



# 10 KEY STEPS YOU MUST TAKE TO SUCCEED IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS

MAKE IT IN MUSIC  
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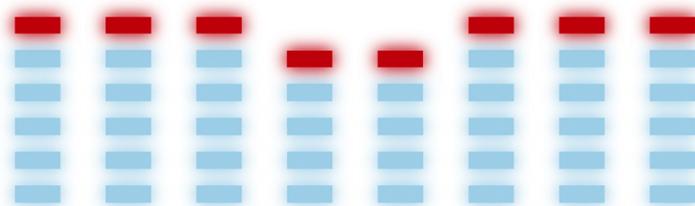
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Published By



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## Who are Make It In Music?

Make It In Music ('MiiM') is a Music Industry Resource Company set up by Ian Clifford, ably assisted by Amanda McGowan. Between them they have 30 years of frontline global Music Industry experience.

After working tirelessly to find, develop and hone young talent for many years, it became glaringly obvious to them that the young hopefuls always had the same questions and always made the same mistakes in their quest for fame and fortune.

That quest has only become harder in the last few years with the turmoil caused by the extended death throes of the long-serving Artist and Record Company model. Nobody knows quite how the explosion of the digital age in the Music Industry (downloading, social networking, the death of the CD etc) will play out. There are theories and there are potential new models, but for now, the future is clouded.

It was always difficult, in any age, to get a band together, learn to write and play, and then attract enough attention to get a shot at success. It's even harder now that the record companies have less money and even less room for manoeuvre. But....there are now some truly feasible alternative ways to reach your future fans and even ways to financially sustain yourself outside of the record company model.

Some bad, and a little good then – but the same things remain true whether you try to go it alone or look to get signed. You need to work out how to be good enough and you need to find a fanbase.

It's the lessons that the founders can impart to help in that quest that led to the creation of MiiM. Having worked as a music lawyer, artist and producer/songwriter manager, record label owner, music publisher, promoter and more, there are few things that Ian hasn't seen in the Music Business. With No.1 records on both sides of the Atlantic and first hand experience in Rock, Pop, Indie, Hip-Hop and Dance (and even a little folk!) that knowledge can be transcribed to any artist in any genre. From a technical legal starting point, through the creative process, making the record and ultimately marketing it and the band to the public, they can share their knowledge of all of it.

Amanda has more than one degree in Psychology – an immensely helpful training both in dealing with artists and also in understanding what makes people become fans. Years of on-the-road touring and street team marketing, both in the moshpit and at the front edge of the digital frontier, make the value of her insight to any emerging artist incalculable.

The aim of Make It In Music is to bring you all the information, resources and help that you need to succeed in the Music Business – and they can walk the walk, not just talk the talk. To your success!

You can find the first brilliant resource, all about using the power of MySpace to promote your music, here - [Make it on MySpace](#).

# “10 KEY steps you MUST take to SUCCEED in the Music Business”

- By Ian Clifford

When I set out to write this short guide, I had to think long and hard about what I wanted and needed to say. My hope was that this would find its way into the hands of people who had massive self-belief and drive and just wanted to make music and wanted that to be their life. The last thing I wanted it to do was to put them off, but, at the same time, I really did want to inject a dose of realism so that hopefully they would heed some of the advice and avoid possibly wasting years going down fruitless paths.

This is not a thorough guide nor is it a handbook to follow. We hope to offer more of that as the website develops over time. This is instead a random collection of thoughts and quick titbits of advice, distilled from hundreds of first meetings with singers, bands, writers, DJ's, producers, players and other assorted musical tramps that have found their way into our offices with a highly prized demo clutched in their youthful eager fingers.

All too often, in most of those meetings (99 of every 100, if truth be told) the honest advice to the hopeful should have been a very harsh “Give it up”, “You’re just not good enough” or the like. But every aspiring artist just can’t hear those words. They wouldn’t believe it - they have too much self-belief. So, usually what ensued was the same kind of question and answer session with pretty much the same answers given out from our side. Many of these have stayed the same from time immemorial and some are newer responses brought on by the changes that are sweeping through the Music Business today.

Just a thought – this guide is not about how to enter a TV ‘talent’ competition, get ten weeks promotion for your debut single and then get cast aside and have no hope of career resurrection. We will talk about that another time, but this guide is about the quest for success on your own terms, not those of some TV executive.

The guide is also, by necessity, a little heavy on the side of commercial success rather than artistic fulfilment. You need too see that from the perspective of an industry veteran. It is honourable and fine by me for you to wish to make music and be recognised for your talent and greatness on your terms. *And* it can be that very dedication to your true path that sees you praised and adored, just because you stayed true. *But*, this guide is about what you *need* to do to give yourself the very best chance of success. I've seen this done a lot and I know that ***it is*** possible to compromise and make commercially sensible decisions ***without*** sacrificing your artistic integrity. So where I am recommending something, some kind of action or step that you think undermines that integrity, remember where I am coming from, and go as far as you feel comfortable and no further. But remember, that inability to take that extra step may be what condemns you to fail to break through and achieve your potential.

With all that said, I've got enough time to throw down the ten tips that I think are most important right now – let's see where that gets us.

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*Once you have read the guide, we'd be really grateful if you would find the time to post a comment on the introductory thread at [Our Blog](#). We really do value all the feedback and comments that we get whether they are supportive or not!*

# **THE 10 KEY STEPS**

- 1. Have some Talent & Learn How to Write a Great Song**
- 2. “Be Young and Beautiful....**
- 3. The Drive vs. Talent Curve**
- 4. Use Web 2.0 to the Max!**
- 5. Understand Your Elevator Pitch**
- 6. Don’t push Against the Tide**
- 7. Perform and Build Buzz**
- 8. Network like Crazy, but Location comes before Representation**
- 9. Build your own Career and look for a Deal *at the Same Time!***
- 10. Don’t Quit, but maybe Shake It Up**

### **1. Have some Talent & learn How to Write a Great Song**

This is the golden rule. Make no bones about it – without this you may as well pack it in now and go and do something much more sensible.

Two of the greatest pieces of advice I was ever given in this industry were about songs:

- (i) All the greatest songs are either basically ‘I Love You’ or ‘I Hate You / Don’t Need You / Am Better Off Without You’ etc; and
- (ii) There are very, very, very few *great* songs and most bands / acts / artists only have one, or a handful, and that can sustain them for a career.

These are two pretty strong but simple, perhaps even obvious, statements but they need clarification and a pinch of salt for all their brilliance.

On the first point, if you look at your national music chart I guarantee that more than half the Top 40 or 20 or Hot 100 or whatever you have where you live, will be essentially conforming to that ‘I love you / I hate you’ paradigm. If you include general self-empowerment (such as Queen’s ‘We are the Champions’ or ‘Eye of the Tiger’ by Survivor), I’ll bet it’s more like two-thirds. Not all of them will have an obvious title containing ‘love’ or ‘hate’ words but the basic lyrical theme will be on that topic. In fact, although the direct approach can be very effective, in most cases a modern songsmith will have tried to work that sentiment into a simile or a story or the like. What this statement is really saying is that great songs are about human emotion – they describe it and they tap into that in the listener. So, look for old and *new* ways to write and sing about raw human emotion.

Of course, the exception proves the rule and there are some almightily huge smash-hit songs that do not fit that narrow set, but the majority do. Learn from that. Go and check out [Billboard’s All-time top 100](#). Sobering reading if you don’t like writing songs about that most basic human emotion!

On the second point, I must agree. If you look at a career band once they have made four or five albums, you are likely going to see something around 50 to 75 songs that they have recorded and

released. How many of them are poor, how many are average, how many are good, how many are very good and how many are truly great? If the band have a significant career, you are unlikely to count many songs that are poor, most will be average, some will be good, a few will be very good and a handful (quite literally perhaps 5, or one per album) will be truly great. It's such a hard thing to define, but being truly great must mean that it's a song that emotionally connects, moves you on a basic level and is so hooky that it's in your head all day long. You know when you hear one, but they are hard to capture, hard to define, and *crucially*, really bloody hard to write!

But you can see that it really can take just one *great* song to break a band or act, and one per album from then on is enough to sustain the career momentum. If that is backed up with a bunch of very good songs, then even better. Sometimes an act who are huge worldwide will release an album that hasn't got any great songs but their momentum will carry them through until the next one – and that had better have something worthy on it!

So, make sure to keep both of these statements in mind when you're writing your songs.

But how do you actually know if you've got talent, and how much, and how do you go about learning to write great songs? Well, I'm sorry but I don't have all the definitive answers to those very important questions. Like I said, I know when I hear one, but I'm the manager / impresario / whatever in this equation – I'm afraid I'm not the songwriter.

I can tell you what I have learned though and we'll be looking into it in more detail in our newsletter and [Our Blog](#).

Don't set out at the start of your musical journey trying to write a hit song. You need to do some practice and it's going to take time. What people forget is that songwriting is a craft. It is only in popular music that we expect our artists to be at their creative peak when they are barely out of their teens - see what I say later on about the whole issue of age! In all other areas of art - writing, painting, classical composing, photography, film-making, jazz composition and performance, sculpting etc - the artist is not expected to reach their peak until middle age or even later. A lot of this has to do with pop, rock and hip-hop being a young man's game, but it does put great expectations on young shoulders.

So, like any craft, experience and learning are key. You should study hit songs and try to take them apart and see why they emotionally touch you and why they work. You should try and identify the tricks of the trade. And then, later, you should set your toolkit to work at writing great songs.

Rick Rubin (he's worked with everyone – Beastie Boys, Jay-Z, Justin Timberlake, Dixie Chicks, Kanye West, Johnny Cash and on and on...) is a man who knows a lot about what it takes for a song to be great. He once said that when you recognise something good in a song or a recording you should grab on to it and not let it go. There's a man who knows what he is talking about – he's got the credits. He's also keen on a strong work ethic – if you're working on a record with him he'll wait months, even years, until you have written enough songs to cull the best 10 from. He'll be looking for 30 or more at least. And he won't work with you if your songs are 'metaphor deficient' – apparently a favourite phrase. He needs them to tell a story in a way that expresses emotion by an artful use of real life comparisons. I'm not going to explain metaphors here, but you need to be a master of them and the less common-place the better. Lastly he wants songs to be 'emotionally true'.

Robin Gibb of the Bee Gees thinks it's all about melody – let the melody come first and let it dictate the flow of the lyrics. His belief is that a melody isn't good enough if you can't easily remember it. So, simplicity is a *key* part of the toolkit too. All too often a great talent fails from over complicating a song and ruining it. K.I.S.S – Keep It Simple Stupid!

If you are a hip-hop artist, you have something of an advantage in songwriting as hip-hop is all about the hook. Hit hip-hop songs are often nothing more than an irresistible catchy moment – the hook. You hear the song and find yourself repeating that part over and over – you can't remember any of the rhyme or lyrics, but you know the song! That's the way these days although, of course, in the hip-hop community, there is great debate over the reliance on insanely catchy hooks at the expense of expertly crafted rhymes, seen as the skill of the original masters of that game. Whichever view is right, you can't argue that hip-hop writers, rappers and producers now know how to hook a listener and get a hit record.

What is the hook? – well, it could be anything. It could be a lyric, the title, a phrase or a couple of notes, often these days a very memorable sample, the whole chorus or just a repeated word, or just

a rhythmic passage. Ideally, according to [Gary Burns' article](#) it should “contain one or more of the following: (a) a driving, danceable rhythm; (b) a melody that stays in people's minds; (c) a lyric that furthers the dramatic action, or defines a person or place.”. He also helpfully adds that a hook should be, 'An appealing musical sequence or phrase, a bit of harmony or sound, or a rhythmic figure that grabs or hooks a listener. . . . *virtually no hit record is without a bit of music or words so compelling that it worms its way into one's memory and won't go away.*'

Great titles can also inspire you to create a great song. Rumour has it that Meat Loaf and Jim Steinman used to sit around for hours dreaming up unique titles and then start work on the song – you can see it too, in 'Paradise by the Dashboard Light' and 'Two out of Three Ain't Bad' – a mixture of colloquialisms and great newly turned phrases.

You certainly need to be able spot, as Rick Rubin said, the good bit that you already have. When you've sensed it, it'll probably be the emotional high point, so centre the song around it. Don't take too long to get to it or the radio listener will get bored and tune out before you hit them. That part is an art that comes with practice, but learning is a crucial part of the process too.

When it comes to seeking out places to learn, the best guide I ever read was Mitch Murray's, “How to write a Hit Song”. Unfortunately now out of print (although I am looking into that!), and written in 1964, it's so brilliant and still relevant that you have to keep an eye out for it on eBay and at yard sales / boot fairs.

There are a couple of things I like online too – a company from Australia have a great course that we recommend – [Successful Songs](#), and the [Musician University](#) run some pretty good online courses too that I would suggest you check out. There's a lot of stuff out there on the web to help you learn – it needn't be these two, I just know people who have benefitted from them. Remember that it's a craft and like anything you have to learn to become good. That usually involves taking some lessons from someone with experience and knowledge and then practising. A natural flair comes in handy, but practice makes perfect.

One last thing about the song. Don't think that it has to be the way you first came up with it – there is always room for improvement. Smokey Robinson, not content with having written 'My Guy' for Mary

Wells (fulfilling the golden rule above – unconditional love from a female perspective), then went a year later and wrote the flip version of that for the Temptations – ‘My Girl’. But, so the story goes, he and Ronald White knocked the song out in an hour or two and played it to Berry Gordy at Motown convinced that it was a hit. He wasn’t impressed and they had to go away, rewrite and re-pitch it at least three more times, spending 50 hours plus on it before he agreed. They changed notes around, moved lines from the bridge to the intro, honed lyrics etc. Maybe it’s a myth, maybe it’s all true, but the lesson is clear. Keep honing a song until you *know* it’s a smash.

That’s the song part, but what about the talent? Well we touch on it in the points below, but, although it’s true to say that you don’t *need* to be the best guitarist, singer or whatever, you do need to have something special to really make it. It’s that Simon Cowell X Factor thing (for our US readers, that’s another Simon Cowell talent show that’s in the same vein as American Idol, and the name says it all). I hate the idea of the TV supported pop-star manufacture process, but Simon Cowell does know that his star needs something special.

The clue is in the title of his show – we can’t define what it is that you need. It’s an elusive ingredient and it may be a combination of factors. Some of it is beauty and youth and some of it is musical talent. But, in another star, it might all be about swagger and self-belief.

When you have someone in your act that has that innate X Factor, that doesn’t mean that the rest of you can slack off and get by with no talent – although that has worked for some. To give your act the very best chance, and despite all the ‘magic ingredient’ stuff, most successful acts will also have a great depth of more readily measured talent across the band: committed and inspiring musicians, songwriting ability and dedication to the craft, a peacemaker, a networker and so on. All things that require talent.

## **2. “Be Young and Beautiful...”**

.....if you want to be loved”, or so the song says. And, it’s harsh but true, but following on from having some measurable amount of talent, it *is* easier for the band with the great looking front man. Now, that’s not to say that they have to be traditionally beautiful. In fact, I’d say that (unless we are talking pure pop) being really traditionally beautiful, too chiselled, or too pretty is actually a little bit of a

handicap (you know, James Dean, Johnny Depp, Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie, Agyness Deyn - they are poster pretty and, interestingly, they are actors or models! Usually your pop, rock or hip hop star will not be that perfect!). No, what you want is interesting, striking, hot! Or, maybe, occasionally, weird. The idea is that all the girls need to want to sleep with the singer, and all the guys need to want to hang out with him and be his friend.

Most artists are male – it's over 90% for bands and still well over 50% for solo artists. In pop the women get a fairer crack of the whip, but the fact that boys don't have the same emotional connection with a female singer as girls do with a guy in a band means that different forces are in play. Most female artists are appealing to girls because of empathy – although obviously there will be some of the lust thing going on from some quarters. My thinking is therefore mostly focused on guys in bands.

So, if your front person doesn't attract this kind of attention, maybe you should think again about whether they are going to cut it. 'Hang on a minute', I can almost hear you thinking – what about the fact that he's a great singer and our artistic integrity? 'Fair point', I'd say. But perhaps if you allow their lack of suitability to govern your future you'll end up struggling to get a deal or enough momentum to make it sufficiently big on your own to have a viable career.

It's a tough call, but also a crucial one. Let's be clear on this. I am *not* saying that in order to make it you need to ditch your front man and get a poster boy. What I am saying is stand back from your singer (he's probably a childhood, school, or college friend and you think he's great – he's your mate after all and you're in this together) and really try to evaluate whether he is a *fantastic* front man and a *definite* asset all round. Make a checklist – voice, look, that X-Factor, sex appeal, wit, attraction etc – and see if that helps you make a dispassionate evaluation.

One more thing about the front man is how extreme they are prepared to be. I'm generalising, but most very, very successful artists are fronted by extreme people – at least they are extreme when fronting the band even if they are more meek and mild when away from the bright lights. They will take something about themselves and make it larger than life – Mick Jagger's lips and hips, Boy George's make up and androgyny or Alice Cooper's gothic horror. It's going to alienate some potential fans, but that's OK as you'll always be remembered. And it's allowed in the name of art!

Although I talk later about not needing your music to be unique, if your frontman is and can become iconic, then you are on to a winner.

If after you have thought about it long and hard, you decide he's not up to it, then make that call. Maybe it's goodbye, but maybe it's a sideways move to a sideman role on Bass or Keyboards. Or maybe the guy (or girl) becomes the manager, or the webmaster or something – sometimes their continued involvement isn't in the frontline of the band itself but they can have incredible value somewhere behind the scenes because of their passion for it and their knowledge about the band.

What about the young thing? Well in many ways that's obvious. If you are young - and I mean 16-25 – you have more time to get it right before the Music Industry and the public decide you are too old. You aren't too old, I know, but the traditional Music Industry will look at you when you are, say, 28 plus, and wonder whether it's got a hope in hell of 'getting you away' before you hit 30. Of course, we all know that they have, but they are terrified that they'll get it wrong, blow \$500,000 on you and get sacked. So, for a moment they'll think about signing you, and then a little while later whilst they are still mulling it over another, hotter, younger band will come along and your slot will be gone.

Why is it so?

Well, firstly, most people buying music by new bands are going to be similar in age and tastes to the people in the band they are supporting. It's a proven fact that most of us are boring and locked into our lifetime buying habits (which apply to music as much as they do to jeans) by the time we are in our mid 30's. And then we spend the rest of our lives pretty much rebuying versions of what we have bought before – same shoes, same pictures on the walls, same type of car, and all wrapped up in long term brand loyalty. In my case, I was into U2 when I was 14 and, although I don't love everything they do now, I still buy their records now and again and I still go and see them play live occasionally. I also buy the same brand of trainers religiously!

So, in a social context, record companies and the public are in league. Without really knowing it, they want all their new artists, bands, rappers, whatever, to be young. They will appeal to the people just now becoming teenagers and they will support them for life. It's a simple and obvious argument.

Next up is the fact that if you start young, you'll have a good few years to give it a go before you admit failure and go and live a far more emotionally rewarding and sane normal life. This applies to learning your craft as a singer, writer, player etc but also just to the number of years available to you to have a crack at it. Very few people get signed at 16 but those who are going to make it are invariably starting to try at that age. By the time you get to 20, you might be on your third band or fifth line-up or whatever and you might be getting good enough, having learnt the craft, to have a good shot. I'd say that 20 to 23 is the optimum age to get signed.

A final factor is simply that real life gets in the way as you get older. Dreaded adult responsibilities, like jobs, girlfriends / wives, kids, mortgages start to hove into view and all of a sudden the dream of making it in music starts to slip away. It's not failure, it's just that life's other priorities get in the way.

### **3. The Drive vs. Talent Curve**

Look at yourself and those around you in your band or crew. Have you got the talent - we looked at that above - but have you also got the drive?

In all my years of looking for that world class star, I've seen time and again the truism that you need an equal dose of both.

I've seen many very, very talented people fall at the first hurdle just because they can't be arsed to get out of bed and put the effort in. Admittedly they never had the ultimate hit song, which we know you are looking for, but they probably could have written it (or found someone else to!) if they had put in the effort. This means continued high intensity effort. Looking at every possible chance, evaluating it and going after it like a heat-seeking missile. No half-measures. But if they wouldn't put in the effort, it invariably meant that they didn't make it. In many of these people the self belief was so strong, because they did have talent, that they tricked themselves into thinking that was enough.

Bettering your songwriting, your singing, your playing, your stagecraft, your look, your sense of where you are in the current pantheon of rock & pop, seeking out new contacts – these are all very good uses of your time. Playing FiFa 2009, watching TV etc are not! **Get Busy!** By which I mean, treat it like job – get up in the morning and kick the shit out of it. Do not take a break and don't give up.

This must be right. I know because the other side of the equation is the person with a vast amount of drive and no, or a very little talent. This can very often be seen in pure pop. Without claiming that they were a talent wasteland (which I would never do) it's safe to say that the Spice Girls got to the top by sheer hard work and determination. They steamrolled their way through any obstacles, kicked down doors and wouldn't let anything get in their way. OK, they had a couple of world-class pop songs with mega hooks, but there was a lot of hard work in there.

In my experience, one of my former clients was signed to a major label to a massive deal and very nearly broke through, only falling at the final hurdle. This individual had almost zero discernible talent – but did have an awesome amount of drive and it was nearly enough. In fact, had they taken a little advice from us on the quality of the songs and the need for a co-writer's help, I'm pretty sure it would have been enough!

What you are really looking at for most people is a balance of the two as a minimum – i.e. slotting in somewhere above the midpoint of an imagined graph. A massive dose of either with a minimum of the other might be enough, but if you're off the top end of the scale for both then you really have no excuse for failing.

What does this mean in practice? Well, amongst other things, it means making sure that:

- all of your band / act are talented enough to be worthy of a place. Each member doesn't have to be a virtuoso musician unless awesome musicality is at the core of your appeal (think Stanley Clarke, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Miles Davis etc...), but they do need to be competent in their role so that they don't let you down in performance; and
- you rehearse all the time. Don't rehearse the basic lay-outs of new songs at band practice. Make sure all of you are doing that at home before you meet up, playing along to a rough mp3 skeleton demo that has been passed around so that when you do meet up you are learning to play it for real and perform it. Rehearse as often as you can - for me that has to be at least three times per week with each session being at least 2 to 3 hours, as a minimum; and
- you ditch the guys or girls who don't make it to rehearsal or who just can't cut it live; and

- you get out and about and network like crazy in your local scene, preferably at the heart of your national scene. The old adage of ‘it’s not what you know, it’s who you know’ is very often true and you never know which person you meet might be the one to recognise your talent and open a big door for you; and
- you make the most of web 2.0. As we’ll touch on later, get a website up, get on all the social networking sites - MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and Last.fm as a minimum (plus Bebo if a younger audience is into you) – and use this incredible opportunity to build a fanbase. Be relentless about it and if you’re not sure our [Make it on MySpace](#) book will give you all the information you need; and
- you play as much as you can if live performance is the accepted norm in your genre. Pretty much any gig is worth doing - we’ll look at this below, but basically, if they ask you to play, you should play; and
- you become a PR machine for yourself and your band. Every flyer that you don’t print up and pass around, every banner that you don’t post on the web, every press release that you don’t bother to write and circulate when you have something newsworthy to shout about is an opportunity to climb the greasy pole that you have messed up. Do them all!; and
- you know what a *performance* is. I watch bands play in many parts of the world and I am often struck by one fundamental difference between British and American acts. It’s not always the case, but usually, the American band knows how to put on a show. They are less reserved about being flamboyant and they put a great deal more effort into entertaining the audience. I think the English reserve sometimes comes into play with a British act and they don’t want to be seen to be trying too hard. Nonsense – this is showbusiness. Put on a show!; and
- you learn how to create a ‘buzz’ and apply that knowledge relentlessly; and
- you do a million and one other things just because you thought of them and thought it might be worth giving it a go!

#### **4. Use Web 2.0 to the Max!**

We touched on this above as being where you need to apply relentless effort, and it’s essential in today’s market. The revolution on the internet with the advent of Social Networking sites over the last few years has handed you the greatest opportunity EVER to reach fans and potential fans all over

the world. If you *do not* make the most of this incredible set of resources then you are cutting your chances of success by a massive factor. Everything that I have said before is absolutely right - you need talent and practice etc – but if you put yourself in all the right parts of the internet that apply to what you are doing and actively seek the right sort of fans, then you are giving yourself every chance of being spotted and / or creating the elusive ‘buzz’ that the Music Industry feeds off.

So, what does that mean in practice? Well, if you haven’t already got a MySpace page for your act (which I’m assuming you have – if you are web savvy enough to have ended up with this guide, then you’re almost certainly web savvy enough to have that covered!), then DO IT NOW! Even if you have, get on the web and research what people think are the best ways to use it to maximise your impact. Our guide, [Make it on MySpace](#), will lead you clearly from set-up to global exposure building tips and tricks. If there is just one thing in it that gives your MySpace profile a boost then its worth its price. It also packs a huge resource section that will fire off endless other thoughts for you on how to use the web to push your band to success, and give you the places to go for the help and information to implement them.

My favourite tip about MySpace is that you shouldn’t use it exclusively! What? But I just said it was the key?? Well, it is, but who knows what is coming next and whether something will come along to blow MySpace out of the water. If it does, if that is your only web presence, then you’re knackered. So, get on there and make it your priority, because as of now, it is *the* destination for people when they are looking to find out about music and artists. *But*, wherever you use your MySpace address, please, please, please, also list your own website address. That way, wherever your act’s name shows up on the internet, there will be the band website address alongside the band’s MySpace address. If anything ever did happen to stop the dominance of MySpace, people would still know exactly where to go to find your act. For now you can just redirect your own website address to the band’s MySpace address and if the time comes that MySpace has lost its effectiveness or gone (I don’t actually see this happening) then you can simply change it then.

I’ve assumed there that you do have your own band website – most artists who know they need to get serious will have that sorted out. If you don’t – go and do that NOW too! All our sites are hosted by a company called [Hostgator](#). I love them. They are cost effective and they have what I find to be the easiest to use tools and applications – particularly if you are not very web savvy – which I suffer

from. The control panel of the domain that they give you has something called 'Fantastico Deluxe' which makes it very easy to install and run a [Wordpress](#) Blog – which you should be doing too!

The other key issue about having your own site is that *you* control exactly how it looks and what you can do with it. MySpace is essential and great, but your own site is where you are in control and any artist who is going to build a successful career is going to need one. If you can't build your site, go to [Elance](#), which is a brilliant website that, as a free service, will connect you with designers and programmers all over the world who will build you a site for a fraction of what someone in the UK or the USA would charge you.

If you are building sites or pages yourself and are any good with technology stuff, then I'd recommend the two best free HTML editors that we use – [Nvu](#) and it's unofficial update (which is what we actually use rather than the official original version), [Kompozer](#). The software is great and really enables you, as someone who doesn't understand HTML, to build, amend and design simple web pages since it offers WYSIWYG web page editing. If, however, you want something that has even greater flexibility for designing a whole site from scratch with virtually no skills, then go for [XSitePro](#). It's great and we use it to create all the pages that we need if they have to be done from scratch. Of course, you buy it once and you can use it over and over again for different sites, and you might well be building more than one!

I've been wandering off my point a bit – apologies. Having created a MySpace page and your own website, you need to get active and get people to look at it and buzz around all your online activity. We'll cover this much more on [Our Blog](#) and over time you'll find loads of great resources there to help you promote yourself online.

The main thrust of my advice would be to build a large following on MySpace as your priority. Again, see our guide [Make it on MySpace](#) to know how to do this. Drive those fans to your own website as well where you can control what material (photos, tracks, merchandise etc) you want them to have access to. I also heartily recommend using an advanced mailing list application, which are called Autoresponders. There are many to choose from, and I like the functionality of that offered by [Reverb Nation](#) (in fact, you should have a band page here anyway), but given that it's what we use, I'd recommend [Aweber](#). I'm not saying that you need to pay for this – I think the cheapest package is

US\$19.99 per month at the moment – but, go and have a look at what it does. These advanced email list building applications have all sorts of very useful elements to them that you can't get if you try and use your computer based mail program. A strong reason for going this route is that an email list hosted by a Social Networking site, like Reverb Nation's is always under their control, not yours and if they ever go out of business, you are going to be mighty pissed at losing your list. With something like [Aweber](#), your list is yours and you can always back it up to your PC or Mac.

One of the other key points about using a specialised email list building application is that they are what is called 'double opt-in'. This is much, much better for you than single opt-in. What it means is that when someone gives an email address in a sign-up box somewhere connected to you on the web, they are sent an email to that address. In that email, they have to click on a link to confirm that they wanted to go on the list. This has far reaching consequences. Foremost of which is that people don't usually bother to set up a fake email address to do this just to get a track or other freebie you are offering for the sign-up – so the email address should be genuine. Also, if anyone is messing with someone's head by signing them up to stuff, they aren't going to confirm the link, so in theory all the people who do 'double opt-in' are genuinely interested in your act. That's what is called 'Permission Marketing' – as opposed to Interruption Marketing, which is where the TV or a billboard thrusts an advertising message in front of you without your permission. People on your list created by the [Aweber](#) system or a similar Autoresponder have given you *permission* to speak to them – to market to them. I'm not sure of the numbers, but you and I see thousands of interruption marketing messages a day, but we may well receive only one or two permission marketing messages – which do you think has the most effect?

So, there you are, building a profile on MySpace, sending people to your website and building an email list of fans that is under your control – what else should you be doing to make Web 2.0 work for you. Again, we'll cover this more on [Our Blog](#) over time, but the short answer is – everything you can.

That means:

- running a [Wordpress](#) blog on your own website and link it to the blog function in MySpace; and

### 10 KEY steps You MUST take to SUCCEED in the Music Business

- setting up a [Twitter](#) account using your own name and one for the band name. Use the latter to talk about the act but focus more on the personal ones for each member of the band and let people (fans) get to know you as a person and tell them trivia about your life (Twitter is all about individuals rather than bands, but it works); and
- setting up a [Facebook](#) page and a Facebook Group / band Page and actively promote it to get more fans; and
- setting up a [Last.fm](#) account; and
- setting up a [Youtube](#) account and get video of your act on there – rehearsing, larking about – it doesn't have to be a traditional music video; and
- setting up pages in as many other Social Networks as you can – [Reverb Nation](#), [Bebo](#), [GarageBand](#) etc; and
- building that email list and keep in touch with your fans through that rather than only using Social Network posting; and
- learning to podcast and doing it regularly enough for it to be worth your fans' attention; and
- writing your own [Wikipedia](#) entry (but only do this when it will be seen as relevant to the Wiki people – they will can it if they think you aren't important!); and
- hanging out on relevant forums and chat rooms and having meaningful interaction with music fans who might like your band – note, not rushing in, spamming and leaving; and
- creating enough material (not just recordings, but T-shirts, podcasts, home gigs, flags, badges, whatever) to have enough to give to your fans free on a regular basis to keep them raving about you; and
- giving your increasing fanbase reasons to interact with you online;

And there are more things you can do!

My last thought on this is to refer back to something that you may have seen when you signed up, depending on how you came to get this guide. In one of our sign-up forms we mention that 'it isn't enough to have a stream of eager fans – that is just the start and can also be a folly'. What I meant by that is partly that you need to try to ensure that the people who choose to sign up to your list are really keen to be a fan and be there to support you and help you out. That is dealt with by building a list using a double opt-in system. They have to jump through a hoop to be on your list so hopefully

they want to be there. But I also meant that it is amazing what the interaction that we have begun to explore can do for you. I worked with a folk singer songwriter a year or so ago and he worked his butt off building up a following on MySpace. We used lots of interaction over the web and when we came to do a statement gig (by which I mean a 'see how many tickets I can sell' gig), he sold out the professional touring venue in his home town on his own – 500 capacity – and on the night we sold a few hundred copies of his debut mini-album. That got picked up by national and local press and things started to move up a gear. In the end, he decided that his calling was actually to go and work in the Far East with the Tsunami rebuilding program rather than fight it out in the Music Business, but he had got a long way very quickly by networking like crazy using Web 2.0.

This idea is taken further by Kevin Kelly in his seminal blog post '[1000 True Fans](#)' in which he argues that an artist (music or otherwise) can make the leap to quitting the day job and financial self-sufficiency at an admittedly arbitrary level of 1000 *true* fans. I won't go into it here as you may as well read it and the comments below it from the man who created it. Look for the update links at the bottom of the post (just above the comments) and also check out Scott Andrew's post entitled '[5000 Fans](#)', which preceded Kelly by a few years but only got all the attention it deserved after Kelly referred to it.

So, you've got to embrace Web 2.0 *and* you have got to work like crazy at it. Find your fans in the places that they are already inhabiting online and give them the content that they are actively looking for. There's a few more tips on this later on – so that you don't have to do all the work yourself.

*That's the four big issues covered – and they often get overlooked. The next 6 can be expanded upon at length, but in this short guide, they won't get as much detail – we can save that for later! For now we'll whip through them.*

### **5. Understand Your Elevator Pitch**

This is a short one, but absolutely crucial. I'm going to defer to Derek Sivers, founder of [CDBaby](#) as he has been filmed a few times making this point and I agree 100%.

Check this out and then come back to the text - [Derek Sivers on the 'Elevator Pitch'](#) and another version – [Derek's second definition of the 'Elevator Pitch'](#).

I love Derek Sivers – he invented CDBaby by accident and has seen tens of thousands of artists come through the virtual doors of his company. Some have found a model to sustain themselves and some have gone on to be signed and become massive international successes. He is a man who has a lot of very valuable insight into the modern music business.

The short version of his point (which he makes better than me, so do watch them!) is that you need to be able to give a description of your music in a meaningful way in a handful of words. This can then be used either in print or in conversation when playing music to someone isn't an option. I have heard so many bullshit reasons as to why an act can't describe their sound or why they are the answer to the missing link that will create an entirely new sound, that I can't agree with him more. Although it is, of course, far better to be able to have someone hear your music and perhaps see you play live to 'really get it' (and that is easier than ever today with the Web and MySpace), there are sadly many times when you really need to be able to tell someone enough information to intrigue them enough so that they check you out when they can. This could be the guy from Sony that ends up signing you or it could be the millionaire philanthropist that wants to give you \$200,000 per year to support your incredible creativity. That therefore needs to be a pretty powerful hook.

I don't agree with the idea that you cannot describe your music by reference to bands that have gone before – ***nor does anyone in the Music Business***. When there is a hot band doing the rounds that are definitely going to get signed, every conversation that tells someone new about them is met with the question 'What do they sound like?' and ***always*** the industry guy can come up with a comparison that tells you enough for you to be able to make a judgement about whether you are going to check it out further.

I also don't agree with the ludicrous notion that having a short clear description of what you are is cheesy or somehow beneath you. Grow up. It's an essential weapon in your arsenal, not a handicap.

As Derek says, it doesn't need to be perfect and it isn't a case of being right or wrong. It's a hook to get people to want to know more.

It also can help you in another way. If you are forced to consider how you can explain what you are about it can help you be clear to yourself and those within the act. This can have far reaching benefits for you and your band. It should help you focus on your place in the pantheon of pop. By that I mean it can help you see which of the directions that you are heading down are the right ones for your genre and what is a red herring. It can also help you look at the rest of the band's presentation and see if that fits with the music. It generally makes no sense for an indie band to have a club kid on bass, as an example. It confuses the viewer / listener and will probably cause musical differences within the band. On the rare occasion of course, this difference might be what makes a band special and lead to their success. That in turn leads you onto the idea of the band having a brand and an identity that fit with their fans' expectations. We don't have the pages to cover that properly here, but think along the lines of your band needing to have a clear identity and message that fits with the music and is carried through all you do – CD sleeves, web presence, band clothes etc.

In short, you need to have a clear idea of what you are and what you are about and you need to be able to explain that clearly to outsiders in a short and concise phrase. A soundbite, if you will!

#### ***6. Don't push Against the Tide.***

In line with the bottom half of the previous point, this one is open to discussion. It is true to say that acts who have no clear identity and who are nearly musically unique do sometimes make it big. It is also true to say that a band that swims against the tide can make it. In fact, it's precisely because they did their own thing rather than follow the herd that they get noticed and get their shot.

So, take this one as it is intended rather than at face value. The point I am trying to get across here is that it is better to fit in with what is going on than to be entirely 'out of time'. I once looked after an amazing band with a handful of great songs, but they were just doing totally the wrong thing for the time. It was the early '90's and they were pretty much a classic rock band when everyone else was making dance records. It just couldn't happen for them at that time. Try to avoid being in that position – it's just making things even more difficult for yourself. Ask yourself truly how many

massively successful acts have actually been unique, especially when they first broke through – it's not many.

This applies in many walks of life and it's often said that you benefit more by being the follower rather than the trailblazer of something new. The guy who emerges behind you copies a lot of what you have done and improves upon it and avoids the mistakes you made. This can, of course, happen in music.

So, your greatest chance of success rests with being part of a current scene – 'being of the now' – probably better that it is near the start of that period than nearer its tail end as well. If you are trying to be so distinctly different that you don't fit the current scene then you'd better be amazing and I'd recommend that you build a new scene around you, so that you are seen as leaders and not oddballs! If that happens, then watch what the people coming into your scene are doing and if you think that they are going to eclipse you, move the goalposts a bit and assimilate some of their style.

I'm going to leave it at that as it's hard to quantify and justify but hopefully you see what I am getting at.

### **7. Perform and Build Buzz**

I've had countless artists sit in my office and tell me that they can't play any more gigs because they have already played too many times in their local scene or they 'don't want to do any more shitty gigs'.

Well, excuse me, but go home and give up now.

If you are playing the same gigs over and over again and there is no change in your circumstances then something is wrong. I can understand you not wanting to play the same gig over and over again if nothing is changing, but the answer isn't to stop playing those gigs, it's to look at why those gigs are still 'shitty', and work to change that. And, it's not the venue or the weather (well it might sometimes be the weather as I'll agree that it's difficult to pull a crowd when it's cold enough to

freeze your breath on an evil winter's night ...), but I can pretty much *guarantee* that it's you. Something you are doing wrong or something that you simply aren't doing right.

Go back over this guide and check to see if you do actually have any good songs, a good act, can you perform, do you market yourself and the gigs etc? Of course, enforced and continuous live performance itself makes you learn to perform and get better at it. I have certainly felt with artists I have worked with that they don't become, if you like, 'a real band' until they are doing it full time and playing up and down the country, day in day out. It's almost that saying you are a full time musician, a working band, is proven by the very doing. I have without fail seen a vast improvement in the technical skill and performance ability of every act that makes that step.

When that stuff is all lined up, then you should be gigging like crazy. Because, if it is all ready to go, you should be adding fans every night and rather than it becoming a tedious re-run at the same venue every few weeks, it should become a roadblock – the hottest ticket in town. That's when you get noticed – by the local media, the big-shot manager, or the record company scout – whoever it is you are looking to snag. Admittedly, this is a balancing act. You can't play in a town of 10,000 every week, but you can in a city. You need to make the frequency of gigs balanced with the increasing demand. Don't overplay one venue or area, but you can probably play more often than you think.

The gig is where the deal is sealed. Your recorded material should attract their attention whether by being on MySpace or given out on a CD, but it's when they see you live that they (both fans and Industry players) will fall for you.

Since you will never know which gig will be the one that the person who is going to give you a break will be at, it makes sense to do as many as you can without running flat.

Ensuring that you are good enough to have a following is one thing but getting the following to turn out regularly is another, and you really need that bandwagon to be rolling when people with power and influence come to see you play. If they sense that something is connecting with a fanbase, that will excite them and they will jump on board. So how do you ensure that, given your act is great, people come to see your gigs?

Well, this is something we'll almost certainly do a full blog post on, but the key is to promote it and start early enough before the date of the gig! Leverage everyone you know to help you flyer and post on relevant websites. Get out in your area and let people in other venues, other bands etc know about the show. Get on to local press and radio and give them a press release. The more often that they hear something about your act, the more they will start to believe that there is something worth writing about – it will become self-fulfilling. There are other tricks but the bottom line is graft.

If you do get to the point that you really do need to lay off your circuit for a while (maybe to hone new material, give the fans a break to come back better than ever), then you'll know that the time has come. However, a drop-off in interest in your area doesn't mean that you should pack in performing. At the very least, get out and play shows within driving distance. Your online and local networking should have brought you into contact with enough bands nearby of a similar style that you can trade headline spots with in their hometown. Go and play support for them and get a good share of their fans committed to you as well.

Building a following this traditional way with the enhanced opportunities of modern Internet marketing and promotion cannot be overlooked.

### ***8. Network like Crazy, but Location comes before Representation***

Following straight on from the need to play as much as possible and supporting that quest is the need to get out and about and meet absolutely everyone that you can who might be able to help you achieve your goals. This is fans, people with any place in the Music Business, but also other bands, musicians (perhaps that replacement bass player you need), filmmakers, photographers, graphic designers, web geeks, absolutely anyone who can bring something to the party.

And, of course, pretty much the very best place to do this networking is at all the venues you can find in your area that have any use in your genre whatsoever (although online is obviously good too). That's where all these people are going to be – they love the scene and are always out and involved in it. You need to become one of those people seen as being integral to the area's vibrant music scene. A great way to place yourself at the very heart of this is to become a promoter as well as an artist. This works incredibly well in dance music and hip-hop, but can be applied in any genre. You

can very quickly create a position of authority in your local scene, bring in hot bands from the national scene, and, of course, give yourself a regular platform and great support slot for your act.

I once heard that, when he started out, Moby put himself at the heart of his local scene, but when networking, as well as seeking the industry players, he realised that instead of running around doing all the promotion himself, as we looked at above, he actively sought out people whilst networking to help him do that. This is a very savvy strategy and apes what will happen when a record company does get around to signing you – they build a team. These days that will include a ‘street team’ as well as the traditional radio plugger, PR, marketing guy and so on. You can spend just as much time and effort networking and getting that team of people together as you can actually running around flying yourself. If you end up with ten dedicated street teamers in your area, then clearly you can cover ten times as much ground and your gigs should be far easier to fill.

Inevitably though, at the heart of the live music scene everywhere, you will find the two people that are going to be most important to your next step – the manager and the record company A&R man, closely followed by the agent and the PR guy.

But should you be putting together the more formal team by this networking? – well, that depends on where you are at. A good manager is the first formal team member you are going to need. I would normally recommend someone with experience and contacts over the friend of the band, but that’s not always the case. We’ll look at this in much more detail on [Our Blog](#) but for now I’d say that most acts look for a manager too soon, before they have laid down enough of the groundwork we have talked about.

It’s true that it’s hard to make the next step up the ladder without formal representation. That’s largely because the established music industry operates like a funnel. Although people do occasionally get signed to a major record label completely cold and from a demo, they usually get introduced to the company that signs them by someone that company trusts – a manager, a PR person, maybe even a journalist who likes you. This makes it easier for the Record Companies to focus in on those acts that have passed over some hurdles and are still worth looking into – i.e. the bands that aren’t good enough are already weeded out – they can’t get a manager, and don’t get their live show reviewed in a magazine or blog that A&R people bother with. So, yes, do be looking

for the manager to come on board and for other members of a team, but make sure that you are ready and everything else is already in place.

Lastly, when networking, be genuine. Don't just look at everyone you meet as a potential leg-up. You need to have a real relationship with these people. People like to help their friends and if you are seen just to be grabbing and not giving, your networking will be less effective. Think what you can do for the people who may be able to help you later on.

Before you do jump on board with a manager, you need to have another honest appraisal of where you are at. It may be that you are at the top of your local scene and that is as far as you can go without more formal help. However, it is equally possible that your local scene just isn't big enough to get you noticed. This is far more of a problem in the USA than in the UK – the UK scene is so small in reality that a band making a buzz at one end of the country gets noticed in London quick enough. But that's not true of the States. In fact you can be selling healthy numbers of records, even be signed to a regional indie label, and still be unheard of in the corridors of power in LA and New York. It's less true today than in the past because of the Internet and MySpace, but it can't be ignored.

And that's where 'Location' comes in. Simple, but, before you hook up with the relatively inexperienced manager in your hometown, who may be the local big promoter or studio owner or such like, just think about whether a move to a bigger city, preferably the capital or recognised Music Industry centre, might be the smarter first move. Many bands have moved continents to make it – and it also probably gives you that extra dose of commitment (or shakes out any band members who haven't got it) that going full time far from home is going to bring.

Your hometown manager may very well be the right guy for you, but just think before you take that decision – it's a big one!

### ***9. Build your own Career and look for a Deal at the Same Time!***

Because of the unbelievable opportunity that has been presented to artists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of reaching out to and connecting direct with an eager fanbase, we have seen above that it is possible

to make a career commercially viable without signing a traditional deal with a record company. Your career can be self-financed and undertaken on your own terms.

I believe that a luxury of the modern Music Industry is that you can work both strands at the same time – I would go as far as to say that you should. Get on with it and find a way to progress your career even if the record company isn't calling. They expect to see you doing more and more of the development work before they will sign you these days anyway. You might be able to do that entirely self-financed or you might have to do a deal with a small indie for the first album (or two or three – like the [White Stripes](#) did). However you do it, as long as you are perfecting your art and learning your craft as you go, the opportunity of the record company calling is ever present. If they do come calling, that's great, but if they don't you can keep forging ahead on your own. These days, success can be achieved without that call ever coming!

Take the lessons in this guide and apply them. Look for every opportunity to attract the attention that will get you the deal that you want...but if it's not forthcoming, do it your way. We'll spend more time looking at self-releasing and promoting on an indie basis or doing a smaller indie type of deal on [Our Blog](#) over time, so check it out for relevant posts.

### **10. Don't Quit, but maybe Shake It Up**

Albert Einstein defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results".

If you've applied all that we and others like us can teach you about perfecting your game and have stuck at it and promoted the arse out of it, and still nothing is working, then maybe, just maybe, you're either deluding yourself or something that you just can't see is blocking your path.

Einstein's right. If nothing's changing, then something is wrong.

**Don't throw in the towel!** Not yet – instead, make a more radical change than you have dared before. Change the line-up, ditch the frontman and take over yourself, get a new name (I'm not a fan of blaming a crappy name, but some are that bad that it can be that much of a handicap and it may

also be that a change of name allows you a second run at the Music Industry people who have already dismissed you – a new name is sometimes as good as a new band!), take a new musical direction, get a whole new bunch of songs. Do something that forces change. If it makes things even worse, you can always backtrack and veer off in a less radical direction, but the odds are you won't need to.

Some artists have gone as far as having various musical projects in various styles ongoing at the same time and waiting to see which one sticks. If you have to, try that.

This concluding piece of advice, coupled with the reflection that Jack White is far, far from being the only artist to spend many years struggling to make their mark, is meant only to encourage you to keep the faith in your own ability and eventual success and musical career fulfillment. If you have been honest about addressing your ability and determined in applying yourself to the necessary self-promotion, then there really shouldn't be anything stopping you achieving what you set out to do.

*That's all for now, but don't forget to regularly check in for more concrete information and ideas to help you succeed in the Music Business at [Our Blog](#).*

*And if you liked this guide, then go and have a look at our ebook, [Make it on MySpace](#), with just as much useable information and a cast-iron money-back guarantee if, for some bizarre reason, you feel that it's not money well spent.*