentially get known and build up a fan base, as I've mentioned before, you need more then just talent. You need to know how to successfully monetize, present and market your music. If you can't do that, you're once again not going to do as well as you potentially could.

As with people who think they're top quality musicians when they're not in comparison to the competition out there, it's often easy to think, "I've done enough marketing and it's not getting me anywhere," even if you haven't. Spending 5 hours a day on Facebook and Twitter isn't the right type of marketing, and will give you very little reward in terms of how far your music career goes.

You need to know where to put the effort in. You could spend hours adding people on MySpace or performing at random open mic nights, but unless it's going to have a clear benefit to you when all is said and done, you will in effect be just wasting your time.

I'll be looking later at what type of promotion you should be doing instead of adding new Twitter followers one by one. It's often better to put your effort in other places, as we'll be looking at soon.

Just because other musicians have had bad experiences and don't believe it's possible to make money from music or gain recognition, that doesn't mean that it's true.

“If you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.”
Henry Ford.

I've seen people on both sides of the fence, and there's a lot to be said about the "self fulfilling prophecy." Set your own path, and don't fail before you've started your journey.

Making Yourself Stand Out from the Crowd (Creating a USP)

As I'm sure you're aware, there are a lot of musicians out there. Even in the smaller genres there will be a lot of competition for you, each musician fighting for their moment to get heard.

With all this competition, it's understandable why people could think there's no more space for them
in the market. In reality, though, if you approach things right, there is always space for new talent to do well for themselves.

So, how do you go about making yourself stand out from the crowd? How do you make people want to buy into you over the thousands and thousands of other musicians out there? Well, you create a Unique Selling Point, my friend!

A unique selling point, USP for short, is a trait you can create to make people buy into you over your nearest competitors. If you sound the same as everyone else and dress in the same way, what's there to stop people buying into one of your alternatives over you? Erm, nothing! If, however, you had something really stand out about you which the others didn't have, you'd naturally move up on the list in terms of being more desirable then the competition.

Sometimes you will naturally have a USP from the beginning. You might have a really nice and original voice, or you might look different then the other people making music in your genre. You might live in a different part of the world and target an audience that doesn't usually get to hear your style of music, or you might simply have a stand out personality that shines through.

Other times, though, you won't have a noticeable selling point which isn't already offered elsewhere. So what do you do when this happens? Easy, you create one!

Yes, USPs can be created. You can actually decide you want to do something that no one else is doing, and incorporate it into your marketing and music career.

While not everyone will see this as essential, I would actually argue that it's vitally important. You see, if you don't manage to make yourself stand out from the crowd, your music and music career will get overlooked far too often. How often have you heard a decent musician that has nothing wrong with them, but you don't think of them ever again because there's nothing there that you thought you couldn't get anywhere else? You may not consciously think those exact thoughts, but you don't think, "I haven't heard anything like that before and really like that, I need to find out who this is so I can hear more of their stuff."

It's not simply enough to be one of those decent "blend in" musicians anymore – you need to offer something different in order to give yourself the best chance of success.

Now I'm not saying you need to be an eccentric musician or that you need to do stupid things to get people to notice you. That said, you do need to have something about you that will stand out, and that will also stay in their mind.

Ok, so let's say there are no naturally stand out features about your music or image as of yet. What could you do to make yourself stand out? Here are some ideas which you can implement in your career:

- **Have a Distinct Sound.**
  One USP you could create is to consciously sound different from your competitors. Even if your voice isn't all that different from what's already out there, there are other things you can do to achieve this. For example, you can have a use a different kind of backing track than the other people that make your kind of music. You can keep it similar enough that it's still counted as being in your genre, but you can approach it from a different angle then everyone else.
Even if you don't want to drastically change the style of music you make, you can always do small things that can become your signature sound. For example, you may have it so all (or the majority of) your songs have trumpets in them, or a lot of them have a beat-boxer in the track. This will be unique to you, and something you can make a big deal of so people notice it too. This will give them a talking point, and will mean that more people will notice and go on to talk about you. This is great for word of mouth marketing.

One final thing you can do is have some kind of vocal signature. This is something that you always say or sing in your tracks, and will mean people instantly recognize it's you. For example, the singer Jason Derulo always sings his name at the beginning of his tracks in a style that's the same every time. This allows people to instantly recognize it's him, and helps him stand out from the crowd. It's such a good example of a USP, that I'm sure if he sang something else other then his name in the beginning of his tracks in the same style, people would still recognize it as being him. It's a mix of good branding and a unique selling point, and this is what you should aim for.

- **Dress Differently.**
  Another way you can differentiate yourself from the crowd is the way you dress. Once again, there are two different ways you can go about doing this.
  First of all, you can go all out and dress completely different from everyone else in your genre. This doesn't mean you have to dress in an eccentric or flamboyant manner, although you could if you wanted to, and you think it's a good image for what you're doing. You essentially want to create your own dress sense.
  Your second option is to dress in a way that people have seen before, but isn't what people in your genre would usually wear. An example of this is English rapper Plan B. Instead of following the normal path a lot of rappers do, he decided to dress himself up in an old style suit and play with a band that looked like they were from out of the 80s. This stage of his career helped put him on the map, and had everyone talking about how different he was compared to everyone else at the time.

- **Interact with Your Fans Differently.**
  While there's an increasing number of musicians that do interact with their fan base effectively, there are still of lot of people that don't. While it's possible to still have a lucrative music career without always communicating with your fans personally, doing so can be a good USP in itself, especially if you do it in a stand out way.
  Let's say all the other people that sound similar to you aren't the best at interacting with their fans. They may send out a couple of social messages to them, but they don't reply to any of them or take it any further then that. At gigs they don't make a effort to talk to people afterward, and act like their show ends once they have finished performing.
  What's very important to remember, is people want to feel like they're part of something bigger. By getting them involved more in your music career, you can help them fulfill this need. By doing things like replying to their social messages, announcing after the show that they can come up and talk to you, and even creating a special online area just for your fans, you can really get people on board with your music career and have them become die hard followers. Surprisingly few people do this, so take advantage and make your fans feel like a real part of your career.

- **Be the Best in Your Genre.**
  OK, here's one final USP I have in mind for you. This one isn't as easy to achieve as the rest, as it's not always in your control. That said, by being the best musician in your genre (or at least one of the best), this in itself is a USP. Think about it; to actually be able to claim you're one of the best in the music style you make, that is something that will get people
listening and pique their curiosity.
The only question, though, is how are you going to make sure you're the best? After all, being the best in a musical genre is a subjective matter...
Like I said, this isn't always possible. Sometimes there will simply be people that are overall better than you. That doesn't mean you shouldn't practice and learn your craft really well, and hopefully you will eventually reach a level where you're regarded as one of the top few in your market.
If you don't reach that level, however, there are other ways around this. Let's say you're not the overall best in your genre, but you have a really stand out voice – a voice that is strong enough or unique enough to get people to take notice. USE THIS AS YOUR USP. Other people may have a better image and/or fan interaction, but play to your strong points and highlight this to people. Market yourself as “The voice of [your] genre.”
Another option is to narrow down what you're trying to be the best in. Instead of trying to be the best country singer in the world, why not be the best country singer in Mississippi? Or even the best country singer in your town, and use that loyal home grown fan base to spread the word about you and push you to new heights.
This can also work in terms of the genre you're aiming to be the best in. Maybe don't aim to be the best rock singer out there; instead aim to be the best in a subgenre like industrial rock music or medieval folk rock. Furthermore, you could even create your own subgenre if you like, and be the pioneer of this new sound. That will definitely have you standing out from the crowd.
Being the best isn't always easy, but as you can see, there are ways around that which you can use to create your unique selling point.

As you can see, it's possible for anyone to have a USP. Because of this, if it's something that will help you stand out from the crowd and give you a greater chance of success, there's no reason why you shouldn't find or create yours. Think about what your USP can be, and work on making yourself stand out.

**Promoting Your USP**

OK, so there's no reason to have a unique selling point if no one knows that what you offer is unique to you. It's like a bank offering a savings rate twice as high as all the other banks. If they simply let people know this, their business would pick up as a lot more people would go to them for their great rate. If they don't advertise this fact, however, people will continue to use alternative banks that are promoting themselves more effectively. After all, how would the customer know to go to this new bank if they don't make the benefits clear?

With that said, when you have your USP sorted out, you need to let people know about it.

Sometimes, your USP will be obvious for people to see. For example, if your dress style is drastically different from the norm, people will notice this. You could always talk about it to emphasize it even more, but that's not 100% essential.

Other times, however, you'll need to point it out, so people recognize that what you're doing IS different and IS a big deal. How do you do this? Well, while there are a few ways, the best is to straight out say it. So if you're at a show and have a trumpet player who's a part of all your tracks, why not ask the crowd to give a round of applause to your trumpet man (or woman)? Tell them the player is a regular feature in your songs, and that they really makes things that bit more soulful (or another word you want people to use to describe your music). This will put the idea in people's heads that you sound that much better because the addition of the trumpet player, and will have
people remembering you for doing something different.

A unique SELLING point is called so because it's something different you use when you're trying to sell an idea to people. In this case, you're selling the idea of you. Make sure it's clear why you're different from the others. If it's not instantly clear, be straightforward and let people know why you're unique. Just be sure not to sound big headed or boastful while you're doing so.

**Setting S.M.A.R.T. Goals for Your Music Career**

"Success is knowing you did something worth while."

*Ronise Lukasiewicz.*

So now you know that it's possible to make money from your music career, and you also know you should take things one step at a time. But before you go out and start trying to earn money from your career, it's important you take time to set goals for what you want to achieve.

While it's easy to say, "I want to get a lot more fans" you have to ask yourself, how is saying this actually going to help you achieve your goal? It's a non-specific "want," rather then a well thought out business plan.

Studies have shown you're more likely to achieve your goal if you have a clear visual understanding of what you want to achieve in life. This is where S.M.A.R.T. aim and objectives come into place.

S.M.A.R.T. is a tool we can use to better map out what we want to achieve. It stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed. That means all of the aims we have for our music career should be specific, we should be able to measure them, they should be achievable, they should be realistic, and we should know how long it'll take us to achieve this aim. These aims should be **written down**, so we have a goal to look at and refer back to when we feel a bit lost as to what we're doing.

You can run a few S.M.A.R.T. aims alongside each other, and they can vary in size in terms of how big they are. One may refer to how you're going to hit the 100 gig mark (which is more long term), and another may be how you're going to set up all the necessary social media profiles you need to promote your music (which is more short term).

Make sense? Hopefully it does, but if not, here's an example.

Let's take the above aim of:

"**I want to get a lot more fans.**"

This is a very vague aim to have, as it doesn't give us any idea of how we're going to achieve this goal of ours. By applying the S.M.A.R.T. formula to it, we can edit it to be an aim we can refer back to and get a better idea of how we're currently doing. This will make it easier to achieve it.

So first off, let's make our goal Specific. We want to specifically state what we need to do to
achieve this goal. There's no point saying we want more fans if we don't know how we're going to go about getting those extra fans, is there? It won't make it any clearer how we're going to achieve that goal; it's sort of like saying, "I want to be rich." The majority of people who say that have no further ideas in their plans to get rich, and therefore never take any real steps to achieving that goal.

OK, so how specifically are we going to go about getting more fans? Let's say you have the means to create homemade videos of you performing cover songs, and have a YouTube channel via which you can showcase your material to the world. By uploading your videos and encouraging people to like your Facebook page if they enjoy your song, you will get a percentage of people taking you up on this offer. Tell them they will find out about your new videos there first, and that they will also get exclusive bonus videos not shown publicly on YouTube. This will encourage a larger percentage of your video viewers to like your Facebook page.

You could also get those new Facebook fans via gigging or other means, but for this example we'll stick to the cover songs strategy. So we can change our aim so it looks like this:

"I want to get a lot more Facebook fans by doing cover versions on YouTube."

Now every time we look at this aim, we know what we should be doing to achieve it. If you want to get more fans by doing other things, you can make other aims to go alongside this one.

Next, we need to make this aim measurable. After all, how will we know if we've achieved our aim if we haven't got a clear goal to aim for? What does "a lot more" really mean? Is that 20 new followers? 100? Or 1000?

In this example we're using Facebook followers as our measuring point, although you can aim to get more mailing list subscribers, more gigs, make more money, etc. Sticking to the Facebook example though, I will change the aim to:

"I want to increase my Facebook subscriber count by 100 followers by doing cover versions on YouTube."

Now this is something we can actually measure, and can look at to see how close we are to achieving our aim. We don't want to stop there, though, as there's more we can apply to make our aim even more useful to us.

Next, we want to make sure our aim is achievable. Well, is it? In this case, it is. Gaining 100 Facebook subscribers is something most people can do if they offer something of value or interest. It will take some people longer then others, but it is something you can achieve. It is also realistic, which covers the next section in our S.M.A.R.T. formula as well.

If you was to say you want to increase your Facebook subscriber numbers by 10,000, though, it may be humanly achievable, it's not really a realistic aim for the average independent musician. Therefore, this number would have to be cut back to one that's a lot more realistic.

Don't try to cheat with the numbers; they're only there to help you take manageable steps to advancing your music career. You don't want to aim for the end goal straight away; this will lead to you not hitting your targets soon enough and only leave a feeling of disappointment and failure. This often leads to people quitting music and believing it doesn't work, so initially aim for something that is realistic and achievable.
We don't have to change our above version of the aim in this case ("I want to increase my Facebook subscriber count by 100 followers by doing cover versions on YouTube"), as it is both Achievable and Realistic. That said, if you've made an aim and it isn't achievable or realistic, change it accordingly so it is.

The last stage is to make sure it's Timed. By this, I mean it's something that we can time, and has an end date.

There's no point having an aim that will go on forever; if you don't achieve that aim, you need to know when it's time to say it's not working and modify it to something more realistic. This is why we will give it a time limit.

For this example, I think 4 months is a reasonable amount of time to get 100 new Facebook fans. You may want to aim to do it quicker if you already have a starting fan base that you can transfer over to Facebook, but for this example let's stick to 4 months. So, let's edit our aim to reflect this:

“I want to increase my Facebook subscriber count by 100 followers by doing cover versions on YouTube. I will do this within the next 4 month by [insert date].”

And that's it, our S.M.A.R.T. aim is complete! Instead of just saying you want to achieve something, you now know how you're going to go about achieving it, when you should have it done by, you can measure how far along you are with your aim, and you know that it's an aim you can realistically achieve.

You should carry out this process with all the aims you have for your music career, whether in terms of how you're going to get more gigs, how you're going to reach a certain pay rate, or how you're going to finish an album you're making. Apply this to all the things you want to achieve, and you will have a much clearer view of what you need to do to succeed.

Important Note:

When you set your music career aims, do them in manageable steps. Don't say you want to earn a million dollars and be rich; take things in baby steps and achieve one goal at a time. So initially aim to break even, and create a S.M.A.R.T. aim for how you're going to achieve that. Once you're at a break even level, next aim to make, say, $100 a month from your music career, and do a S.M.A.R.T. aim for how you will complete this aim. As you achieve it, keep building things up and work toward new aims in manageable and realistic steps.

What Happens If You Don't Meet Your S.M.A.R.T. Goals (and What Happens If You Do)?

So, you've mapped out your S.M.A.R.T. goals, and you've been following the plan to achieve your written down goal. But at some stage of following this plan, it becomes apparent that you aren't going to hit your target. What should you do?

Well the thing about these goals, is you can make them flexible. You will of course want to try and make your goal as realistic as possible when you're drawing up your plans, but sometimes it's easy to underestimate how difficult something really is.
If this happens, you should go back to your original aim, and edit it as needed. By now, you should be more clued up as to what a more realistic aim is to have in terms of this part of your music career. Let's say for example 100 new Facebook follows was too much to aim for. Why not reduce that number to 50 if you feel that's a goal you really can reach?

On the other hand if you hit 100 fans well before you time limit is up, why not set a new aim for more Facebook fans in a new time range? Only if you feel it'll benefit your music career of course, you may instead decide to increase interaction with your current followers before you actively try and get any more.

At the end of each S.M.A.R.T. aim, there are a couple of things you should do. Firstly, you should analyze how things went. What worked and what didn't? Is this something you can scale up to get even better results? Is it worth aiming for this goal again?

Once you decide this, you should make a new aim to keep you busy in your newly free time. Alternatively, you can use that time to work more on another aim you have going on.

After a while, you will start to see what the best place to put your efforts is. You will find that by doing some things, you will be gaining more fans (or making more money) quicker than when you do other things. It's in these areas that you should start to put more time, as they will give you more rewards for your time. Work smart, AND hard.

**Why Laziness Is a Career Killer**

All right, so I want to quickly talk to you about laziness. This is a trait I've seen a lot of musicians have, and it's one that has killed music career after music career.

A lot of people seem to think that music is an easy way out of working a 9 to 5 job. In reality, however, working on your music career can be a full time job in itself. Furthermore, you're often required to put in even more hours if you're just starting out and are still in the process of building up your name.

I know it's easy to just lay about sometimes, playing computer games or hanging out with friends instead of working on your music. In reality, though, if you don't contact people for gigs or market your music when you're supposed to, it's only you that will suffer for it. Not that other musician that's putting the work in and reaping rewards, not your friends that have time to burn playing computer games all day.

Now I'm not saying that as a musician you shouldn't have a social life. It's important that you give yourself time to unwind, and a break from handling your business all the time. That said, you need to set a good amount of time out to work on your music career, and you need to take the necessary action to get where you want to be.

One of the byproducts of laziness is cutting corners. This could be in terms of your recordings, setting up your artwork or promotional material, or planning how a gig is supposed to go. Don't think, "It's only a couple of small mistakes," or "It'll be all right on the gig night." Everything you do at all stages of your music career will reflect on your brand.

If it only takes a couple more takes and 10 minutes to get the perfect recording, why wouldn't you
invest that extra time? If a couple more practice sessions means you will perform one of the best gigs of your life, why wouldn't you do that? Same with going out of your way to talk to and build up relationships with people that can get you gigs. Even if this is outside of your comfort zone or you "can't be bothered," don't let that stop you from doing what you need to do to succeed.

So, why is laziness a career killer? Simple, because it'll stop you from doing everything you can to make things work. Let's say you have a really good voice, but so does "Bill," one of your competitors. You're both on an equal level in terms of talent, and both have a good look which people would respond well to.

While you only spend 2 hours a week practicing, though, Bill spends 6. While you can't be bothered to look for gigs to play, Bill is always chasing leads when he gets the chance. While you spend a few hours a week online talking to fans and seeing what's new, Bill spends double that amount of time building real connections and adding new things that will benefit his music career.

Ask yourself, who's got the better chance of succeeding out of these two people? Who do you think will have the biggest fan base after the first 6 months? Who will most likely be making more money from their music career?

I know I've said this before, but your music career is a business! That means you must treat it as such. If you aren't working a day job, you shouldn't have a problem spending at least 7 hours a day, 5 days a week working on your music. If you do have a job, you should still aim to dedicate at LEAST an hour a day to your music career – more if you can, and more on days where you need to record, rehearse, etc.

Remember, things like TV, computer games and even friends can be a distraction. As I said, don't fully cut these things out your life as we all need time to relax and unwind, but if you've got a full day to do something in the week, choose to work on your craft. Don't spend the full day flicking from channel to channel, and don't go out and spend the full day with a friend. Do your minimum seven hours of work, and then go and relax with your friends or in front of the TV afterward.

You are now self employed, and you only have yourself to keep your motivation going. If you slack, you're the one that's going to suffer for it. So keep on putting in the necessary work, and stay on top of what you need to do.

The Importance of Marketing Your Music

“There is no shortcut to success, you have to put in the hours to reap results from your music.”

Sp3kkTrumn.

OK, so while all of the things mentioned in this book so far are important if you want to make it as an independent musician, the following is one of the most important things you are going to read:

If you're not going to market your music once you release it, you aren't going to get very far.

Marketing is the process of raising awareness of your music or release. You need to let people know it's out there, that it's available to buy, and that it's worth buying. If people don't know it even exists,
what good is having it available to buy? Similarly, if they see your offer but can't tell what makes it worth checking out, how many downloads or sales do you think you'll make?

These days, anyone can sell their music online. That means you have a lot of competition, and that there's a lot of noise for the customer to get through before they hit gold. It's your job to make yourself stand out from the noise. This is done using clever marketing, and by relaying your USP effectively to potential fans.

The importance of marketing is something I really want you to take on board. If you remember just one thing from this book, it should be this. Hopefully, though, you'll remember a lot more. :)

If you've ever tried to release a product, be it a digital download or a physical CD, if you didn't promote it enough you will know the result of a lack of marketing: Zero or very few sales.

It's easy to think that once we've put our project together, all the hard work is done. Now we simply have to sit back and watch the sales pour in, right? Err, wrong! In reality, the opposite is true. Once the project is made, that's when all the hard work starts. You now need to work at getting it in front of your target audience, and convincing them that you're worth buying into.

Many would argue that the marketing stage is just as important as making a good song. They both go hand in hand, you can't really have one without the other. You can have the best song in the world, but if you don't go on to raise awareness of the song and let people know it exists, no one will buy it. On the other hand, you can be the best marketer in the world. But if you market a poor song, a lot of people still won't buy it once they hear what you're trying to sell. Even if you do make some sales, after they hear what you have sold to them, they're likely to never listen to your recommendations again. They may even want a refund on what you sold to them.

So, how do you go about marketing your releases? Well, that's outside the scope of this book, and is a huge subject in its own. If you want to learn how to effectively market your music, though, you should check out the IMA Music Business Academy. This is a course I put together which helps independent musicians learn how to promote themselves and their releases. For the price, you won't find a better guide anywhere else online.

**Setting Up Your Online Base**

As you probably know, many of the tools that are freely available to independent musicians are online. On top of that, an increasing number of people find out about new music online through browsing or recommendations. It therefore makes sense that you create a strong online presence for you and your music.

Now if you've been online for more then a few months, you'll realize there are numerous tools that claim to be able to help you get your music out there more. There are websites that can get your music in front of thousands of fans, and services that will allow you to sell your music in exchange for you keeping 90% of the profits.

**In reality, the majority of these websites will act as nothing more then a distraction to you.**

Most of them simply won't deliver on their promises. They take time for you to learn, and even more time for you to use. Many of them have fake users displayed just so their numbers look bigger
then they really are, and a lot of the time you'll just be promoting your music to other musicians instead of connecting with the fans that the website promises.

So how do you know which websites you should be using? Simple, I will tell you.

There are only a few online properties you will need to tend to. These are currently:

**Your Own Website.**
Your own website is the most important online tool you could have, as it's the only property that will be completely in your control. You can control the layout, what information you put up for fans, the color scheme, the sales funnel etc., and this will be used as your online base. While you will be using other properties to supplement your own website, you should aim to drive the majority of fans back to your site and on to your mailing list. This is the best way to get contact details from potential fans so you can go on to build up a relationship with them.

If you haven't already got your own website, you can [learn how to easily set one up here](#).

**Facebook.**
As I'm sure you know, Facebook is the most used and most popular social networking site at the time of writing this book. It's because of this, that we should definitely be using this tool to establish our online presence.

While there are a lot of people on Facebook who will like your music, it's not a case of you simply searching for people and then adding them based on their location or likes. Many people use their Facebook account as their private place online, so they won't accept just anyone who requests to have them as a friend. Instead, you need to let them come to you.

It can take a while to build up a strong Facebook community, but once you do, you will find it to be one of the best places to market your music online.

**Twitter.**
While it's hard to get a lot of Facebook fans out of the box, it's a lot easier to start getting people to follow and interact with you on Twitter. Twitter is another online property worth having an account on. Like Facebook they have a lot of genuine people using their services, and music fans form a good portion of those users.

I advise people to use Twitter to get in front of a lot of potential fans fast, and direct them to your website and on to your mailing list. The good thing about this strategy is that it can largely be automated, so you can spend very little time to get good results.

I've actually written a free guide on how to make the most of your Twitter promotion; it's called Twitter Domination. You can [download Twitter Domination here](#).
As well as the above accounts, we will also need a YouTube account to host our videos. While it is possible to host videos on our own site, there is a very good reason to add them to YouTube instead: the chance of additional exposure!

As YouTube has a built-in search engine, if we optimize our YouTube videos correctly, it's possible to get them found with less promotion on our behalf. While we should of course promote our videos as well, being on YouTube can make it easier to get found.

Another thing to remember is that people are accustomed to YouTube. They know how to share these videos, and they're easily played back on most modern day devices. Some other video formats don't play properly on smartphones, as they require Adobe Flash to be viewed properly. So if you want to allow people to view your videos in as many places as possible, YouTube is the way to go.

Google+ (Optional, But Useful)

Google+ is the new kid on the block when it comes to social networking sites. While it's not yet as effective as the others, it does have one very useful trait: If people have added you to their Google+ "circles," when they search on Google for something you have already talked about on your site, your site will appear higher up on the results page than they normally would (only to them).

So if the average person searches Google for "rock band," for example, you most likely won't appear anywhere near the front page and won't get found. If, however, they're a friend with you on Google+ and they did that same search, if you have the term "rock band" a lot on one page of your site, you will probably appear on the first page of results.

While it won't get you any new fans, this is great for reminding people you exist and increase their interaction with you.

Online Base Conclusion

And that's it, the five platforms you need to interact with your fans and promote your music online. Anything more than this will have you putting in too much time in this area of your career, and in all honesty, your time would be better used in other areas.

The important thing is not to be sucked into the idea of new websites that claim to be able to put you in front of fans very quickly. New websites claiming this spring up every week, and in reality none of them deliver on their promise.

Do you know why the above mentioned websites are more effective? Because they have real users that will only follow you if there is a real reason to. Either they like your music, or they want to give you a chance and see what you're about. Other than on Twitter, people don't add you because you added them first. They'll add you because you're worth adding. Fans like this are the ones that are going to be responsive, and will communicate with you with no ulterior motive.

So stick to the above mentioned platforms. You should set up all these websites before you start promoting your music, and use them to retain fans and interact with them on a regular basis.
Offline Activities, and Why You Shouldn't Neglect Them

With the internet now being a big part of how people promote their music, it's easy to think that all of your promotional efforts should be made over the internet. If you want to build up a diverse fan base, however, it's important that you also promote your music using offline methods.

Yes, it's easy to sit at home on your computer all day and talk to people online. You reach people all over the world, and you can do it while sitting in your underwear and eating snacks. Easy, though, doesn't always give you the best results.

As you can see from the section above, it's all important for you to set up your online base. If you only focus on selling yourself online, though, you will miss out on a large section of people that could have found out about you via other means.

Think about it; gigging, TV and radio channels are all outlets separate from the online one. Many musicians have given up on these opportunities as they're "harder to get," or are "old methods of promotion." These musicians aren't giving themselves the best chance of getting out there, and are missing out on potentially a lot more exposure.

I'll admit, these platforms aren't as easy to get on as it is to sign up for a Facebook or Twitter account. Well, guess what: taking your music career to the next level is not an easy task! If it was, don't you think there would be a lot more musicians earning decent money for their efforts?

Those musicians that will do well are the ones that are willing to put the work in. That work includes leveraging yourself on those offline platforms, as they DO still work.

Now I'm not saying as an independent musician you're going to get your song play-listed on the big channels straight away, or that you'll get your first music video spun on MTV Base. That said, there are community radio stations and specialized TV channels where it is possible to get some good exposure.

Gigging, for example, is one of the best ways for the modern day musician to make money from their career. You can sell your CDs there (yes, physical CDs can still make money like this), you can make money from royalties when you perform, and you may even get paid for the gig (harder to do when you're still unknown, but possible as you start making a name for yourself and can draw in crowds).

We talk a lot more about offline promotion and making money from gigging in the IMA Music Business Academy. For now though, the take away point should be this:

Don't limit yourself to only having an online music career. Getting out there and connecting with people face to face is a great way to build up a strong and loyal fan base. It can help build your confidence, and will give you more avenues to make money from.

A healthy balance between online and offline promotion is necessary, and will allow you to progress in your music career even faster.
The Power of Leveraging Established Platforms

“Be with fellow musicians as much as possible. It's easier to grow in a group than when one is alone... It's also more fun.”

Yasmine Modestine.

All right, I'm about to share with you another big tip that most independent musicians never take advantage of. Along with the info given in the "The Importance Of Marketing Your Music” section, this is one of the points you really need to take on board. If you do and start applying this theory to your music career, things will start to move forward a lot faster then before.

While the internet has given musicians a big opportunity to get themselves out there, it has also spawned a lazy mentality. MySpace taught us that all we need to do to get fans is sit at our computer all day and add people. It was simple, and in a lot of people's minds, it worked.

In reality though, it didn't. The majority of the people that viewed your page were other musicians, and were in it for their own goals rather then to become your fan.

While MySpace has long since disappeared as a widely recommended tool for artists, a lot of people still have the same mentality: That it's possible to focus all your promotional efforts online, and add people one by one on your chosen social networking site.

While select social networking sites are important to have (see the "Setting Up Your Online Base" section above), there is something you can do which is much more powerful than adding people on these sites all day: Getting on and being recommended by established platforms.

What do I mean by this? Well, sometimes instead of you personally marketing directly to fans one by one, it's better to get yourself on an established platform in your niche and let their audience hear you instead. So for example, network with a popular YouTube channel and get them to feature you in one of their videos. Or network with a community radio DJ and have him or her play some of your tracks.

The good things about this is these places will already have a set audience. If you get featured on one of these established platforms, you will instantly be showcased in front of a audience proven to like the type of music you make. What's more, someone with authority in the niche will be giving you a stamp of approval, giving you instant credibility.

Now who do you think people will listen to more: Some random person that has added them on Facebook (who they went on to ignore by the way), or their favorite YouTube channel saying you're an act worth listening to? Exactly, the second option!

As an independent musician, once you have built up a small following (and maybe even while you're in the process of doing that), you should put the majority of your time into networking with and trying to utilize these platforms in your genre. I say you should start to build up a following first, as you can use the fact that you have some loyal fans to get onto your first established platform.

But wait, I know what some of you are thinking; it sounds like a lot of work, right? These platforms
aren't that easy to get on, right? Well, in all honesty that could actually be a good thing. Barriers are there to keep the competition and more lazy people out, so if you push past that and manage to get on your first couple of established platforms, things will get a lot easier from there.

As I mentioned, it's all about leverage. While it may take you a month or two to make progress with your first established platform, once you do get showcased on one of them, you can use that first experience to your advantage. You now have the experience of being on this first platform, and can use its name to help you get on other platforms in your genre. So if for example you can say to people you've been on one of the top three YouTube platforms in your genre, don't you think DJs on community radio stations are going to start taking you more seriously? As will other YouTube channels in your genre, and websites that talk about your music style.

When networking with people who are involved in other established platforms, without boasting, you need to mention what other platforms you have already been on. This will automatically give you more credibility, and increase the chances that they will want to work with you. Think of it as showing your resume; the more past experience you have, the better your next job could potentially be.

As you get on a lot more platforms, others will start approaching you. Some will be big, some will be small. Most will be worth doing. The more you get yourself on these established platforms, the more opportunities will come along, and the more new people you will reach. Once the ball gets rolling, as long as you can retain a percentage of the fans you get in front of and convert them into buying customers, you will have a good music career.

So where do you find these platforms? Easy, **you go to where people in your niche want to hear new music and find out the latest happenings**. Examples of platforms you can leverage include:

- Forums.
- Radio Stations.
- YouTube Channels.
- TV Channels.
- Magazines.

Now I know it can take a while to get on your first established platform, and it can feel like you're not really getting anywhere. But your chance will come, and when it does, it will all be worth it. During that time, keep practicing your art and promoting your music in other ways by yourself. But never give up on getting on these bigger platforms, as when you do, things will start to take off much faster than ever.

**Tip:** Don't go for the biggest established platforms first. If you're an unknown artist and try to get on MTV Base, most likely this won't happen. Aim for one of the top 3 YouTube channels in your genre, or a grassroots level popular website for your music style. From here you can build things up, and get on even bigger platforms as your name becomes known around the circuit.
When To Be Cheap, and When Not To Be

As an independent musician, money can often be an issue. To make music, you will need to invest in tools that allow you to do just that. Your money could go on instruments and equipment, studio time, musical education, travel costs, artwork for your first release and more.

A lot of the time, these kinds of expenses are unavoidable. If you're working a day job alongside trying to make your music career work, this can fund the expenses your music rounds up. If you're a student or haven't got much money coming in from anywhere (which is the case for many new musicians as it's a job that's often started in the teenage years), the lack of money can be a serious stumbling block.

That said, it is sometimes possible to take short cuts when it comes to spending money on your music. In this section of the Independent Musician's Survival Guide, I want to look at just that. How can you as an independent musician save money in your career?

Before I give you some tips though, I want to make one thing very clear. You should NEVER cut any corners in your career if it means you're going to put out an inferior quality product. Your music is what will make or break you, so saving money by recording cheesy sounding tunes for your fans is a big no-no.

All the methods mentioned here should still give you good results. If they don't, don't use them.

With that said, let's look at some of the best, and worst times to be cheap in your music career.

When It Comes to Getting Artwork for Your Projects.

Artwork is one of the places you can save a fortune if you know the right places to look. For most of your projects you will of course want an attractive and informative cover. Usually most people recommend paying an established designer to make a cover or promotional material, but there are a few other options as well.

One of those options is to look for designers on any music forms you're part of. In the same way there are up and coming musicians that will use these forums, there are most likely a few up and coming designers as well. These designers are interested in your type of music, and they will often do a free cover or two if you approach them right.

If you manage to get a cover from one of these designers, you will both benefit. You will get a free cover made for you, and they will get some work for their portfolio and hopefully some paid work off the back of what they have done for you. They will also get to say they have helped work on a project in their field of interest, which is also a big thing for many people. This is especially true if you go on to get that CD into shops or into the big digital download stores.

So how do you go about getting this free artwork from forum members? Well, the first stage is to sign up to a busy forum in your chosen genre. You can find these forums by Google searching "[your genre] forum."

Replace [your genre] with the type of music you make, for example, jazz. Next, you will want to begin getting involved in the forum, posting say 20 posts or replies over a few days. This is to look like you're part of the community, rather than just there to advertise to them. Forum members
usually don't take well to this, and you will get a negative response.

Once you have some posts up and have been a part of the community for a little while, post a new topic saying you're running a competition for an up and coming artist to be featured on your new project. Within this topic, you should list to them the benefits of submitting a cover design for consideration: Things like it being released into shops, that they will get a couple of free physical copies, that they'll get a digital download copy, that you'll push their name along with the project so they could potentially get paid work from this, etc. All these things will go over well. Just make sure you can back up any claims you make in the interest of fairness.

By doing this you will hopefully get a good cover design or two. If you don't get any good cover designs out of the bunch, don't be afraid to tell them that no one won. You don't want to settle for a poorly designed cover, so if you don't get one that's usable, continue the search.

One idea is to sign up to multiple forums, and run a competition across them all at once. This will increase your chances of finding someone suitable, and getting that cover that you want. Be sure to let people know that this competition isn't just limited to the members of the forum they use, so you're completely transparent with the competition rules.

If you don't manage to find a free cover you want, you could always go to Odesk and hire someone to make you a good quality one for cheap. On Odesk you can post a job offer for as little as $20 and get some good cover designers giving you designs. You can raise the amount you offer to increase the amount of quality graphic designers who apply for your jobs, but this isn't essential. You will still get some good ones willing to work for that price. This is because they want to get good feedback on their profile, so they will get more higher paid work in future. These good designers won't work at that price for usually past a month or two, so use them at the lower rate while you can.

When It Comes to Recording Your Music.

Ok, this is a tough area to save money in. The key thing to remember is you should NEVER use a studio if it makes your vocals sound anything less then good quality. I don't care if someone pays you to use their studio, if the final mix and song quality isn't at a good level, you should steer clear of using that recording studio.

Your songs are a big part of how any potential fans will see you. If they hear poor quality songs with hissing in the background, they aren't going to think you're a very good artist. You could put out 100 songs like this, but it'll probably do more harm then good.

While it's not always the case, home studios usually produce these kind of poor results. Unless it's a professional setup with all the necessary equipment a full on recording studio has, you should steer clear of these studio types.

Even though it's hard to find free studios to record your music, it is possible. One of the best places you can go is to youth clubs. Some of them are now popping up with good quality studios, and can be used to make songs for free if you're a member of this club. What's more, many youth clubs are now open to people going into their 20s, so it's not just the teenagers that will get to use these resources.

Like I said, it's not always easy to find a good quality free or low cost studio. That said, it is
possible, so have a look around and see what you can find. If you can't find one, however, suck it up and be willing to pay for a decent mid-level studio. Your fans will thank you for it, and it will be worth it in the long run.

**When It Comes to Getting Videos Recorded.**

OK, so can you be cheap when it comes to recording videos? Well, yes and no.

It will all depend on what type of video you're shooting. If you want a music video for TV channels and as an official song for one of your singles, it's important you make sure the video is top quality. The majority of music videos out there are of a good quality, so doing anything less will simply be showing people you're not at the level your competitors are.

If, however, you're creating a video interview, a small feature video or a video showing you doing a cover version of another song, it's possible to get videos made for free or cheap.

The thing about these types of video, is the "homemade" feel often works just as well as the professional shiny ones. People know they're made on a small budget, but they don't mind as the piece has a "human" feel to it. They know anyone can make these videos, and it helps them relate to you that bit more. They'll also appreciate it more when you do get bigger and start producing noticeably better quality videos.

So if you've got your own decent quality video camera, it's possible to record something that you can upload on YouTube and allow you to keep fans happy. You don't need to spend a big budget on getting the perfect video made; just make sure it's not blurry or grainy, and what you say and do is worth watching.

Note: This does NOT mean you can put out poor quality, boring or stupid videos. It still has to reflect well on you, so make sure everything you release does just that.

If you want more money saving tips, check out the IMA Music Business Academy. We look more at how you can implement some of the above suggestions, as well as other great ways to start saving in your career.

**Keeping Records and Files**

I've mentioned a few times in this guide about how you need to treat your music career like a business. I've mentioned some things that this involves, and I'm sure you also have your own ideas about what this entails.

One thing I definitely do mean by this saying, is that you need to keep on top of your paperwork!

I can hear some of you groaning already. You're in it for the music, so you shouldn't have to bother with any writing other then creating lyrics, right? Well, unfortunately, this isn't the case.

Why do you need to keep records and files? Simply put, to make things more manageable for yourself. It can be hard keeping track of what you have to do, all your contacts and how much money you're making. Writing it all down in a computer file can make your life a lot easier, and
helps you keep on top of things a lot more effectively. It can also help when it comes to filling out your taxes (yes I do recommend you do this; you are running your own business now, after all), so you'll definitely want to take care of at least this part of things.

While you certainly don't need to be taking down books worth of notes or spending a huge amount of your efforts in this area, there are some times where you will need to keep records and note things down. These times include:

- **A "To Do" List.**
  Keeping track of what you should be doing on a daily basis is one of the most important things you should be doing. It's easy to forget tasks at times, even if they need doing. A diary will allow you to note down what needs to be done each day, and will mean that things won't slip your mind as easily.
  I personally prefer to note what I need to do in a physical note book rather then on a computer. This is because I can make a note of things even when my computer isn't on, and can easily see what I need to do at any point during the day. I also use my phone to make notes when I'm out, so I can transfer them to my note pad later on.
  How you decide to manage your to do list is up to you, but I strongly recommend you create one ASAP.

- **Any Expenses You Incur.**
  Another vitally important thing you need to keep track of are any expenses you incur. There are three main reasons for this:
  One, you want to see how your music career is progressing. If over the first three months you have made a loss, the second three months you make a loss, but the third three months you've made a profit, you can see what you're doing that is bringing you in the right direction. Only when you take down your expenses as well as a record of any money you make, can you get a picture of how your music career is doing in terms of finance.
  Secondly, these figures are important for when you pay taxes. If you want to be a professional musician, you will have to sign yourself up as your own business. You will need these figures when sorting out how much tax you have to pay (if any – you won't have to if you're not making money), so make sure you keep track of them properly. I'll talk a bit more about paying taxes in the chapter "Paying Your Taxes and Making Things Official."
  Lastly, it's also good for seeing where all your money is going. By looking at your expenses, you can see if you're spending too much in certain areas, or if you have more money to spend on other things.
  Don't be afraid to invest in your music career, but don't just throw money at it and hope that means you will make more money in return. It doesn't always work like that, so spend wisely.

- **Any Money You Make.**
  As well as making a note of any expenses you rack up, you will also want to make a note of any money you make. This for the same reason as above; so you can see how well you're doing financially as time goes on (when you make your first genuine $1 from music, it's a very motivating feeling), and also for tax purposes.
  Along with the above expenses data, you can store these numbers in one of two ways. You can either keep them all in a spreadsheet file, or you can create individual word processing files for each expense and income. Either way, make sure you keep these files safe, as well as any physical receipts and documents you get along the way.

- **Contact Details of Your Links and Resources. Also, Any Other Relevant Information.**
Another thing you need to keep records of are the links and resources you gain along the way. There is a number of things that could fall under this category, such as record stations, media outlets, recording studios, graphic designers, event organizers, marketing people, possible collaborators, and anyone else that can benefit your music career in any way. These are the people and places you will be using to do everything you can't do by yourself. For example, if you can't design, you will need to know someone who can. Chances are you will need to contact them for more than one thing over the span of your music career, so it's important you keep that person's contact details safe. Similarly, unless you have a professional recording studio in your house, you will need the contact details of somewhere to record your songs too.

You will need to contact these people at various points in your career, so even if you don't plan on talking to them every week, keep their contact details safe. As well as taking down their contact details, you may also want to make any additional notes on them such as how much their services costs, who in the company you specifically want to work with, when is the best time to meet this person or use this service, and anything else that is relevant.

- **Where You've Sent Material Off To.**
  Having the contact details of possible links and resources will be useless if you never get in contact with them. While some of these communications you make won't need to be documented, some of them will be. Let say for example you contact a community radio station, and it turns out you need to send them a demo of your music to potentially get played. As well as sending this off to them, you should also make a note of a few things. First of all, you will want to keep a record of the cover letter you sent to them. This is because you want to remember what your deal with them was, so you don't confuse it with a different one with someone else later on. Secondly, you will want to make a note of when you sent your demo, and how you did so. If you make a note of the date, you will have a rough idea of when it should reach them by, and if needed you can contact them in future to see if they got it. You will want to note how you sent it to them, so you can let them know that in case they need to chase it down.

These kinds of notes just make your music career that much easier to manage. Because you already have your cover letter written up from when you sent it to them, making a note of these additional things will take a matter of seconds to do.

- **Your Music Business Aims and Objectives.**
  When it comes to goal setting in your music career (which we looked at more in the "Setting S.M.A.R.T. Goals for Your Music Career" section of this book), it's important that you keep a note of these goals. While it can be helpful simply just thinking of a target in the first place, it becomes a lot easier to visualize where you want to be if your goal is written down and in a place you can regularly see. By creating a sheet with your goals on it and sticking it on your wall, it becomes easier to remember what you're aiming for. If you don't portray your goals like this, they can change in your mind as time goes on, and it'll become easier to lose track of your final target. So make a note of what it is you want to achieve and do in your career, and refer back to it when you need a reminder of the direction you want to head in.

- **Fan Contact Details.**
  Your fans' contact details are some of the most important bits of information you will be receiving. People these days don't give up their contact details easily, so if they do, they must really see potential in what you're offering. You will usually be getting people's contact details via them signing up to your mailing list.
in exchange for some of your songs (we look more at how to do this and why in the IMA Music Business Academy). You can also collect them in person at events and via any other means you want. If people sign up to your mailing list and you're using a email marketing service such as Aweber, you will automatically have their details saved within your account. You should back up your fans' contact details to your computer every two weeks to a month, just in case anything unexpected happens to Aweber or other email marketing service you're using. If you manually take down the contact details of your fans, you should store these details in either a text or spreadsheet file. You should record their name and contact details, as well as any other relevant info. Do they like a certain type of your music? Did you meet them at a specific type of event? Is there anything else you know about them that will help you put forward a better offer to them in future?

Once you have these people's contact details, you can contact them in future as you see fit. Email marketing to fans is one of the better ways to keep in contact with them, so give it a try.

When you think about it, all of this won't take you much time at all. It may seem like a long list and a lot to do, but bear in mind you won't have to do all of these things every day, so it'll really only take up a very small amount of your time.

All of these things will make any future inquiries you or other people have a lot easier to keep track of, and ensure you're doing what you're supposed to be doing. While you can probably get away with not record keeping when you aren't dealing with many people and aren't making any money, this will become close to impossible as your music career starts to take off. It's because of this, that I suggest you get into the habit while there's still not much to be done. This will mean you'll easily be able to manage it once business starts to pick up.

**Creating Manageable Folders**

Not only is it important to keep a record of things, but it's also important to make sure your records are well organized and easy to find. To achieve this, you need to create different folders on your computer for each of these things you need to take notes on. For example, in your "Documents" folder, you may want to create a new folder called "Music Career." As the name suggests, you can put everything to do with your music career in here. This will make everything more easily findable, as you know if you want to find anything to do with your music career, it's going to be here.

Inside that folder, you should break down things further. You could create a folder called "Audio," which you could further break down into "Finished Tracks," "Unfinished Tracks," "Instrumentals" etc. Alternatively, you could create a new folder for each project you do, and inside have an "Audio," "Artwork," "Paper Work," and any other necessary folders you need. This is the way I personally recommend you try, but you essentially need to do whatever is most comfortable for you.

Now, I want to talk a bit more about creating a "Paper Work" folder. This is a folder I suggest you create, and should be your home for any paper work you need to do that wouldn't be more suited to another folder. You can either create this folder within each individual project folder, or you can have one master Paper Work folder for all the paper work in your music career. If you have multiple projects or are planning to create multiple singles, mixtapes and albums in the future, your best bet is to go with the first option. This will make things a lot more manageable and easy to find in the long run.
In that folder, you can create the folders "Fans' Contact Details," "Useful Links" (which you can break down further into "Record Labels," "Graphic Designers," "Promoters" etc. if you wish), "Letters Sent," "Venues Need To Contact," "Musical Resume," and the like. Basically, these are folders you personally need to keep your records separate and easily locatable.

You can either use these folder ideas that I have given, or you can work them into a system that works better for you. As long as you understand your system and where everything is, that's the main thing.

Some people prefer to put everything from one project into one folder. For example if you are working on your first release, you can put all the audio, paper work, and everything else related to that in smaller folders inside that one.

Creating folders on your computer is pretty much a one time task, and you can easily add more folders if needed at a later date. It will make your record keeping a lot easier, so make sure you sort this out.

**Record Keeping Example 1**

OK, so I couldn't talk about record keeping without giving an example.

Let's say you're browsing online, and you come across the website for a place that's looking for live acts to perform at their venue. If you don't already have a relevant file, you can create one called "Potential Shows." You can put that file in the folder "Venues Need To Contact" I mentioned above, or in any other folder you create that you think will be appropriate.

You should then draw up something like the following:

**Venue Name:**

**Website:**

**Person To Contact:**

**Phone Numbers:**

**Additional Notes:**

*(E.G. What to quote when contacting them, when you need to contact them by, what kind of music they play, etc. Anything else you feel is relevant).*

You can use above example if you like as a template for this file. You can then copy and paste it as many times as you need, and fill in the gaps each time you need to add another venue.

A good idea is to also highlight each one depending on what stage you're at. So for example, if you've contacted them but nothing's come out of it, highlight the venue in red and note down why you didn't have any luck. Is it a temporary problem which will mean you could still potentially perform there in future? If so, maybe highlight it in light red.

If you've contacted them and you're awaiting a response, highlight the venue in yellow. If you've
heard from them and you've managed to get a show, highlight the venue in bright green. This is a contact you now have a relationship with, and you can hopefully use again in future. You should also go on to make a new file detailing how this relationship goes with this company, and note anything of interest which can help you get more shows with them again in the future.

**Record Keeping Example 2**

Another example is if you meet a potential collaborator when you are at a gig. You have managed to get their contact details, and you decide to talk about doing a song together. When you get home and have access to your files (or you can do it when out and about if you do your initial filing on your mobile phone), you simply open up your "Collaborations" file, create a new bullet point, and put this person's details down. It can be as quick as:

- Date:
- Name:
- Met At:
- Additional Notes: (E.G. He's a good singer, arrange to collaborate with him on that idea I have).

See how simple that was? You can even have the Date, Name, Met At and Additional Notes sections written down beforehand so you just have to fill in the blanks with each new entry.

Doing paper work doesn't have to be a long process. From when you create the initial templates (which doesn't take that long and can be done only when you need to use them) it's simply a case of filling in the gaps. That said, the information you record will be worth a lot more if it allows you to keep track of everything and manage your music career more easily.

**Paying Your Taxes and Making Things Official**

As I've mentioned about 100 times before (and for good reason, I want to drum the idea into your head ;), your music career is now your business. And guess what businesses all around the world do? That's right, pay taxes!

Now I'm not going to go into the ins and outs of paying tax. There will be a lot of different people in different countries reading this book, and tax laws and amounts vary from country to country. That said, I do want to let you know how important it is to get properly in line with the tax system in your country.

A lot of self employed musicians don't think they have to worry about taxes. As there are a lot of opportunities to get paid cash in hand or via websites which don't require your tax details, it becomes something which many think is easily avoidable. This is the wrong attitude to have.

Think about it, would you go into setting up a retail shop and decide you're going to avoid paying the right amount of tax? No, as you know you have the potential to get fined a lot of money if you're caught. Would you set up any other kind of business without paying tax? No, you wouldn't. So why do it for your music career?

The excuse I often hear is, " But I'm not making much money from my music yet. " To be honest, that excuse simply isn't good enough! If money is turning over in your business (whether you're
profitable or not) you should get it on the records just to cover your back. After all, the last thing you want is the tax man catching up with you after ‘X' amount of time and fining you a large sum of money. I've seen this happen to people before, and in most cases it drastically hampered their lifestyle at the time.

Even if you aren't making a profit from your music career yet, it's still a good idea to get tax registered so you can get used to the process as soon as possible. The last thing you want to do is start paying tax when you're making good profit, make a mistake along the way, and have the tax men take away more money then they need to. So get the practice starting now.

I wish I could go into this subject more thoroughly, but the tax laws and procedures vary from country to country. With that said, I suggest you go on to search about how tax laws work where you are. Most likely you will have to set up as a sole proprietor or as self employed, so do a search and find out what you need to do.

When it comes to actually earning money in your music career, make sure you hold a certain percentage of any profit you make in a separate bank account which you can use to pay off your taxes when necessary. This will mean you have that money sitting there, and will definitely be able to cover your yearly tax fee when it comes to collection time.

This bank account should not be touched for any other reason no matter what. Even if you feel like you're low on money one month, leave it be. When you work for a company, they automatically take your tax money away each month and you manage to survive without it. Do the same for yourself: take the money away right now, and put it where you won't be tempted to touch it.

While it's not one of the most fun tasks in the music industry, getting taxes sorted is vitally important. So make sure you get it sorted sooner rather then later.

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**Getting Fans to Become Part of Your Journey**

As I'm sure you know, you fan base is one of the most important parts of your musical journey. After all, it's your fans who you're providing your music to, and it's your fans who will largely determine how successful you are. Even if you get big DJs to play you, if the fans don't like what they hear, they simply won't buy into you.

There are two approaches you can take when it comes to dealing with fans:

1. You can distance yourself from them (E.G. Not interact with them on your social networking sites) to intentionally put a barrier between them you. This is so it feels like you're unreachable, and therefore at a higher level. You're someone that is admired from a distance.

2. You can talk to your fans over social networking sites and build up a personal relationship with them.

In all honesty, both methods can work. When you fan base is still quite small, though, and you need to do everything you can to get and keep fans, I suggest you go with the second method.

When you embrace fans and communicate with them on their level, they will start to grow a bond
with you. You're no longer someone they're looking at from afar (and will most likely eventually get bored of); you're a friend with talent that they will want to help succeed. You're not just another one of the many musicians out there; you're someone special to them, and they're on your team.

Without ongoing interaction, people easily get bored. With so many other things on the internet fighting for their attention, if you don't do things to stay in fans' minds, you quite simply won't. It's because of this, that you need to do what you can to make sure people that show interest keep coming back for more.

**How to Interact with Your Fan Base**

Here are some ways you can go above and beyond to interact with your fan base. These things won't take up too much of your time, but can make a real difference when it comes to how many people turn into your long-term fans.

- **Ask for Their Opinions.**
  One of the easiest ways to get people to feel a real part of your music career, is to ask them for their opinions. It's a simple thing to do, but it can make people feel so special.
  By asking them to give you ideas for your songs, what they think about your new outfit, or what they particularly like about a song of yours, you're showing them that their opinion matters. When people feel like they matter, they become more enthusiastic about the topic.
  Show your fans they're really important by listening to and thanking them for their opinion.

- **Give Them an Exclusive Membership Area.**
  One method that I'm a big proponent of is giving your fans access to an exclusive membership club. This is an area on your website that allows people to sign up and receive exclusive goodies from you that they won't be able to get if they aren't a member.
  You can give out a free membership where they get, say, two new updates a month. You can then also have a paid membership where they get 4 or more new updates a month, plus access to valuable content that the free members don't see.
  They benefit for them is that they get a lot of content that other people don't get (when something is "exclusive," they have bragging rights and will feel more involved with you). The benefit to you is you either get an email address from your "free" members (which you can then use to contact them in future and get them interested in other things you're doing), and payments/contact details from your paid members.
  Setting up your own membership site is one of those things you should do close to when you first set up a base online. We show you how to do this in the IMA Music Business Academy, so check it out if you want more information on that.

- **Interacting on Social Networking Sites.**
  One of the easiest ways you can interact with fans is to talk to them on social networking sites. For example, if you have a Facebook or Twitter page, when your fans message you, you can reply to them and show them this is a two way relationship.
  I'd advise you to encourage your fans to interact with you publicly on your wall, rather than via private messaging. This will give social proof to anyone that comes to your page for the first time, and shows that you're popular and people want to interact with you. This will give people the impression you're worth talking to, and in turn they will be more tempted to get involved.
  When people private message you, this same sort of social proof isn't displayed. You'll also spend longer replying to people individually, rather than addressing an issue to everyone all
Running Competitions.
While you won't want to do this all the time as its effectiveness will be decreased, you will occasionally want to run a competition for your fans to get involved with. While you can do a smaller prize such as winning a copy of your EP or new single, why not occasionally offer something of real value? For example, as a one off, you could run a competition for someone to be featured on one of your songs. This could be in terms of a verse if they're talented enough, or in terms of a talking spot in an introduction or outro. Alternatively, why not run a prize where they can meet you for lunch?
Whatever you decide, be sure to have enough people you can reach before you run this type of competition. If you can't let enough people know about it, you won't get many people entering and it might not be worth your time. One of the main reasons to run competitions is to gain exposure, and if you won't be able to achieve this, it may not be worth doing at the moment.

Conclusion
And that's it for now. I hope the Independent Musician's Survival Guide has given you a good introduction on how you should be operating your music career. Other than a lack of talent, one of the biggest reasons musicians fail is because they don't know how to act in certain situations.

We're not taught how to navigate the music industry in school. And even when learning through trial and error, it's easy to get things wrong, but think you're doing things right because you're seeing small results. But who's to say you wouldn't see better results by going down a proven path instead?

I hope we've given you a lot to think about in this guide, and have helped you see your music career in a different way.

Now that you have a good idea on how you should approach a number of situations in the music industry, other than perfecting your talent, the next stage is to learn how to effectively market your music. As you'll remember from the above section entitled "The Importance of Marketing Your Music," if you don't market your music enough and correctly, it's practically impossible to get known and make money from your music career.

Marketing is the process of raising awareness of your music; if no one knows about it, how are they going to go on to buy it and tell their friends about how great it is?

If you want to learn how to effectively market your music, check out the IMA Music Business Academy. This is a course that has been set up by myself, Shaun Letang, and is one that has helped hundreds of musicians take their music career to the next level.

You can see a full list of the things you'll learn in the Academy by clicking here.

Once again, I hope this book has helped you realize what it takes to hold your own as an independent musician. Believe it or not, if you've fully read through this guide, you now have a much better understanding of what it takes to succeed in the music industry than the majority of musicians out there. Now it's just up to you to put into practice what you've learned.
If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review and let other people know this book is worth picking up. This will not only help others see this book is worth getting, but you'll also be doing me a favor and encouraging me to get more helpful information out there for you and others to use.

For more great music industry advice, check out my website Music Industry How To. Here you will see a bunch of useful guides and tools that will help music industry figures of all sorts. I look forward to our next encounter.

Shaun
The IMA Music Business Academy
Music Industry How To
As a bonus section for you, I decided to get some additional advice from other respected music bloggers and advisers. Given the lead 'My Best Advice For The Independent Musician Is...' here is what they came up with.

Christine Infanger at Thirty Roses:

Treat your music career with the same amount of seriousness you would any other career path. Were you to embark on a career in law, accounting, finance, management, or marketing, it would never occur to you to flippant about your job. The thing to remember is this; your job as a musician involves each of the things previously mentioned – law, accounting, finance, management, and marketing. While it isn't necessary to have degrees in each, or any of those things to achieve success in the music industry, it is necessary to stay abreast of how each of them impacts your career. Working as a solo artist or within the structure of a band, working with a manager or not, it's imperative to the success and longevity of your career to understand that you have to do a few things to actually be a professional musician.

Always remember how much you love music, this will make the business "stuff” that you'd rather not deal with more tolerable. As much as you may not want to address finding a publicist, looking for managers, or talking to booking agents, these are the people who are going to help you more than anyone. Of course you'd rather be writing, recording, or performing, but without the business types and their expertise, you're not getting out of the garage or the local pub. Learn from professionals and their experience. Learn how to take constructive criticism and use it to improve and grow artistically. Remember, you're paying people for their experience and professional opinions. While you may think that an electronic glockenspiel with a train whistle solo is exactly what your track needs, the producer you're working with can probably draw from his fifteen year career to guide you in a different direction. Don't take it as a personal affront; try to approach it from a different angle and see what you can come up with.

Also remember, you have to spend money. Whether it's a manager, a PR agent, a publicist, or marketing do not expect to get by without spending any money on assistance.

So many artists spend thousands of dollars on gear, studio time, a producer (if not several), and an engineer (if not several) to make a record. Then a rather funny thing happens; they refuse to spend any money promoting it.

Does it matter how good your record is if it sits in a bunch on boxes in your drummer's garage? Does it matter who you got to master your album if no one is downloading it? Of course not!

If artists aren't going to invest the money in properly promoting the record, it's pointless to even record it.

Hiring a PR firm, marketing agent, or assembling some other kind of promotional team is essential.

While there is certainly a degree of promotion that artists can (and should) do themselves, they can't do everything themselves and need to have a proper team in place to handle radio, social media, and set up tour support the way that only people who specialize in such things will know how to do.
The internet and its myriad of social networking sites allow artists constant access to their fans. While many think this can be a hindrance, it's also a wonderful tool. Not only does it allow artists the opportunity to interact with fans whenever they have a spare moment, it also lets them ask fans directly for assistance if needed.

While this interaction may be more difficult for solo artists, sending Facebook messages, tweets on Twitter, or messages on any other social media site, fans love interacting with artists they love. A quick note to your fans will go a long way and they will remember that for a long time to come. In a band setting, each member can devote a few minutes each day to replying to messages. Solo artists can do this as well; they just won't reply to as many people.

People always promote music, usually unwittingly. If a person gets a reply from an artist, especially an up and coming artist, they'll be very eager to help that artist when they need a favor.

It takes little effort for fans to send "Retweets" about upcoming gigs, casting calls for video shoots, share Facebook posts about host cities for house concerts, moderate your message board, or help you set up a street team.

Fans are often more than happy to help out your hand if you show them a bit of interaction and all you have to pay them with is an advance copy of your latest record and the occasional guest list spot when you're in their city.

The key to success in any industry is networking and utilizing the people and resources available to achieve the best results possible. In music this seems to be especially true and it's very fortunate that there are resources available all around.

Always remember, the more solid the business foundation, the longer your music career will be, and take full advantage of those willing to help you.

By Christine Infanger at Thirty Roses (@norabarnacle).

**Chris Rockett at Music Marketing Classroom:**

First ask yourself: Who would like your music the best?

Then find out who has already built an audience of those type of people.

Finally work out how you can convince the people with an audience to spread the word about what you're doing.

A package of free music works well, or offering a commission on your music sales.

You're looking for people who run popular blogs, interesting websites, YouTube video producers, Facebook pages and cool Twitter folk.
Basically go where the hits are and then divert them to a page where you can collect contact details and follow up with these new fans.

It will still take a massive amount of effort though, so get ready for a fight.

And anyone who tells your otherwise is DRUNK!

Ask yourself every day...

What have I done today to connect with people who would be into my music?

And what have I done to be cool to the fans who are already on my list?

By Chris Rockett, founder of Music Marketing Classroom.

Want More?

“Educate yourself about what it takes to get where you want to go. Study successful people, as success leaves clues. Get a mentor that will inspire and motivate you.”

Stefano Ashbridge.

For more great music industry and music business advice, check out Music Industry How To. Make sure you sign up as a free member to get access to all the guides and our exclusive music business newsletter.

If you're ready to learn the business and marketing side of things, check out the IMA Music Business Academy.

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