

How to Get Fans For Your Band (or book, start-up, app, whatever)

by Lavinia Ludlow

You're finally in a band that can get through a rehearsal without someone strangling someone with an amp cord over creative differences. No one's in jail, rehab, or MIA from a multi-day booze binge. The group has laid down a few quality tracks that don't sound as if it was recorded in someone's mom's poorly soundproofed attic (or basement, if you're not on the West Coast), and maybe you have a few respectable gigs lined up at local clubs in the coming months. So how does your aspiring local band kick start the promo train so that you don't step on stage and see an empty stadium staring back at you?

HOW TO KILL BUZZ AND LOSE FANS

- Guilt-trip every person in your family including in-laws into buying thirty copies of your album. Not only will this fail to generate buzz but everyone is still seething at your middle/high school self for pressuring them into buying candy bars and catalog junk so you could fundraise for your class trip to Disneyland.
- Stand on Market Street pushing your album to tourists, FiDi suits, and SoMa engineers. People would much rather take and immediately toss the flyer of the guy hustling lunch specials.
- Flyer every flat surface around town from construction walls, bus benches, trash cans, and telephone poles. Not only will no one care, but it leads to a sad graveyard of staples and decaying detritus.

To succeed, promote through engagement by leveraging your local community:

- Hit the places you frequent whether coffee houses, smoke shops, speakeasies, or corner stores and see if years of your loyal patronage buy real estate on their counter or check-out lanes for a stack of small band flyers or stickers.
- Maybe those coffee houses and speakeasies have open mic night, and sure, they're hit or miss, but this is a low-key and low-pressure means of networking with the locals who will ultimately be the greatest local disseminators of your band.
- Stop hoping Live 105 will respond to all those emails you sent them about your cool local band. Instead, research the indie local radio waves. Colleges often broadcast on their own channels or they secure a few hours a week on local radio station. Request an interview combined with a few minutes of airplay for your best track.

UNDERSTANDING THAT DEEP DOWN, PEOPLE DIG FREE SHIT.

- Host giveaways to generate buzz but also to engage your audience: "If you listen to our sample track and comment below, you'll be entered to win what-have-you (a free album, a free download, our show's cover charge)" or "Come out and see us play live tonight. We'll buy drinks for the first (number) people to introduce themselves to us."
- Send out newsletters to your email followers. Keep them updated on your band's schedule, news, and other tidbits that might be culturally relevant to your audience. Just be mindful of frequency so your readers aren't gunning for the "unsubscribe" button.

(SOCIAL) NETWORKING LIKE A MOFO

- If you're not on the obvious social media sites like LastFM, YouTube, WordPress, and Facebook, you're missing out on huge networking and publicity opportunities. You're in the Bay Area, for Christ's sake, leverage just how inbred-ed-ly connected this tech-soaked region is. People wanna hear

your music and see you play live shows but most of the time they're eyeballs are glued to their phones or computer screens.

- That being said, we all know social media is a beast, and at times, a huge source of white noise so target and engage your followers and friends responsibly and personalize the messages whenever possible. Tweet AT them. Like, share, or comment on THEIR Facebook posts. Nothing like annoying everybody with an incessant stream of your band's updates and news. You know those people who post minute-by-minute baby pictures and status updates? Or post pictures of every snack, drink, and meal they have on their month-long vacation? Don't be that guy/girl. Also, try to refrain from being that overzealous political spammer who tweets up a frenzy whenever a presidential candidate says something dumb. You have a limited amount of news feed airplay before people start clicking "see fewer posts from this group" or "unfollow."
- Don't mass blast other bands and musicians asking them to help promote you. They're trying to keep their own heads afloat in an attention-deficit society. Instead, strike up a symbiotic relationship. Participate in or host a podcast with multiple local artists. Have them tell you their story. Tell them yours. Engage in a two-way dialogue or a roundtable, and take audience-submitted questions. Share the stage together (just don't get into an ego-fight over who's opening for who...) You'll cast a wider net and connect with a broader audience.
- Reach out to culture mags (just like this one!) and indie 'zines, and ask them to review your album. You will probably want to query with a letter of introduction first so you're not sending your materials into oblivion. My favorites include Spectrum Culture, Indie Music Review, which does everything from album reviews to shows, singles, and

videos, and Razorcake, which features a variety of other media like comics, interviews, and book reviews.

A final note: be authentic, kind, and operate with integrity. Until you're as big as Van Halen, no brown M&M tantrums. Don't insult the audience, spit at the front row, or hurl beer bottles or equipment across the venue (especially if you're too broke to buy new stuff or deal with a lawsuit). A big part of creating buzz is keeping the fans you have, and not just performing but acting in a manner that encourages people to see your next show and buy your forthcoming album

See you out there on the stage. And if you're looking for more sage advice on this, checkout my novel ***Single Stroke Seven*** (2016), it explores the lives of independent artists coming of age in perilous economic conditions.

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