

## A new strategy for your music

I have attended numerous events with titles such as "Which Brand Fits Your Band" or "How To Get Your Song on TV", where experts talk about the right color for a CD sleeve, how to wine and dine music supervisors or how to use social media. After events like this, musicians go out and spend money for promotion and spend more time on the internet than with their band or instrument. The end result is they find themselves at exactly the same place a year later.

Maybe it is not time yet to use your last cash to master your songs, hire a publicist, get more photos, shoot a video, etc... All products need the right photos, packaging and campaign to be successful. However, these steps make sense only if you actually have a working product. Unfortunately, even the most talented artists and bands usually do not have that product.

Before anyone could just record at home, bands played their songs hundreds of times in rehearsals and on stage. It took real people in a real room. The songs grew and changed with the band, and there was time for feedback and fine-tuning. In an ideal scenario a band would bring their best songs to the studio, where a producer would work with the band to get these songs in even better shape. A good producer would not only record what was handed to him, but provide input on instrumentation, performance and storytelling. An experienced arranger could add a little magic by writing a delicate string arrangement echoing the melody. A good recording engineer would then track the songs and mix the music, while the producer kept his eye on the bigger picture.

Today, it is often one person in a bedroom studio recording an unpolished idea and then trying to immediately push it into the market. There is no time to mature, no feedback and no pool of experts.

So when I meet an artist who is struggling to get placements or develop his or her career, I always encounter exactly the same issue: the material is simply not good enough.

Often the songs contain great ideas, but vocal phrasing, arrangement and harmonic control (to list just a few points) are not up to a professional standard. To this day, I have not heard a single "homemade" ballad with a solid string arrangement. Yet almost all the ballads on the radio have solid string arrangements.

**Your songs are the core of all your plans as an artist. They deserve the best. They deserve more attention.**

Your favorite singer or artist might be a great performer, but the reason the material sounds polished and "finished" is because of the team of experts behind each song. You will see the same producers, arrangers and engineers on a number of successful albums for a reason - because they are the experts your favorite artist needs and trusts.

I will never be a great singer and I need someone better than me to sing my songs. Chances are you need someone who understands songwriting and production better than you in order to get your material to the next level.

I don't want to compete with people who focus full-time on developing their voice and stage persona. So why would you want to compete with people who have developed their craft full-time over many years? Just like I get help from a singer, you can get help to get your material in shape. An artist needs grooming and objective feedback. This is why bands such as U2 and Coldplay rely on Brian Eno for conceptual thinking, Daniel Lanois for musicianship, two engineers and a string arranger.

Here is my recipe for quality:

Go back to the standard process before home recording. Perform your songs, let them mature, do demos and build a team.

From a producer's standpoint, it takes a thorough pre-production with an artist who is willing to polish every note, regardless of whether this process is outside of his or her comfort zone. It also takes an artist who is willing to fight for a vision and at the same time understands that good communication is all about the listener. Both artist and producer need to be open to trying new things and to keep going until both are pleased with the result.

To sum it up:

Save your money. Do not book a studio (yet), do not print 1000 CDs, do not hire a publicist and do not spend the time you should be practicing using social media to promote your unfinished product. Spend your money to study songwriting and composition and / or work with someone who has the training, a solid track record as a songwriter and who has successfully coached and produced artists. This might cost some money, but the up-front costs will save you time and money in the long run.

Once you have developed a number of songs that are so well-written and tight that they work in a simple acoustic form, you can take the next step and create a detailed demo. After all the issues are ironed out and you have all the parts arranged, you can enter a studio or start the real recording.

All social media, CD sleeves and band pics come after that.

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