



February

Music P.R. - what to do and what not to do

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You've recorded your debut EP/single, you've played some supports, are setting up a headline tour, the MySpace is up and running, you're building a fan-base and you're thinking maybe, just maybe, we could do this music thing and actually make a living....

Next step?

Well, you need to get people talking about you, start building your profile. If people are talking about you, they will check out your MySpace, listen to your songs, come to your gigs, tell their mates, download tracks and so the ball begins to roll..

Though online is the new vital component for building profile, the traditional mediums remain the most important element in a publicity campaign for any band: TV, radio and press.

If you really feel you're ready to share your music with the world, then you need to gather a few basic materials and make the right first impression.

Press Release/Biography

With any new band, biographies should be kept short and sweet. Media are not interested in the gig you played in your Granny's living room when you were twelve, nor do they care that you entered the charts at No. 82 with your first band. They are only concerned with information that will be of interest to their readers/listeners/viewers - how the band got together, roles within the band, any decent supports and headlines that you've played, interesting music people you've met, interesting things that have happened to your band members and any positive comments from other media. One page is plenty. Make sure that the most important information is in the first paragraph – the band name, where you come from, the title of your release, the date of the release, what kind of music you make, any gigs you have coming up and your website or MySpace details. Remember to put contact details for the band on the press release too.

Before sending it out, quadruple check that the writing, the grammar and the spelling are correct! Press releases that is written wrong with bad grammer and lots of mistakes will end up in the bin along with your cd....

Photos

Often overlooked, photos are probably the most important publicity tools after the music. A good photo will get your band many more column inches than the best press release/biography in the world. Check out your favourite bands' websites, take a look at their promotional photographs, copy the set ups if needs be. Print media will only take colour photos, so whilst black and white shots may make you look better, they're no use to newspapers and magazines. All print outlets take photos in j-peg format now. Just make sure that your photos are high-resolution print quality, which means 300dpi (look it up!). Be creative, it's not rocket science!

Website/MySpace

All music industry discussion at the moment centres on the world of web: online sales, digital, e-commerce, blogging etc... Online is no longer the way of the future, but the way of the present. It is vital that all bands have a solid web presence. More and more acts are coming to prominence through online activity and A&R people are using online resources as their first point of contact with new music. Make sure to keep your online presence relevant and updated. It is imperative that your band takes responsibility for developing online communication. Word of mouth is the most honest and enduring part of building a bands profile.

Video

There are a good number of programmes on Irish TV that show videos, so it's worth considering making one. Bands do not need to spend hard earned cash trying to re-create The Matrix. A brilliant idea and a decent camcorder can go a long way. Just remember that while many stations will accept DVDs, some will look for Beta tapes, so it's best to have one ready. The quality of a beta tape broadcast is much better than DVD in any case.

THE CD

The first piece of music you send out to media is like the CV you would send when applying for a job. You wouldn't write it on the back of a beer-mat and send it to your prospective employer in a second hand envelope. If you did, it would presumably end up in the bin. Preparing your music to send out to media should be looked at in much the same vein...

Tracklisting

Make sure that the lead track is the one most likely to appeal to DJs. They have so many CDs to listen to, if you can catch their ear on first play, then you stand a much better chance of getting a track played.

Timing

As a general rule, songs that are over four minutes long will not get a lot of play on radio. They don't fit into the radio hour formula, which mixes sixty minutes of music, chat and ad breaks. Ideally you should aim for three and a half minutes maximum. If you have to make a radio edit, then do it! If your guitarist wants to sulk about his three-minute opening solo being axed, sack him!

Packaging

The best way to ensure that your release will be greeted by the bottom of the bin, is to send in a totally rubbish CDR, with the info written in black marker on the disk. People! Remember, media receive approximately thirty CDs PER DAY. They don't have the time to listen to them all, and the first round to get chucked are the 'black marker' CD's. Make your CD look like a real single/EP release and make sure to sticker the back of the CD with the release dates and any upcoming gigs, so that DJ's have something on hand to plug for you if they play your track.

WHO TO SEND IT TO

There is no point sending a rock CD to a DJ that only plays hip-hop. Not only is it a waste of time and money for you, it's also insulting to the DJ that you haven't bothered to check out their show and know what they play. The Hot Press Yearbook is a great resource for music media in Ireland, listing key contacts at national and regional TV, radio and press.

Radio wise, you should start off at local level. Community and college radio is a great place to start, followed by regional radio. For instance, if your band is based in Cork, you should research which shows on Cork radio support new Irish music. Fortunately, most radio stations across the country have programmes dedicated to new Irish music. All of the Dublin stations, along with the national stations, have new Irish or alternative music shows.

On the press side of things, again start with college and community papers and magazines, then connect with local press. All counties have multiple print outlets and most have local entertainment sections. Many regional papers and magazines have dedicated music pages. It's the same with national print media, each and every one runs music related articles, from CD reviews to gig previews, in-depth interviews to Q&A features.

All Irish TV stations host shows where videos can be shown or bands can perform. Research music bookers on each show and send them on your CD. Find out who programmes the videos and submit a copy along with your press release.

While getting a national media platform can be difficult, and is usually the point where many bands feel they need to hire independent PR, if you have done the work at local level, in the city or town where you live, you will have made a good start.

A handful of properly placed CDs will achieve an awful lot more than sending out 500 copies to the world and its' missus.

Get googling, get a contact sheet going and start building your own media database.

HOW TO FOLLOW UP

Do follow up with the media you have serviced with a CD. A short, polite email will suffice. It's OK to ask what they think of the track. Some will get back to you, some won't, that's just the way it goes. This is where PR people can make a difference – they have already developed good working relationships with the media and they should be able to secure responses from all of their contacts.

Do NOT become a stalker! If a DJ, journalist or music booker hasn't come back to you within a fortnight, send one more email, politely asking if they have the time would they mind letting you

know what they think. If you don't hear from them, leave it. In fairness, if they were interested they would have been back to you by now. The last thing you want to incur is stalker status with media. You could easily ruin your reputation with simple over enthusiasm. Let it go!

If you do get a response and it's positive, thank them for their support and enquire if they might be interested in having your band to perform on their show, in studio to do a radio session or if they might write up a small profile piece in their column etc..

If you do get a response and it's negative, take it on the chin! You are going to need these media people again in the future and there is no point in burning your bridges. If someone has taken the time to listen to your music and give you an honest opinion, it's far more worthwhile than all your mates assuring you that you're on the way to outselling Pink Floyd.

LONG TERM PLAN

A good PR campaign for any band should be a long term, well thought out plan, which takes into account all single/EP and album release dates. A bit of media coverage here and there and then silence for a long period of time will not have the kind of sustained effect required to keep a band in the minds of either media or public.

If the plan is to follow the single/EP release with an album release, always bear in mind that the majority of national media will only feature a band once over an extended period of time, so if The Irish Times are offering you the cover of The Ticket or Tubridy Tonight are offering you a performance around the release of your single, you will most likely not be considered for this again for at least 12 months. In this instance, you would be better off holding out for these opportunities for around the time of your album release, when you have something to physically sell in record stores.

BE HONEST!

The most important rule to remember in communicating with all media is to be HONEST. You may think that telling a journo that 'Mick' invited you to play Slane with The Stones or that you had a near death experience with five Arcade Fire band members on the LUAS is a good PR move - it's not! Never! Not ever, ever! The music business in Ireland, and indeed the world, is a very, very small community. The truth will always out and you and your band will be branded sad losers forever more. The only species with a memory to match that of an elephant, is a music journalist – they truly never forget. If you have to resort to making up stories to get your band noticed, then you're music is probably muck and you should continue to practice your karaoke.

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www.entertainmentarchitects.ie / www.myspace.com/entertainmentarchitects