

A Guide To Self-Promotion For Independent Artists

Our guide to self-promotion is a comprehensive bible that's packed with tips and tricks to help get your music heard.

Don't be under the illusion that other artists are getting everything handed to them on a silver platter.

While our DIY distribution service provides independent artists with everything they need to get their music selling and streaming in all the right places, it's not likely to get heard much if you don't know how to promote your music.

The downside of it being easier than ever to get your music out there is that there's never been more competition for people's ears.

That means you need to work every angle to make sure they hear the music you've worked so hard on.

Table of contents

Two golden rules p. 4

The Pre Game

- How to approach self promotion p. 5
- Positioning and tone of voice p. 5-6
- Research p. 7

Getting started with self promotion

- Press Kit p. 8
- Picking up nad registering your channels p. 9
- Tools p. 10

Promoting yourself on your own social media channels

- Getting on top of social media p. 11
- Post types p. 12
- Interacting with others p. 13
- Building an email list p. 13
- Social adversting p. 14

Promote yourself on other people's channels

- Making first contact p. 15
- Getting your music on Spotify Playlists, YouTube Channels and SoundCloud premieres p. 16
- Getting your music featured by the press p. 17
- Getting your music on the radio p. 17

Planning a release strategy

- The big announcement p. 19
- Press, radio and premieres p. 19
- The video p. 20
- Counting down p. 20
- Release day p. 21
- Keep pushing p. 21
- Final thoughts p. 22

Two Golden Rules

- 1. Never been afraid to ask. It's surprising how much you can get if you just ask for it, and don't be under the illusion that other artists are getting everything handed to them on a silver platter.

 Whether you're asking forconsideration as a support act for a gig, or asking for someone's email address, the worst that can happen is that they say 'no.'
 - 2. Never underestimate the power of a personal, face-to-face meeting. Just meeting someone once is much likely to make them more up for working with your or helping with you than if you've only had an email relationship. So get out there in the real world and network until you can't network no more!

The Pre Game

How to approach self-promotion

You need to give promotion the same graft and attention that you do to all the other elements of your musical career. There's no shame in pushing yourself. All of the greats had to do it at some point, to some degree.

What's more, the days of simply submitting demos and getting signed or getting discovered at a gig are largely gone. As we said already, with so much more music being released these days, ears are in high demand — and that goes for the label A&Rs

who sign artists too. With rare exceptions, it's not enough to simply be talented and have some great tracks. Decision makers want to see that you have a following or some hype already. Labels want to see that fanbase. vou have a growing

Radio playlisters want to see you are generating noise with online tastemakers.

Until you can afford your own press team, you need to be the one making this happen.

Positioning and tone of voice

It's all about finding the ways in which you are comfortable promoting yourself. For example, not everyone wants to share every moment of their lives on social media, and that's fine. It's about figuring out how to have a presence and how to promote your music without feeling crass.

Write down your answers to the following:

- 1. Which other artists do you want to be viewed like or on the same line-ups as?
- 2. Which festivals do you want to play at?
- 3. Which press titles, websites and blogs do you want to appear on?
- 4. Which label do you want to get signed to?

The clearer picture you have of all of this, the more cohesive your promotional activities will be.

"It's best just to be yourself, be natural and let your personality shine through."



Once you've sussed that, the next element to figure out is your tone of voice for your own channels — i.e. in your social media, email newsletters and website.

It's best just to be yourself, be natural and let your personality shine through as people tend to connect best with something that feels genuine and personal.

But if you are more of a shy type who likes to let the music do the talking, then that's fine too.

You don't have to talk about your innermost feelings and post photos of everything you're doing.

There are other ways to connect with your audience and let them into your world, like posting about your musical influences or the music that's currently inspiring you.

Whatever you do, the most important thing is to always promote your new music and gigs and find a way to build a regular connection with your audience.

Research

You should be constantly learning about the scene you want to be in and the wider music industry. You need to know how things got to where they are, where they're at and where they're going.

There are thousands of books and free articles and podcasts out there that can help you understand more about how to promote yourself and how you can make inroads into the industry. The more you know and the sooner you know it, the better. It's also important to keep on top of the ever-changing world of social media and online marketing.

Some of our favourite resources to help you with all of this are:

'How Music Works' - an industry-standard book for any aspiring musician, written by Talking Heads legend, David Byrne.

Red Bull Music Academy: Couch Wisdom podcast

- a superb collection of in-depth interviews with some of the biggest stars in music about how they got to where they are, from Drake producer Boi-1da to Björk.

Complete Music Update - a daily music industry email newsletter (which also has a jobs section in case you are looking for other paid work in the industry while you build your musical career).

Music Ally - similar topics to Complete Music Update but a bit more nitty-gritty on the inner workings of the industry.

<u>TechCrunch</u> - their social media section is good for keeping up-to-date with feature updates and upcoming changes on all the key platforms





Getting started with promotion

Press Kit

Good promotion starts with a solid press kit. This is a link that you can send to press, blogs,

- a biography
- high-resolution photos of you or your band and logos if you have any
- links to your social channels, music and videos
- key press cuttings.

It should be a one-stop shop that gives someone a complete overview of what you're about and why they should care. Also don't forget to put your contact details in your bio!

If you're a good writer, there's no shame in writing your own biography. It can feel a bit weird writing about yourself, but at least you know you're going to say all the right things. Otherwise, think about whether you have any writer friends who you could call in a favour from, do a skill swap with or pay a little money to write it for you.

The same goes for photos. Ultimately all of this is a good investment, so if you need to pay for these assets, it's worth doing. Just make sure you shop around and find someone whose style you are into. Make sure you get 5-10 good photos in a variety of styles and dimensions(landscape, portrait, square). It's better to get simple, clear photos rather than stressing yourself out over anything too conceptual — or if you do have a creative idea, make sure you get some straight-up ones too.

Your press kit should be easily accessible as a link you can quickly share or reel off to someone as easily as you would give them a business card (too old school!). Create a clearly labelled press kit folder on your computer, put your (also clearly labelled) bits in it, and upload the folder as it is or as a compressed .zip file to Dropbox, Google Drive or similar. Then use a link shortening service like bit.ly to create a customised link that's easy to remember - e.g. bit.ly/mybandnamepresskit

etting started with promotion

Picking up and registering your channels

Even if you're not sure you're going to have the time to post on every major channel, it's worth at least trying to reserve your preferred username on each channel and filling out the profile details, uploading your pic and so on. It's best not to spread yourself too thinly and just stick to the main channels, and maybe decide which is going to be your 'hero' channel where you focus most of your energies. The way to figure this out is by asking yourself: if I could only havefollowers on one channel, which would it be?



"There are countless success stories of artists who have built a career through amassing their own fan base without external help."

Tools

There are lots of useful platforms, websites and apps that can help make managing your online presence much easier and more efficient.

Hootsuite and **Tweetdeck** are great for scheduling content on Instagram and Twitter respectively.

<u>Canva</u> is the go to web app for designing slick looking artwork of any kind, with loads of great templates and fonts (the mobile version isn't very easy to use, though).

<u>Sounds</u> lets you quickly create 15-second clips of YouTube, Spotify and SoundCloud uploads for free to save to your camera roll for uploading.

Hypeddit lets you create 'fan gates' where people have to take certain actions to download one of your tracks for free — such as following you or reposting your track.

Bandcamp also allows you to offer free tracks in exchange for emailaddresses.

<u>Bit.ly</u> is a free link shortening service that lets you create unique URLs so you can see which of your activities and channels are getting the most people clicking.

<u>Linkfire</u> lets you create a landing page link that contains multiple links to your music on several different platforms. This means you can just share one link on your social media on release day and people can then pick their preferred listening platform on the page it directs them too.

<u>SoundCloud</u> is still the most user-friendly way of sending people private links to your tracks for listening and downloading.

<u>Songkick</u> and <u>Bandsintown</u> are the leading gig listing services which put the shows you add to them in dozens of places across the web. Songkick's placements include integration with your Spotify and SoundCloud artist pages (you have to connect the latter manually). They also offer widgets to install on your website and social media channels, saving you from having to update several places at once.

<u>Squarespace</u> is the go-to service for building your own slick-looking website. You can find cheaper options, but you won't find one that's easier or more intuitive to use.

<u>Mailchimp</u> has become the industry leader for sending out professional looking email newsletters, and has lots of powerful options for optimizing your mailouts.

Promoting yourself on your own channels

This is where you have control over how and when you promote yourself. Make sure you use your own channels to their fullest advantage instead of relying on getting discovered by a blog or tastemaker. There are countless successstories of artist who have built a career through amassing their own fan base without external help.

Getting on top of social media

Frequency and consistency are key with social media. If you're the forgetful type, set yourself a daily reminder to post on your chosen channels. Better yet, if you have the time, use some of the scheduling services mentioned in the previous Tools section to plan out your week of content ahead as much as possible. Don't forget to leave some gaps or flexibility for real-time, spontaneous content. If you've got a release coming up, write down a rough week-by-week plan of what you'll be posting to make sure you've got all bases covered (more on that later).

Social media experts talk about 'hygiene' and 'hero' content. 'Hygiene' means your day-to-day, ticking over posts — stuff to keep people engaged with your world. 'Hero' content means your releases, videos, tour dates — anything big that people are really going to get excited about. It's important to have this steady stream of 'hygiene' content along with regular 'hero' spikes.



Post types

More specifically, you should think about what your content 'pillars' or 'buckets' are on social. These are the different themes you have to play with that fit in with what you do and can help you come up with posts ideas when you're feeling stuck. Some examples:

- -Behind-the-scenes / backstage photos
- -Rehearsal / studio work-in-progress videos
- -Inspiring music from others
- -Articles or podcasts you find interesting about music and other musicians
- -Ticket / guestlist giveaways for your shows
- -Questions / polls for your audience to answer e.g. what track would you like me to cover / remix?
- -Reviews of your tracks or gigs
- -Playlists that include your tracks
- -A live stream Q&A with your fans

Another nice way to build some consistent engagement is to have weekly post types, much like #ThrowbackThursdays. You can play with these existing social media trends or create your own. It could be that you post a track that's inspired you every Wednesday, or create a new playlist of your favourite music of the week on a Saturday, or post a new video blog every Monday letting people know about your weekend gigs or rehearsals. If you can think of areally unique type of regular post that no-one else is doing and will stand out visually in people's social feeds, you're on to a winner.



Interacting with others

The more you interact with your fans and other artists you like, the more visibility you will have. Until you're so big you can't keep up with the amount of messages you get, reply to your fans comments and questions and show your appreciation for their appreciation.

Comment and like other artists' posts. Interact with posts from your favourite promoters, festivals, labels, blogs and websites. Make connections with other artists online and in the flesh at gigs and ask them for repost / retweet swaps so you cross-promote each others' music to your respective audiences.

Building relationships like these can be really crucial and could even lead to support slots.

Building an email list

It's important not to solely rely on building up your social media presence to promote yourself. Although it is overwhelmingly the most important area, it's also wise to build up your own email list so that you are not only at the mercy of algorithms and having to always pay to promote your posts.

All good build-your-own-website and mailing list providers give you ways to capture email addresses through sign-up forms that you can embed on your website or host on a unique link.

Bandcamp and fan-gate services like **Hypeddit** allow you to offer free downloads in exchange for email addresses.

However you capture your emails, make sure the method you are using complies with the recently introduced <u>GDPR</u> changes. As a rule of thumb, it's a good idea to use a service which uses 'double opt-in' where the user will be sent a confirmation link to click after they or you have added them to your mailing list.

Try not to email your list more than once a month, and only email them when you have something important to say or promote. As it's a more 'invasive' form of communication, you want to keep it for those special occasions.

Social Advertising

It's not secret that if you want to reach significant numbers of fans on Facebook these days, you're usually going to have to pay to use their advertising service.

Used in the right way, social media advertising can be incredibly effective and give you a good return on your investment. It's worth getting to know

<u>Facebook / Instagram's Ad Manager</u> and experimenting with a small budget when you have important things to announce like a new tour or gig.

"Used in the right way, social media advertising can be incredibly effective and give you a good return on your investment."

The first step is to figure out what your priority is.

Is it driving streams and followers on Spotify?

Is it selling tickets for your gig? Have a clear objective in mind.

Then think about who you want to target.

What age range are they?

Where do they live?

Are they fans of yours already or do you want to target fans of similar sounding bigger bands?

Ad Manager lets your target very specific groups of people.

You could, for example, target 18-21 year olds who live within a two-mile radius of the venue you're playing at who are fans of Radiohead and don't already like your page. It's very powerful stuff, and you can use it for everything from selling a product to building an email list.

Promote yourself on other people's channels

Getting exposure on blogs, websites and radio can be hard work — and sometimes disheartening when you're not getting any results or replies to your messages. But it's crucial to persevere and to put the hours in. If you believe in your music and you keep striving to improve it, there will be others out there who are into what you do.

Step one is figuring out who they are.Step two is figuring out how to contact them.And step three is to keep on contacting them until they show some interest!

Making first contact

As we said before, do you research and figure out which platforms you want exposure on. Build a spreadsheet of contact details to build up as you go along, and build groups in your email provider to easily mass mail different people like promoters, journalists etc. Don't forget, though, that the personal touch is always optimal and is likely to get better results — even if it does take longer.

Next, it's all about finding that crucial email address for someone. <u>Hunter.io</u> is an excellent place to start, allowing you to search email addresses on a specific domain e.g. yourfavouritelabel.com. It scours the web to find all instances of name@yourfavouritelabel.com. At the very least, this usually lets you see what the format of email address in that company are e.g.

firstname.lastname@yourfavouritelabel.com or firstname@yourfavouritelabel.com. So if you know the person's name, you can usually figure out their email in this way.

<u>Twitter</u> and <u>LinkedIn</u> are also goldmines for contact building and reaching out to people, as are <u>Instagram</u> DMs.

<u>Facebook</u> Fan Pages often have email addresses listed in their About sections and often have private messaging functions turned on.

You might be surprised how often people will reply to unsolicited, personally addressed emails if you write a polite and professional request to them.

Getting your music on Spotify Playlists, YouTube Channels and SoundCloud premieres

Where press and radio once held all the power — and more recently blogs — it's these three platforms that really hold the key for the emergence and rise of new music these days. Again, it's about first identifying the channels you want your music featured on. Then it's a case of trying to find contact details for each. Check profile sections, playlist descriptions, About sections — or in the case of SoundCloud, use the direct messaging function.



If and when you manage to get these contact details, make sure you regularly update your favourite channels with news of your music when you post it or release it. For Spotify, you could send them a preview of your track before it comes out and then remind them when it drops on release day. On YouTube and SoundCloud, you can offer premieres of your new tracks in advance of their release.

There's some useful information about how playlists work on Spotify and how to promote yourself on SoundCloud which make for essential reading.

On all three platforms, the more plays your tracks get and the more user playlists they are in, the more likely they are to get recommended to other listeners through the platform's own algorithms. So it pays to get as much engagement on your tracks as possible to try and drive this knock-on effect.

Getting your music featured by the press

When courting the press — online and print journalists and bloggers — it's important to choose your targets carefully. Try to be selective and only send your music to people and platforms that it's relevant to. Do some research to establish which writers cover the sort of artists you like, and send them new music whenever you release something. If you're playing a gig near them, hit them up and offer to put them on the guestlist for the show without them needing to do a review of it. They may not be able to offer you immediate column inches, but if you can get them at your show to check out what you do, it could reap benefits in the long term.

<u>Submithub</u> is a useful resource for contacting bloggers, allowing you to submit your music to blogs which cover music similar to yours. It even includes a field when submitting music where you have to mention other artists that your music sounds like so that bloggers can easily find stuff they might be into in their crowded inbox. Again, be specific here and don't dupe people. Beware though: you have to buy credits to submit music to most blogs worth their salt on here. But some blogs only accept submissions through it, so it's worth looking into.

Getting your music on the radio

You're looking for two things when it comes to radio: contact details for the presenter themself, and for their show producer. Their producer is often the person who sources, sorts and curates a lot of the music that features in the show, and as they are often more accessible, they may be your best route in.

When it comes to a publicly-funded organisation like the BBC in the UK, much of their content is produced by external production companies, so do your research on them to see if you can find out which company makes your favouriteshow and then try and find the show producer through their general email address or by searching for "company name" "producer" "LinkedIn". Pay particular attention to new music shows on your favourite radio station, and consider local radio as a good route in if you can't make any headwayat national stations.

Some people like to make a 'fake' email address on their own domain to use to contact press, radio and promoters so it looks like they have a manager or someone helping them with press. It's up to you whether you want to go down this route, but it can give an air of professionality.

Planning a release strategy

Spinnup can take care of getting your music into all the best stores and streaming services. But to squeeze the most out of your music, you need to have a solid release strategy that takes you from the announcement of the release through to the release day itself through to pushing it in the weeks that follow. wlf you can create a checklist to go through for every release, you'll ensure that no stone is left unturned.

"To squeeze the most out of your music, you need to have a solid release strategy."



The big announcement

Once you've decided on your release date, you should start teasing details out to your fans. If you've scheduled your release through a distribution service like Spinnup, you should already have your artwork — which is usually what people use to announce an upcoming release. You could also share a short teaser clip / video with a snippet of the track, but some people like to save that for aseparate follow-up post.

Press, radio and premieres

Once you've announced the news to your fans, your next port of call is letting press and radio know it's upcoming. You'll probably want to include a private streaming and download link of your track, but don't forget to specify if there's a certain date it's not allowed to be played on radio before. Generally speaking, it's best to only send out music when it's OK for everyone receiving it to start playing it immediately. Whether or not you want anyone playing the track before it's released is another thing, however. It's not uncommon these days for tracks to only be sent out to press and radio once they are released.

Now is the time to decide whether you want to give anyone a first play premiere of your track. Typically you could have two or three different premieres: one on radio and one or two online (some blogs only use SoundCloud, some only use YouTube, some use both) one on radio and one or two online (some blogs only use SoundCloud, some only use YouTube, some use both). The benefit of premieres is that your music will be pushed to these platforms' audiences in exchange for the exclusive content. For online premieres, always ask for a pre-order link to be included in the copy. It's best to create this with a link shortening service like bit.ly so you can see how effective it's been. You should also ask them to include details of any upcoming gigs you have — likewise for radio premieres.

The video

Creating some visuals to go with your music is always a good idea, even if it's something pretty simple and lo-fi. Maybe you have a friend with a camera who could help you create something. Maybe you just get creative with your phone and some free editing apps and make something simple but effective. Or maybe you have a little money that you want to invest into creatingsomething that really fits with your vision for the track. Just remember not to break the bank! Whatever it is, it's crucial to have a video format of your track, even if it's as a simple as the track playing alongside its artwork.

In terms of releasing the video, many artists choose to put it out after the track has been released — unlike the old days when videos promoted the song ahead of its release in a similar way to radio. So you can always take your time with it and use the video to give yourself a second spike in promotion later on. and use the video to give yourself a second spike in promotion later on.

Counting down

You'll need to find a variety of interesting ways to keep up engagement about your upcoming track on your channels in the run-up to release date.

A few ideas include:

- Posting lyrics
- Posting teaser clips
- Posting track premieres (if you have arranged any)
- Giving insights into how the track was made
- Sharing music or playlists that inspired your track's creation
- Posting pre-order links from different stores
- Posting a live version of the track
- Sharing press feedback about or reviews of the track
- Creating a competition around the track

(e.g. share the artwork for a chance to win gig tickets)

- Sharing pictures of you holding the physical release (if there is one!)

Release day

On release day, make a Linkfire or similar landing page and plug in your various store links into it so you can share one link and your fans can choose which service they want to listen on. Post it with a video clip of the track inviting people to click on to listen in full.

Make sure you post on all your key social networks, update your biographies / profile sections with the listen link and update your cover photos with the new artwork if you didn't already.

Send out an email newsletter to your fanbase driving them to listen to the new track.

If you've found some email addresses for relevant Spotify playlists, send them the link to the release and ask them to consider it for inclusion.

Ask your friends and family to listen to your track on their preferred streaming service and to save it to their collection or a playlist. If you're feeling extra cheeky you could also ask them to share your post on their social networks.

You could also host a live stream event where you play the track and other music for your fans.

"Promotion shouldn't stop after your release date."

Keep pushing

Promotion shouldn't stop after your release date. You have to keep the ball rolling if you want your new track to do well. Keep your fans updated with any news about it — more reviews, radio plays, playlist inclusions and so on. If there are remixes to follow, they will give you another chance to push the track. Don't overdo it, but if there's something new to share, keep the promotional wagon rolling by all means.

Final thoughts

As with anything in life, you get out what you put in with promotion. If all you're going to do is post about your new track on release day and you're quiet the rest of the time, you're not going to see the benefit.

Take the time and effort to promote yourself properly and you'll reap the rewards.

Remember that it's a long game. No matter what it seems like, almost no-one actually had the overnight success that they would appear to have done. There's usually years of hard graft and pushing behind any successful artist. Until you get discovered, signed and all the rest, no-one else is going to promote you. It's down to you.

There have never been more free tools to help you promote your music. Take the time to learn about them and to find your place in world of promotion. It doesn't come naturally to everyone, but with a little determination and patience, even the most promo-shy can get to grips with pushing themselves.



SPINNUP

spinnup.com