

***Shares.com***

## Impressive Promo Kits (with Valuable Tips on Dealing with Printers and Artists)

First impressions are crucial in the music industry. Bands and solo artists are made or broken on the basis of a first impression. Though this may seem unfair (often it is), the competitive nature of today's music business has resulted in an expectation of higher and higher standards from a band's presentation of itself. Today a band must grab attention and hold it. If you miss your first chance, you've blown it.

This is why putting together a winning press (or promo) kit is crucial. This kit can be viewed as your *graphic ambassador*, the one that goes before you, representing your music and act to the world. With such rich resources available today, in terms of printing and graphics, a contemporary promo kit should be nothing less than a visual feast leading the recipient step-by-step to the audio feast—your music.

The promo kit should be a tightly constructed sales pitch. There should be no confusion about what kind of band you are. Image must be crystal clear—it needs to shine through all the separate parts of the package, unifying printed, photographic, and audio materials. In fact, it is advisable that when constructing your kit you begin with the photo. Use it as the tone-setter for the entire project.

This will, of course, mean a significant financial outlay. High quality promo kits could end up costing anywhere between five and eight dollars per piece. Go for quality. Don't compromise! Be patient. Your high-quality act deserves high-quality representation. If you send out a half-baked kit expect a half-baked response, or even none at all.

A good thing to remember when assembling your presentations is that standout creativity is in short supply. The presentation of your image and essence is a tremendous opportunity to express your uniqueness and pique the imagination of your audience.

In this chapter we will look at each item that goes into a winning promo kit. Since printing and graphics are such a large part of the project, we'll conclude with some helpful tips on dealing with printers and artists. But first, who might want your promo kit?

## **Where Your Promo Kit Goes**

You'll be sending your promo kit to three main groups of people that can help your career:

**1. ENTERTAINMENT BUYERS.** These can include club owners, booking agents, festival and fair coordinators, private party organizers, and student activities directors at schools and colleges.

**2. MEDIA CONTACTS.** These can include music magazine editors and writers, entertainment editors in the mainstream press, radio station music directors and key DJ's, and television and video music buyers.

**3. INDUSTRY CONTACTS.** These can include A&R (Artist and Repertoire) representatives from record companies, music publishers, multi-media producers, entertainment lawyers, and record pool directors.

Each group will require a certain slant that can be conveyed effectively in your cover letter. Kits going to clubs and colleges will want to stress the group's following and its powerful stage show. Those aimed at record labels will want to underline the band's staying power, original sound and success at selling records.

## **What Makes Up a Winning Promo Kit?**

What does an attention-getting promo kit look like? Put yourself in the place of the one receiving your kit. They are likely to see its components in this order:

**1. MAILING ENVELOPE.** This is the first thing one sees. Avoid the typical brown manila envelope and go for some color. There are a lot more options available today than a short time ago. Check out a good office supply catalog for suggestions (a good one is available from Quill Office Supply; 1-800-789-1331). Also send for "Paper Direct's" catalog of very funky (and pricey) paper products. Call 1-800-A-PAPERS.

**2. FOLDER WITH STICKER LOGO.** This is the next thing to greet the eye. Again go for something unique. School report folders are also pretty typical. Try something marbled or metallic, or perhaps a granite look to it. Go for glossy. Your logo will provide the first direct contact with your act's image and the graphic cue that unites your whole package. Office supply houses are again the place to look.

**3. PHOTO.** When the folder is opened there are a number of items a person can grab. Chances are the photo will be the first to catch their eye. Again, go for quality. Hire a pro and look for a "package deal" that includes a three-roll shoot and printed 8"x10" glossies of your photo with logo and contact information. If you can get three or four usable pictures per roll from your shoot, you're ahead of the game. It helps to get a lot of input from people you respect before choosing the photo for your kit.

**4. DEMO TAPE.** At this point the kit recipient will probably fish out the tape and pop it in the cassette player. Your demo should contain no more than three tunes with your best one up front. Have them duplicated professionally with creative graphics and all pertinent information printed on both the cassette label and (if included) the cassette case "j" card. Don't forget to put your contact address and phone number on the tape.

Don't send shrink-wrapped tapes. It's better for the environment and easier for the listener to just open and play. Local duplication packages can be found in local music mags or you can call a complete CD, LP and tape production house like Discmakers in New Jersey (for a free catalog call 1-800-468-9353). Should you send a full-length CD? Not for demo purposes. Most people will not have a conveniently located CD player to play it on. Most expect tapes. It's a good idea to call and ask which format is preferred.

**5. COVER LETTER.** Here's the personal touch. A sincere individual letter works better than a form letter. Introduce yourself and your act. Be concise and make it professional (grammatically correct and typed on good bond paper with letterhead). Ideally, use a word processor so you can use mass mailing software and personalize each letter with just a few keystrokes. You don't even need to own your own computer to do this. There are plenty of word processor services listed in the Yellow Pages or your local classifieds. Call and compare prices. There's probably someone in your own neighborhood who can

help with this. Chains like Kinko's are another option. They have computers (both Macs and PCs) and software programs available to the public for an hourly charge.

**6. ARTIST OR BAND BIO (GRAPHY).** Give a brief history of the act and what the near future holds. The bio should be short (one page), neat and professionally written. It should reflect your musical identity, originality and style of music. Use a professional writer if you can possibly afford one (local music publications are, again, a good source). While its content should be true, you should present yourself as a likely candidate for success. Don't lie, but don't be afraid to exaggerate a bit either, because the people reading your promo kit will assume you did anyway! While preparing your bio, keep in mind the print media (magazine and newspaper writers) who will be receiving your kit. Well-written, creative sentences are often scooped up and reproduced whole from bios, saving time and getting your point across. Finally, since you want to be able to use the same bio over and over again, don't date it or link it to any particular record release. By all means, drop names. Pump it up!

**7. BUSINESS CARD/ROLODEX CARD.** This can be inserted in the pre-cut slot on the folder's inside pocket (make sure the folders you purchase have this feature). Most businesses use Rolodexes for fast retrieval and, again, you want to make it as easy as possible for those you contact to reach you. Some good deals on business cards can be found in "The Business Book," (for a catalog call 1-800-558-0220).

These are the seven *essential* items that should be in every promo kit. If your kit lacks anything from the above list, you're selling yourself short. They are the minimum daily requirement for your basic promo kit.

There are also a number of additional non-essential items that can make your kit stand out from the rest. These include:

**8. GIG SCHEDULE.** This lets people know you're getting around and where they can catch your act. Complimentary to this is a "Where We've Been" list, telling them where you've played—kind of a musical employment record.

**9. RADIO AND PRESS QUOTES.** Once you have a new release, you can send it around to music magazines for review. Hopefully you'll get good reviews! Then you can pull quotes from the review and use them for further

promotion. Likewise with radio. You can include a "DJ Response Card" with your release, leaving a space on the card for comments. Any positive comments can also be pulled and used for promotion. This can lend your act additional credibility and assure the recipient that you're not just tooting your own horn, others are too!

**10. SONG LIST.** If you're sending your kit to an agent, school, or private party organizer, and you do some cover tunes as well as originals, it's a good idea to send a song list. These potential buyers look for both originality and familiarity when hiring talent. Well-selected covers go a long way towards getting you work, especially at schools and private parties.

**11. VIDEO.** A picture is worth a thousand words. But before you start enclosing expensive videos in your promo kit, make sure you have a standout product. If you want to use your video for simply making your act more attractive to entertainment buyers, then a low-budget shoot of your live performance or an in-studio, lip-synched shoot will be all you need. Expect to spend anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,500 for a full ten-minute production. If your plan is to sell your video in stores, air it in clubs and/or get it on music television programs, then you should expect to spend upwards of \$5,000 or more. Needless to say, those unfamiliar with video production should work with professionals from the planning stage onward. For some video producer contacts consult *The Yellow Pages of Rock*. Be sure to get references and talk to other bands about who they've used for their video shoots.

**12. PROMOTIONAL NOVELTIES.** Here is probably the ultimate way to make your promo kit memorable. Enclose an object with your name printed on it that's slightly off the beaten path. A creative button, or bumper sticker, or maybe a mock ticket to your band's performance at Madison Square Garden! I remember Pink Floyd enclosing an inflatable pink plastic cow udder in their promotion to radio in the early seventies. A little brainstorming can result in some great, untried ideas. There are a number of companies with catalogs available to stimulate your thinking on this. Check the Yellow Pages under "Advertising Specialties."