

Business Tips for Independent Recording Artists

Small Steps – Steady Wins the Race

Small steps! As an Independent Artist, you must visualize and then set your own path. You should know what your ultimate objective is and keep it in your sights. Perhaps more importantly, however, you should focus on your long term plan and break down the process of arriving there into realistic steps. Your goals will be easier to reach if you design a good "baby step" plan and follow it through. Here are some ways to apply this approach to various aspects of your project.

Project Planning/Management

Let's face it, talent, unfortunately, is not as much a factor of "success" in the music business as are perseverance and professionalism. We've all heard major label artists, even pop icons, singing and playing out of key. I truly believe that anyone with a fair amount of talent and ambition can become a self-employed artist. Use the baby step approach, one step at a time. Getting your first gig, even if you have to play for free, is the start. Now that the first show is over, what is next? Maybe play a gig at "Club XYZ"? Work on it! Then, maybe, put out a record. Then, maybe, get more shows farther away from home. Then start touring! It sounds easy, I know, and it can be. If you don't expect instant money and "success", then you will grow into your career. Artists that focus on "getting signed" become stagnant and their music often becomes less appealing than growth oriented artists. Both of these examples are basically going through the same motions, except, one is experiencing "success" by having realistic goals and reaching them. The other is experiencing failure because of not getting signed - perception is everything! Image will only take you so far and will fade quickly. Genuine artists endure the long haul!

Recording and Mastering

You can apply the small step plan to your recording project also. Focus on each part of each song and build it from there. Think in terms of one song at a time, one instrument at a time, one note at a time. If you don't plan your recordings this way, I promise that you will find players and parts that clash in the studio and this will cost you more money and may compromise the final results. Multitrack recording is like examining your work under a high-powered microscope. Plan it out and make your efforts the best they can be. If every player knows what they are going to play during every moment of each song, the recording will be better. Surprisingly, many artists don't realize that it takes many, many hours to make a three minute song sound great on record.

Package Design and Mass Production

Don't be afraid to start thinking about the design of your record early on in the project. Take advantage of photo opportunities as you go along. Develop a concept for artwork as you are developing a concept for the music. Almost every successful album has a theme. Choosing the right songs and artwork will provide you with a cohesive package. It's harder to market a record that is stylistically all over the map. If you want to show the world what a diverse artist you are, I'd suggest waiting until you have a few albums and a decent fan base under your belt. A focused and cohesive album will be easier for fans to attach to. Your fans can appreciate your versatility later, as they grow into you as an artist.

Distribution and Promotion

Engage your fans! Update your web site, give away merchandise, make record store appearances, be creative in this way also. Take the time to appreciate the people who are paying the bills - the fans! Have a web site and update it frequently to keep it fresh. Keep your fans informed. Mailing lists are one of the best tools for keeping you at the forefront of your fans minds. Have a mailing list sign-up form on your web site. Also have a sign up sheet at gigs. You'd be surprised how quickly you can build a huge fan list just getting one contact at a time. As an artist you are, like it or not, a business, and the fans are your customers. These are people that are behind you, don't let them slip away. If you treat your fans like they are special, they will return the favor.