

# Podcomplex Musician's Guide



## PodPosts: Promoting Your Music – Vol. 1

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## [More Ways To Make Money From Music](#)

If you're just starting out as a musician, you're probably eager to unleash your talent upon the world and receive the mighty flood of cash that it deserves. However, once that initial surge of enthusiasm dies down, you may begin to realise that promoting your band is an essential part of making a living from music - and it actually takes quite a lot of work...

There are a couple of problems with this. The first is that any time you spend promoting your music is time you could be spending making music, which is what you really want to do. The second is - well, how do I go about promoting my band anyway?

### **Get Your Gig On**

When it comes down to it, very few bands make enough money to live comfortably on it. Even the ones that do survive on their music probably make most of their income through playing gigs, not from album or single sales. So, the first thing you should do to promote yourself (and perhaps earn money) is to play live as much as possible. In this way, you increase your exposure, improve your performance technique and hopefully generate a loyal fanbase (very important).

### **Marketing Your Music Online**

But what about the Internet, you say? Surely the digital age empowers me to reach a wider audience. I can put my music on MySpace where millions of people can see it, and then fame will surely follow!

Well, this is theoretically possible, but many of the success stories you hear about artists making their breakthrough via the Internet are not revealing the whole truth. To reach a wider audience on the Web, you need to have something extra; a catchy video, a PR stunt, some savvy marketing, a unique selling point that people want to talk about and show their friends - something that might go viral.

Now, a lot of 'Webtists' actually have all of these angles covered, and a full promotional team working in the background to give them the edge. Just because it's the Internet doesn't mean that a full-scale marketing offensive isn't at work - Andrew Dubber has written an [excellent article](#) about this, which is itself a clever marketing ploy, and the downloadable PDF he offers (of which his article is part) is an even cleverer marketing ploy. But it provides real value; his information and observations are good. So, as an up-and-coming band, what can you learn from this?

### **Monetising Your Music Site**

Don't just sit on MySpace and hope the hits will come - get your own website, and make people want to link to it. Link to your site from MySpace, and from these other [Online Music Distribution](#) sites. Once you have a site set up, you can also put AdSense on it and earn money when people click through those ads. Google matches the ads to the content of your site, so they should be relevant to your readers.

You can set up a free AdSense account by clicking through the link below (and I will get a referral bonus). This is just one example of how you can offset your costs online.

[Get targeted ads on your site with Google AdSense](#)

## **Think About How To Create An Angle**

Remember, whether on stage or on your website, you must make yourself unique; do something that sets you apart, that makes people want to share you. The OK Go treadmill video is a good example of a simple and cheap idea that went viral. Nico Ramon mentions the idea of blogging your music [in this post](#); this is a good idea, although the benefit of being the first to do this probably rests with [Johnathan Coulton](#), who blogged his challenge of writing and recording a new song every week - and managed to attract 3,000 visitors a day through some canny promotion of his venture.

CelesteH had the idea of [commissioning songs on eBay](#) (you can read more about it later in this issue); this was unfortunately deemed a violation of eBay's TOS, but an interesting angle nonetheless. It's important also to get your songs out to as many people as possible; don't worry about people ripping off your tunes, because if they're really that good then people will inevitably want to listen to your music, and more of it. If you get people coming to your gigs and to your website, then you're on the right path - but you really have to clearly define something about yourself that sets you apart and makes people take notice.

## **Optimising Your Band Website**

The process of creating a website that is easily readable by the search engines is known as search engine optimization, or SEO. If you follow the principles of SEO when implementing your website, you have a much better chance of being ranked in the higher positions of the search results pages, which means more people will find your site.

If you have quality content, then there are a number of things you can do to make sure it ranks well, but this is a complex arena and beyond the scope of this post. If you want to learn about Search Engine Optimization, the best place to start is [Aaron Wall's SEO Book](#) (affiliate link). This is recognised by SEO experts worldwide as being the number one reference book for SEO knowledge, and is regularly updated by Aaron to reflect changes in the industry.

## [Musical Suicide for All](#)

Tuesday, May 1st, 2007

About a year ago, in March 2006, [Bob Ostertag](#) decided to put his music online for free, under a creative commons non-commercial license. This is not particularly unusual in itself - however, the fact that he has 28 years worth of recorded material on his site means he is providing a large portfolio to the public, without any immediate or direct prospect of monetising such work. This is precisely what his article "[The Professional Suicide of a Recording Musician](#)" is referring to.

He makes several interesting points regarding traditional and developing models of music distribution, and concludes that it is now necessary to define new methods of making money from music (preferably for the musicians themselves). Prior to putting his back catalogue online, he made most of his musical income from concerts, not from recording sales - and this is typical of most musicians.

The major-label mentality of presenting the 'record deal' and consequent album/single sales as the lifeblood of a successful artist is deeply flawed, and geared towards perpetuating the monopoly of the majors rather than the interests of musicians. However, many bands still embrace that ethos - even though they might have few or no sales, or virtually no visitors to their website, they refuse to provide or distribute their work for free, as there remains a belief that this would somehow devalue their output. However, if you are not making money from restricting access to your music, it is clear that a new approach is needed - why not try and get your music out to as many people as possible, without restrictions?

If the public has open access to your music, it's easier to find it - if they like it, they might spread the word to like-minded friends. These friends then pass on the word, and even if no members of your distribution chain give you any money, they may go to your gig when you're in town. If they really like you, they might make a donation to your site, or buy a CD. But if they've never heard your music in the first place, then you definitely won't make a penny. Remember, a self-distributed artist can make more money from 5,000 album sales than a 'major' artist makes from two million sales - there's no corporate bloat to suck up the proceeds of your work.

Something to bear in mind if you're putting your work on the Web - if you use a [Creative Commons](#) license, it might be a good idea to stipulate 'non-commercial'. If you leave it completely open, then anyone can take your music/video/book and start selling it themselves, without your permission or knowledge.

## [How to Make People Love Your Music](#)

Thursday, April 19th, 2007

The music industry has always been notoriously unpredictable, and the old A&R maxim that the ‘cream always rises to the top’ is far from a given. For any one band that makes a living out of their music, there are at least a thousand [that never will](#) - and the proportion of musicians that actually become wealthy through their work is smaller still. There is, however, a general feeling (if not an actual consensus) that those musicians who do make it are there because they are in some way intrinsically ‘better’ than the swathes of artists left in their wake.

This is reminiscent of [Robert M. Pirsig](#)’s interrogation of ‘quality’ - what makes something good, and is there really any objective standard by which such quality can be measured? Most people would say there is, as they can easily tell if a band is amazing or a bunch of talentless hacks - but when it comes down to it, this amounts to nothing more than personal taste and opinion. Although one can point to certain technical qualities like musicianship, structural complexity and production values, music is more than the sum of its parts - one cannot dismiss the Sex Pistols for not having the technical genius of Mozart, no more than one can effectively rank the music of Stockhausen above or below that of Willie Nelson. It seems that when it comes to music, it must be instilled with a *Philosophik Mercury* which is as intangible as it is unpredictable. The only barometer by which we can judge is whether we like it or not. Or is there something more?

Recent history is littered with examples of works and artists that are now considered classics (or have at least become enormously popular) which were at first rejected offhand by talent scouts, agents or industry executives. Harry Potter, Star Wars, the Beatles - all fall into this category, as does Pirsig’s classic work *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, which was [rejected 121 times](#). If phenomena of this magnitude could be overlooked, then what chance do merely moderately talented artists have of ever being noticed? On the other hand, the entertainment sphere is packed full of artists who could never hope to be anything close to moderately talented. So does the entertainment industry really know what it’s doing, when so many of its predicted hits fail miserably and rejected unknowns keep popping up with chart-toppers? Recent research would seem to suggest not.

Now that Web 2.0 is in full flight, social media networks are changing the way we access and perceive content. The digital music age is upon us, and the ease with which new music from unsigned bands can be obtained has created a new economic model for distribution and promotion. Buzz itself is the latest buzz, and word-of-blog/IM/email has become a very powerful tool for aspiring artists. Combined with the fact that single downloads now count towards a song’s official chart position, the promotion and distribution cycle for new music can take place entirely online. But does such bewebbed convenience make it easier to predict what will become a hit?

The standard approach of major labels is to emulate what is already successful. On the face of it, this seems a perfectly valid strategy - if you take a woman who looks sort of like Shania Twain, give her an album of songs that sound “just-like”, a similarly designed album cover, and spend the same amount of money promoting her, then

surely this new album will also be successful. Often, however, this is not the case - instead, another woman who possesses all these characteristics (with music of a similar 'quality') appears from nowhere and goes on to enjoy a spell of pop stardom.

This approach is clearly flawed, but what is the problem? It's this - the assumption that the millions of people who buy a particular album do so independently of one another. This is not how people (in the collective sense) consume music. Music is a social entity, as are the people who listen to it - it helps to define social groups, creates a sense of belonging, identity and shared experience. Treating a group of such magnitude as if it were just a compilation of discrete units completely removes the social factors involved. Whilst a single individual, removed from social influences, might choose to listen to Artist A, the same person in real life is going to be introduced to artists through their friends, either locally or online, and will instead end up listening to Artists C and K, who may be of a similar (or even inferior) 'quality' but that isn't the real point. Music can be as much about image as about sound.

This raises further questions about 'quality' - is a song's popularity predicated on some sort of Chaos Theory, all else being equal? There is certainly a cumulative advantage effect at work when promoting music - a song that is already popular has more chance of becoming *more* popular than a song that has never been heard before. This is clearly seen on social media sites such as Digg and Reddit, where an article's popularity can grow steadily until it reaches a certain 'critical mass' of votes - at which point its readership suddenly explodes and it '[goes viral](#)'. Such snowball effects have been known to bring fairly robust servers to their knees with incoming traffic.

Duncan J. Watts and his colleagues recently conducted a fascinating study into the effects of social influence on an individual's perception and consumption of music. The process was described in an [article in the NY Times](#). Using their own [Music Lab website](#), they studied the behaviour of more than 14,000 participants to determine what factors influenced their selections.

“participants were asked to listen to, rate and, if they chose, download songs by bands they had never heard of. Some of the participants saw only the names of the songs and bands, while others also saw how many times the songs had been downloaded by previous participants. This second group, in what we called the “social influence condition”, was further split into eight parallel worlds such that participants could see the prior downloads of people only in their own world. We didn't manipulate any of these rankings - all the artists in all the worlds started out identically, with zero downloads - but because the different worlds were kept separate, they subsequently evolved independently of one another.”

Although the article gives no information about the demographic details of the sample audience, given the nature of the medium (an online music site assessing user behaviour on online music sites) and the size of the sample it is probably fair to assume that the results would be reasonably indicative. As it turns out, the study produced some very interesting revelations:

In all the social-influence worlds, the most popular songs were much more popular (and the least popular songs were less popular) than in the independent condition. At the same time, however, the particular songs that became hits were different in different worlds, just as cumulative-advantage theory would predict. Introducing social influence into human decision making, in other words, didn't just make the hits bigger; it also made them more unpredictable. □

According to these results, an individual's independent assessment of a song is a far less significant factor in its success than the 'social influence' factors. The intrinsic 'quality' of a song if indeed measurable is overwhelmed by cumulative advantage, which means that a few key votes at an early stage can radically alter the course of the selection process overall. This has some significant implications for musicians, producers and promoters. Essentially, it means that no amount of market research can enable you to accurately predict which songs will become successful. The behaviour of a few randomly-chosen individuals at an early stage of the process, whose behaviour is itself arbitrary in nature, eventually becomes amplified by cumulative advantage to determine whether a song progresses to the next level. The randomness of such a process means that unpredictability is actually inherent to the nature of the market.

This is not to say that any old song will do, however. Many disgruntled bands dismiss chart music as 'commercial' or feel, to quote David Bowie, 'I could do better than that'. While the cumulative advantage theory does illustrate the arbitrary nature of popular adoption, it is probably fair to say that there is a notional 'quality threshold' to be achieved before becoming eligible. This may amount to little more than a well-produced recording of a song which has a recognisable structure. Once a song or band has reached this standard, then there may not be much to set it apart from countless others unless the vagaries of social influence turn in your favour.

It is easy to be wise in hindsight, but people's desire for some form of determinism does not mean that the household names of today are accorded that status by the mechanics of inevitability. Quite the opposite the [wisdom of crowds](#) does not necessarily apply to music, or film, or (least of all) celebrity. Now that Harry Potter is the best-selling anything in the history of sellable things, and the Beatles hailed as the greatest pop group the world has ever known, it is easy to ridicule all the agents that refused to give them a chance. However, despite the talent that is now undeniably there, it could easily have never happened.

So, returning to the title of this article, we once again ask - how do you make people love your music? The answer is obvious: make sure enough people love your music already.

## [Music Commissioning on eBay](#)

Wednesday, April 4th, 2007

There will always be a new way of using the Internet to sell whatever it is you want to sell - it's just a matter of thinking of it. In the case of Celeste Hutchins, he is [using eBay to auction his music commissions](#). He also defines an interesting economic theory to support his venture - the creation of a *music gift economy*. His commissions are not targeted at companies, major record labels or media production enterprises, but at the fans. According to Celeste, music is data, and data wants to be free - no amount of DRM is going to stop it, and attempting to do so ultimately reduces your exposure to potential fans, and irritates the ones you already have. So what's the solution? Set the music free - and if it comes back, it's yours. On a more practical level, you give your fans a real motivation to invest in you - if your fans actually commission your work, their name is attached to it, they become part of it, and they themselves will then be invested in it (not just their money). This has to be good for you as an artist, and greatly increases the social significance of your work.

I think this is an extremely interesting approach, and I wish him every success - I would certainly agree with the ethos behind it, and I would strongly consider implementing such a factor in my own work. Perhaps I will take the concept to the PodShop - Podcomplex artists could offer songs for sale which haven't been written yet(!). These then would not be songs, but rather commissions, and once the customer pays for it, then the band can go about composing it, perhaps following some guidelines provided by the 'client'. Such guidelines could be instructions on what instruments to use, how many instruments, song length, perhaps nothing more than a song title, perhaps nothing at all. The fans could then become part of the work in a way previously only available to rich 'patrons'.

For those of you paying attention, the exclamation in the previous paragraph is an acknowledgement of the irony of my conclusion - in fact, many of the tracks in the PodShop at the moment have not been written yet. For example, the band 'Electric Petrol' do not exist at all, and neither do any of their songs. This entry was created during the testing phase of the shop, but now Celeste has given me an interesting way of presenting it - rather than removing the 'band', I could simply rebrand it as a 'commissionable entity'. Not only could a music fan commission their own songs, they could commission their own artist - becoming a sort of 'instant music management mogul' in the process. I wonder what sort of regressive path this is all leading us down...



## [How to Sell Your Music](#)

Friday, March 23rd, 2007

For many aspiring musicians, their ultimate ambition is to become rich and famous and play sell-out gigs in massive arenas around the world. Other musicians are quite happy to just get on with the creative side of things without being bogged down by trying to 'make it' in the industry - after all, most do what they do purely because they love it, and will continue to make music regardless of whether they earn any money from it, or if anyone is listening.

However, it is still very pleasant to be in the position whereby you can earn a living from doing something you love...and it is possible to achieve this, if you are dedicated enough, talented enough, and know how to put yourself out there in the most effective way.

Some of the best advice I've ever read on this topic can be found on [Derek Sivers' advice page](#) - he covers a huge range of issues, including band promotion, how to get college gigs, developing your website, how to know when you're doing something wrong...the list goes on, and it's well worth a read.

If you want to sell your physical CD online in the States, then [CDBaby](#) is a good starting point. They even provide a UPC barcode, and your album will be automatically registered with Nielsen Soundscan, ensuring that you will be featured in the charts should sales of your disc suddenly go through the roof...

(of course, if you want to support Irish distribution services, you can also sell your physical CD right here in the [PodShop](#)...)

## [The Stars of Social Media](#)

Thursday, May 17th, 2007

Derek Sivers (of CD Baby) sent me an article today which [documents the phenomenal success](#) of certain CD Baby artists - achieved purely on the back of viral exposure on sites such as MySpace. On one level, this might seem to corroborate the findings of [Duncan Watts' study](#), covered in a previous post on this blog. However, I think it primarily illustrates the importance of having a promotional angle - something that can be described succinctly, sets you apart and which hooks people in to what you are doing.

In the case of Jonathan Coulton, he set himself a challenge of writing and recording a new song every week, which he then posted on his blog. Halfway through last year, his fanbase had grown to include more than 3,000 visitors a day and he was making a decent living off his own music sales. He interacts directly with his fans, to such an extent that he spends several hours every day responding to emails, and instead of going on tour, he picks out towns where he knows he has enough fans to fill a local venue, and goes to them to play.

As another example, a low-quality video of the band *OK Go* dancing on treadmills generated 15 million views on YouTube - a phenomenal reach for any marketing campaign. It seems that the potential of online social marketing knows no bounds, and is only increasing in power - but are we any closer to knowing how to predict the hits?

## [117 Places to Plug Your Performances](#)

I haven't featured a list in quite a while, so today here's a rather substantial one - 117 places where you can post your music, descriptions of your music, gig alerts or just general promotional blurbs...

Some of the following were featured in a [previous post](#), but I reckon it's a good idea to have as many of these links on the one page as possible. With regard to promoting your music, spreading the word should be a priority - and don't be precious about those mp3s either: put them where people can hear them. Hopefully someone will like what they hear and pass it on to their friends, and from such ripples greater waves may develop. If you want a comprehensive guide to modern independent music marketing, you could also try Bob Baker's [Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook](#) (affiliate link) - this is a comprehensive and straightforward guide to promoting your band, and worth every penny.

Anyway, on to the list - a mix of netlabels, social networking sites and blog submission portals. Get yourself on all of these and traffic is bound to pick up. It may take a while though, as most require you to register before posting anything. Not all of these are targeted at new music acts - in fact, many are general resources for website promotion. However, any link you can get to your band page (whether on MySpace or [Podcomplex](#)) is going to boost your online presence and so should be worth pursuing.

1. [Acid Planet](#)
2. [Artistopia](#)
3. [Artist Server](#)
4. [Amie Street](#)
5. [A1-Webmarks](#)
6. [Beta Records](#)
7. [bookit](#)
8. [Bookmark4you](#)
9. [BmAccess](#)
10. [BlinkBits](#)
11. [BlogHop](#)
12. [BlogLot](#)
13. [BlogMarks](#)
14. [BlogMemes](#)
15. [Channel Byron](#)
16. [BlogPulse](#)
17. [browsr](#)
18. [Fark](#)
19. [CiteULike](#)
20. [cloudytags](#)
21. [Canopy Channel](#)
22. [clipclip](#)
23. [clipmarks](#)
24. [Connectedy](#)
25. [Connotea](#)
26. [de.lirio.us](#)
27. [del.icio.us](#)

28. [digg](#)
29. [Download.com](#)
30. [diigo](#)
31. [fantacular](#)
32. [Feedmarker](#)
33. [Feed Me Links](#)
34. [Funender](#)
35. [Furl](#)
36. [Gibeo](#)
37. [GoKoDo](#)
38. [GoogleNotebook](#)
39. [getboo](#)
40. [googlelens](#)
41. [Hyperlinkomatic](#)
42. [IceRocket](#)
43. [Kaboodle](#)
44. [Kinja](#)
45. [Lilisto](#)
46. [linkfilter](#)
47. [listmixer](#)
48. [linkroll](#)
49. [Listible](#)
50. [Lookmarks](#)
51. [Last.fm](#)
52. [ma.gnolia](#)
53. [Mp3lizard](#)
54. [Mesfavs](#)
55. [Netvouz](#)
56. [#1band](#)
57. [Newsvine](#)
58. [openBM](#)
59. [pe.oples](#)
60. [Primetones](#)
61. [RawSugar](#)
62. [reddit](#)
63. [Rojo](#)
64. [Rollyo](#)
65. [rssmicro](#)
66. [Radioindy](#)
67. [Scuttle](#)
68. [Shadows](#)
69. [Simpv](#)
70. [Soundlift](#)
71. [Sitetagger](#)
72. [Smarking](#)
73. [Spurl](#)
74. [StumbleUpon](#)
75. [taghop](#)
76. [tagtooga](#)
77. [TailRank](#)

78. [Ticklr](#)
79. [Unsignedbandweb](#)
80. [Shoutwire](#)
81. [popurls](#)
82. [NowPublic](#)
83. [gravee](#)
84. [wirefan](#)
85. [jumptags](#)
86. [ebooknetworking](#)
87. [pickorflick](#)
88. [devbumb](#)
89. [linkboy](#)
90. [uvouch](#)
91. [jigg](#)
92. [netscape](#)
93. [tagspace](#)
94. [spotplex](#)
95. [awordofhelp](#)
96. [connectedy](#)
97. [oyax](#)
98. [sync2it](#)
99. [tagza](#)
100. [thethingsiwant](#)
101. [urlex](#)
102. [web-feeds](#)
103. [wists](#)
104. [wurldbook](#)
105. [iglobecity](#)
106. [tektag](#)
107. [linklog](#)
108. [linkatopia](#)
109. [otavo](#)
110. [sirlook](#)
111. [Soundclick](#)
112. [Web2announcer](#)
113. [stirrdup](#)
114. [squidoo](#)
115. [Yahoo My Web 2.0](#)
116. [yoonoo](#)
117. [Zurpy](#)