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The Self-Promoting Musician

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Chapter 12

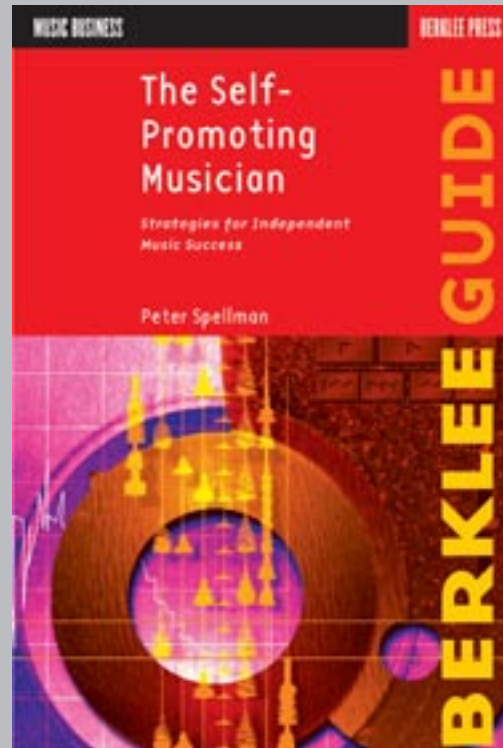
Twelve Things You Can Do to Get
the Most Out of Every Gig

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Twelve Things You Can Do to Get the Most Out of Every Gig

One of the keys to music business success is the ability to maximize limited resources. This simply means making the most of the time, money and effort available to promote your career. Though your resources may be meager, it's what you do with them that really counts.

This principle applies to every aspect of a musician's life, but I want to focus on just one of them: *How to get the most out of every gig you play.*

Gigs are one of the most potential-rich avenues for bands and musicians in terms of networking and exposure, yet few take full advantage of the opportunities they present. *Each gig should be seen as an occasion for expansion of your music and performing skills, your fan base, your media contacts and industry relationships, etc.* What follows are 12 ways to get the most out of every gig.

Things to Do Before the Show

You've just booked a gig at a new club and it's two months away. Let's look at some of the things you can do now to maximize this performance before, during and after the show.

1. *Find out all you can about the room you're going to play.* Know the stage size, what times bands are expected to sound check and to begin and end playing and whether or not there's a dressing room. Find out about the sound and lighting system, if it's provided, and talk to the engineers. If possible, ask other bands who have played the room for tips and pointers. Remember, you're there to perform a show, not worry about all these details. Get the right information before the gig and you'll have that much less anxiety during the gig.

2. *Rehearse your show straight through as if it were the real thing.* Pay attention to your stage presence as well as your stage sound. Practice any movements or dance steps you're planning to use at the gig. You may also want to hold a full dress rehearsal and have someone snap some Polaroids or shoot a low-budget video of the group to see what the audience will see. This is always educational (and often humbling!). Remember, you're trying to make the most of this gig.
3. *Publicize the show.* Print up a bunch of flyers with all pertinent information, including contact number. You're competing with a lot of other events so you want your flyer to stand out. Use colorful paper and eye-catching graphics. Seek the advice of a friend who's an artist or go the extra distance and have a professional create a killer gig poster for your act, leaving a blank space at the bottom for all relevant info. Once you have your flyer in-hand, it's time to send it out. First, send it to all your fans, your primary support base. Second, send it to all music writers in the local media. To obtain this information, visit the reference librarian at your public library. Tell them what you need and you'll be directed to a number of useful directories. Two particularly good ones are *Gale's Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media*, which lists over 36,000 print and broadcast media, and the *Broadcasting Yearbook*, covering radio, TV, and cable outlets in the United States and Canada.

Write down all dailies, weeklies, and monthlies within a 10-mile radius of where your show will happen. Your list should include music publications as well as mainstream press. Chances are you've already started such a list but you want it to be as comprehensive as possible. Jot down phone numbers as well as addresses. You'll want to call each publication to find out two things: first, the name of the arts and entertainment editor to whom you will send your notice, and second, how much "lead time" the publication needs for printing a concert listing (i.e., when you need to send in your listing for it to be printed before your show). For more insights into working the media, see chapter 13, "Media Power: Creating a Music Publicity Plan that Works."

You'll also want to send a good photo of your act, if available. Your gig listing will receive a hundred times more attention with a photo. It's worth

the extra expense. Make it as easy as possible for the editor to use the photo by finding out the exact specifications required for photo submissions when you call about the other items.

The next list you want to assemble is that of local radio. Most stations have local concert listings as part of their news segment and you'll want to target a flyer to each. Be sure the station receives your notice at least a week before the show. If the gig is extra-special (i.e., a high-profile showcase room), you may also want to send out personal invitations and free tickets to local music industry representatives (record execs, booking agents, personal managers, entertainment attorneys, radio personnel, etc.). Remember, think *maximization*.

Besides your mailings, you'll also want to post your flyers in music stores, hangouts, inside the venue (don't forget the bathroom stalls!) and on all community bulletin boards in the area.

If you want to save money on the mailings, you can have your flyer reduced to one-quarter its size (from 8½" × 11" to 4 ¼" × 5 ½") and printed on postcard stock. This lowers your postal rate about 21 cents per piece. If you're doing huge mailings on a monthly basis, check with the post office about a "bulk-mailing permit" for additional savings.

Things to Do During the Gig

At last, the night has arrived. You walk into the club, greet the sound and lighting engineers (you already know each other), park your belongings in the appropriate space, and proceed to set up on the familiar stage. Smooth. Now here are a few more things you can do to make tonight's show a standout:

4. *Have a banner with the band's logo* hung up behind the act, high enough to be easily read by all (for banner sources, see Further Resources at the end of this chapter). You'd be surprised how many people will see and hear your act and never know who you are. A visible banner solves that problem.
5. Place "*table tents*" with band information (read, "hype") and gig schedules on each table around the club. Use sturdy, postcard stock for best results.

6. *Set up a visible area for merchandise* (T-shirts, tapes, CDs, etc.). The person (non-band member) running the merchandising can also oversee the new fan mailing list. Be sure there's plenty of writing instruments and paper on-hand.
7. Have plenty of *business cards* with a contact person's name and number in the pockets of all band members and support crew. Distribute them liberally.
8. When you're on stage, remember to *make your show visually as well as aurally stimulating*. You're on display and all your clothing, colors, movements and lines should blend with the music you're playing. Give the people what they want—a feast of sight and sound. This is an essential part of “working the crowd.”

Things to Do After the Gig

You just had a great gig! Congratulations. A lot more people know about you now than before this evening. There's a small buzz brewing and now it's time to follow it up.

9. But first, before you leave the club, *try to secure another gig* with the owner while you're fresh in his mind. At the very least, seek a verbal commitment and call within a few days to confirm and formalize it.
10. Before leaving the club *make sure the dressing room is in the same condition as that in which you found it*. While this may sound trite, it's a basic human consideration and will speak well of your act.
11. *Strike while it's hot!* As soon as possible, follow-up on any industry contacts made at the gig. Call and thank them for coming to the show. Build rapport. Network.
12. Finally, *send a personal letter to all new fans*, thanking them for coming to the show and informing them further about the band and other ways they can support you (for example, calling club owners, calling radio stations to request your song, purchasing your music at local retail outlets, telling their friends about you, etc.).

Of course, you can forget about all the above suggestions and just play the gig. After all, you're musicians and that's what you do best. Granted.

But more and more, we are seeing the smarter bands being brought home because they know how to organize publicity, work the radio, boost promotion, and generally maximize and optimize their limited resources. After all, why should one gig equal *one* when it can equal *ten*? Maximization is the key. Go for it!

Further Resources

BANNERS

Bannerama, Waltham, MA, 617-899-4744.

The Banner Barn, 800-537-7469.

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Crucial do-it-yourself strategies. Tips for writing business plans and press kits, using the Internet for promotion, customizing demos, getting played on radio, and a comprehensive musician's resource list.



Making Music Make Money: An Insider's Guide to Becoming Your Own Publisher

Eric Beall, Vice President, Creative at Sony/ATV Music, helps songwriters traverse the intricate maze, pitfalls, and obstacles surrounding music publishing.



The Future of Music: Manifesto for a Digital Revolution

The record industry as we know it is dying. But the music industry is healthier and more vibrant than ever, with limitless possibilities for change and growth due to the Internet and the digitization of music. Discover how you can benefit from the explosion in digital music.



Getting Signed! An Insider's Guide to the Record Industry

Former Rykodisc President George Howard will show you the importance of connecting. Connecting with the right songs, connecting with the industry, and connecting with the right label will all help you connect with your audience.

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