



THE ROUTENOTE GUIDE TO SELF PROMOTION

GET YOURSELF HEARD

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Advantages of Digital Distribution

You already know the advantages that the internet has to offer musicians, you wouldn't be reading this site if you weren't interested in exploiting them. If you're still unconvinced, digital distribution, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways:

Your music reaches a bigger audience than ever before, more people than have ever been into Tower Records, HMV and Virgin Megastores combined have access to your music without either of you leaving home.

More than this, digital distribution costs nothing when compared to physical – you don't need to press CD's or LP's, you don't need to package them, warehouse them, ship them, you don't need to take returns or manage stock, you can just put one copy of a track up with a digital distributor and have infinite copies of your music literally anywhere there's a phone line.

Of course, there are many more ways for people to copy your music without paying for it on the web, but since the cost of getting your music out there is so much less, and a greater proportion of the profits goes to the artist having cut out so much of the bulky record company structure, you'll probably end up making more money anyhow.

The truth is that the internet is inescapable as a medium for music; you just can't afford to ignore it. Even if you think the internet lays your music too open to piracy, and stick with just releasing CD's or vinyl, chances are some one of your dedicated fans will encode their copy and put it up on a torrent site anyway, so you might as well give people the **option** of buying it legally online.

There are a few online music distribution companies out there, each professing it's service and it's model to be the cheapest and the best: what you need to do is figure out which of them is going to be the best for **you**. How many tracks can you reasonably expect to sell? What can you afford to outlay? Figure those things out and then decide which deal is best for you.

The basic models of distributor are:

Subscription – Keep your royalties, but pay a maintenance or subscription fee to keep your music online. Good if you're going to be selling a lot of tracks.

Percentage – Don't pay any fees, but pay for the service with a percentage of the royalties from sales (this is the model we use at RouteNote). Good if you don't want to risk losing any money, or your sales aren't likely to be massive just yet.

Upload fee – A flat fee for uploading your music, and then keep your royalties. Again, good if you're hoping to sell a lot of tracks, but there's no incentive for the distributor to promote your music, as they've already made their money, and can't profit further from helping you out.

Managed – The next best thing to being signed to a record label, some digital distribution companies will take labels and larger bands on, and for a larger cut of the royalties from sales, will make more of an effort to promote their music, or offer other benefits to their partners. It's up to you to decide whether their efforts are likely to be worth the cut.

Controlling your own output means that you don't have to go with the same partner for multiple releases, you can pick and choose different partners for different releases. If you find that the music distribution deal you're on with one company is working better for one release than another, you can change partners for the one that's losing out.

Also consider that digital music sales increase your presence in the marketplace, and a record label will look at the level of your sales of both physical and digital music, and of your live gig audiences when they're looking at signing you (if that's what you're after).

Perversely, focussing on digital music sales can make the physical products you release more desirable. Think about Radiohead: In Rainbows. They put it out basically free over the net, and sold lush, limited edition vinyl and cd box sets, which sold 100,000 copies, and is currently trading for about \$200 on ebay.

Vinyl sales have actually picked up all over since music went digital: vinyl sales across the US went up 80% to 6 million units in 2007, because the real fans want a piece of their favourite band... a lovely artefact to hold and stroke and show off. Make the most of it! If your digital sales are good, that means there's an opportunity to make a premium on really well produced physical material. If you can give your fans something special, that also has a premium because of its scarcity, then they'll happily pay you for it.

Self Promotion

The web has made it far easier to promote and profit from music. So much so that it's now possible for bands to succeed in a big way without having the big finances and professional experience of a record label behind them. This is great news for bands starting up in the music business, but it doesn't mean that success is going to happen by itself, overnight.

The reasons that record labels have lost ground over the last few years are many: most important was their unwillingness to embrace digital as the future of music retail, but the fact that online media also made it easier for musicians to look after the business of running their career for themselves.

Not having people from a label looking after promotion, gig booking, logistics, merchandising and the many other things that go together to make a band successful does mean that you don't have to pay for that work, but it does mean that you've got to do it yourself.

Don't be put off – the rewards are there, and they're greater and closer than ever before. It's just that to get to them you've got to be creative, dedicated, willing and most of all, more smart and cunning than the love-child of Machiavelli and a fox with a master's in cunning from Oxford university of Cunning.

General

Two words you should think hard about. Music. Business. If you're just having fun playing jam nights and amazing your friends with your mad guitar skillz then that's cool, and we'd love to help you put out a release if you record anything you're happy with, but to take music forward as a career you have got to accept that it needs to be a business.

First of all, get your music right. This is the first and most important step in your career as a musician. It's also the fun part. Regardless of anything else, fans will come to you for this reason first and foremost, and if you've got a great sound, the battle is half won. The other half of the fight is a dirty slog through the trenches, getting your music in everyone's ears, making yourself impossible to ignore.

Image

Your music's perfect? There's nothing more to do? Then it's time to start planning your explosive entrance onto the world scene. Think about who you are, what image your music projects, how you want to succeed? Do you want to be Bob Dylan or The Chemical Brothers? Both are massive superstar acts, but with totally different images and vibes. What's yours?

Your music should go a long way to helping you get this central image focused in your mind, but get it right, because everything else in your arsenal of self promotion will take a lead from this primal idea. Of course it helps if you're hugely outgoing with bulletproof confidence (because it will take shots, guaranteed), but there's room for everyone.

Indie star Cat Power started out gigging with her back to the crowd because her stage fright was too bad to let her look at her audience. Recognise your strengths and capitalise upon them – it's easier than pretending to be something you're not.

A strong image will make people believe in you, want to buy into your look and associate themselves with you. A poor image makes you look uncool and unprofessional. Look at the hundreds of sloppy band websites and myspace pages out there – this is often your first contact with a new listener, if you want them to like you it's worth making the effort. Care about that first impression, it shows you care about yourself and your fans.

We can't really help you dream up your image, but there are some things on the RouteNote tools page that should help you actuate it: sites to help you build a good looking myspace profile, guides to setting up your own website and to building widgets to put on your own and your fans myspace pages and websites, places to get t-shirts made.

Research

You need to get ears hearing the brilliant music you've worked so hard on. you need people to love you, and more importantly, pay your rent. Who are these people? If you can identify them, figure out where they're going to listen to music, how they buy it, what attracts them to a band, then you'll find it much easier to make yourself available to them. Transmit on the channels they're already receiving on and you'll see the ranks of your fans grow much faster.

Getting to know your fans means doing some research. When someone befriends you on myspace, message them asking about how they found you. Keep a record and add to it. When someone buys a CD or a t-shirt off you after a gig, get them to give you some details about themselves.

Collect postcodes, mobile numbers, email addresses, anything that makes it easier for you to tell fans when you're next playing, or what fabulous new bit of your merchandise they can buy. Don't pester them, no-one wants to fill out a 10 page questionnaire when all they were after was a badge: there are some sheets on the tools page that you can use as templates.

Consider ways to get people to part with their contact information. Using mobile services like StarTxt.com to distribute mobile content means you can send people tracks or wallpaper in return for their mobile numbers (if you have a lot of 14 year old girls in your fan club, that is).

A great tool for collecting information is the google forms service. If you don't have a google account, sign up for one online in about 30 seconds, and you'll be able to use google documents for word processing and spreadsheets. Alongside these applications is the forms service, which lets you build questionnaires to embed into widgets (see the sproutbuilder guide on the tools page) websites, myspace pages and wherever else you can think of.

Key information you should be asking your fans to provide includes in order of decreasing importance:

Email:

Name:

Post/Zip code:

Postal address:

Country:

Mobile number:

You should also record the date and place you got people's details, so you can be more personal when you contact them. Keep this list close to your heart. Nurture it and watch it grow, because it's the most important possession you have on the road to fame and fortune.

Using The List

Respect your mailing list. It represents real people, people that you're asking to do things with you, and for you. Be regular with your mailouts and updates, so that people keep you in their minds, but don't spam them. One contact per fortnight per method of communication is fine. More, and you'll start to bug people.

Things you should be writing to your customers about are pretty obvious; let them know when you're gigging near them (postcodes are useful here). Let them know when you've got new content on your website, blog, or myspace page, or you're doing a magazine interview or radio session that they might be interested in. Definitely let them know when you've got something new that they might be interested in purchasing, be it music or merchandise.

Learn from your list. If you get loads of people signing up at a gig, or after a particular event, you've done something right. Do it more, and harder.

Your Website

If you haven't got one, why the hell not? You can buy a domain from Active24.co.uk for about £5 a year, a little more if you want some hosting space. And that's all you'll need to spend, in any case, this is not money spent. This is money invested. Set up a paypal sales account, sell two CDs through your website rather than someone else's shop and you're in profit.

There are a lot of different ways to go about creating content for your website – sites like Wix.com and Wordpress.com offer simple solutions and templates for building content rich, good looking websites very easily. Shop around for a platform that offers you the features you're looking for. You don't need to be a graphic designer, there are skins up there for you to choose from. You don't need to be particularly computer literate, there are guides to walk you through putting a site up on your domain, and you can post on forums for help, or call up your hosting company for tech assistance if you're totally stuck.

There is no reason you can't have a fully working site built and running over a weekend, and no excuse for trying to promote a band without one. A little initial effort will pay you back, and soon.

With reference to the maintaining a mailing list, your own site is an ideal place to put a google form to get information from your fans when they visit you. If you're really slick you can even put one into a Sprout widget, and combine it with your band's music, videos and pictures.

Video Content

Really good video recordings from gigs or live sessions are great for getting your fans to do your promotion work for you. Videos get shared around on youtube and other sites, and can spark interest in people, driving them to your website or myspace.

For the wildly creative and highly ambitious there's always the possibility of making a video with the intention of sending it viral. If you get it right it'll be a massive boost, but getting the tone right, and having that brilliant idea that motivates people to send a clip on to their friends is tricky. For inspiration, look at things like OK GO's treadmill video, the diet coke and mentos series, The Flight Of The Conchords entire body of work, and then go and do something entirely different.

Once you've made your videos, make sure they're spread over as many places as possible. This help search engines track you down, and it's like scattering bait all over the internet, the more breadcrumbs you drop, the more people will follow the trail back to your website.

There are tools out there to make your life easier while distributing video content. The most important one to know about is TubeMogul.com. This site will automatically upload your content to all of it's partners, YouTube, Vimeo, DailyMotion, Revver, Yahoo! Video, and all the rest. This means that with one upload you can get your video to a load of sites, instead of slogging round with separate uploads.

We've done a few video sessions ourselves – they're up on our website at <http://routenote.com/blog>, and on all the other places that TubeMogul can help you put yours, as well as Facebook, myspace... you get the idea.

Bloggers – The Uber Fans

If there's one set of people that you want on your side whilst promoting yourself online, it's the music bloggers. They're out there, trawling the web and the venues for the next cool act, hoping they'll stumble across a gem they can hold up to their readers, gleaming in its freshness and individuality, reflecting it's glory and brilliance onto their own work.

Hyperbole aside, you need these guys on your team. Treat them right, make them a priority whenever you make a new video or record a new track, let them have it for a week or so before you put it out for general release. A good relationship with a music blogger is a perfect symbiosis – they want new, interesting music and content, and you want coverage and introductions to new potential fans.

Treat bloggers like royalty and they'll reward you by putting up your press releases, tracks, videos, photos, gig reviews or whatever else you can get them. Put yourself in their shoes and think about what they'd like to be sent – sucking up with free merch will win you points, especially if they like your music.

Some of the most popular music blogs are listed here. Every one of them has a contact email onsite; there is no excuse for leaving them off your list when you're mailing people about your new album. Mail them individually, build a relationship, they're in control of a big, music loving audience that you **need** access to.

Gorilla vs. Bear
Drowned in Sound
Hypebot
Pretty Goes With Pretty
Aquarium Drunkard
Large Hearted Boy
Aurgasm
Soul Sides
NME
CMJ
Rolling Stone

Old Media

When reading the post on how to cherish blogs, you may have noticed that there are some crossover brands that have blogs and physical magazines. A good relationship with the NME, CMJ or Rolling Stone blog gives you a massive lead on getting into the physical magazine, with all the legitimacy and endorsement that implies.

Online media are relatively easy to exploit compared to old media channels like TV, radio, magazines and newspapers, but you can't ignore the old methods. College radio stations in the states, and local radio stations in the UK and Europe actively look for new acts to feature in their shows, especially from their own neighbourhoods. It's worth making a similar effort to butter up DJ's as you should be making with the bloggers – work with them; they need people like you feeding them content in order to do their jobs.

Figure out who is doing the new music or local music show on your local station, who is writing about music in your local paper, and get in touch with them directly. As with bloggers, it's important to make yourself stand out a little to these guys. Make the contact personal and offer them something unusual, a reason to take an interest in you. Make the effort to read their articles or listen to their show – this will reveal to you their own biases, what their audience like, and are like, and it will give you ammunition for making that first contact impossible to ignore. Comment on their work – make suggestions about their show, anything to make it significant and personal. You're asking them to invest time in you; show that you're willing to do the same for them.

You ought also to be taking advantage of old media channels when you're announcing gigs. Most local stations and publications will have a slot for publishing upcoming gigs in their area, get a mailing list of people that compile these gig listings together and mail them every time something comes up. If you use a webmail programme like Gmail, or a desktop one like Outlook it's easy to create groups of people that you can mail in one shot with information like this.

If you do manage to strike up a positive association with a DJ or journalist, then your gig announcements will come with an endorsement every time you're mentioned. Stick it in your scrapbook – you never know when a good quote will come in handy.

Specialist Media

In both new and old media channels (online/mobile vs. broadcast/physical) there will be brands specialising in different areas of music. If you've been sensible, and figured out who your fans are likely to be, then it makes sense to make those brands that cater to your likely fans a priority. If you're in a j-pop outfit, don't bother sending press releases to the editor of Kerrang! This might seem obvious, but in directing your promotional efforts efficiency is of cardinal importance.

If you have £40 sloshing about with nothing to do, get hold of a copy of the unsigned guide. This lovely little tome has got a list as long as your arm of magazine and radio contacts that are looking for your material.

Social Networks

Starting with the obvious: Myspace. It's an ugly, cumbersome brute of a website, very nearly swamped in photos of obnoxious people taken at arms length while they pout or flex, but it's still the first port of call when people are searching for bands online. Sorry, I wish you could avoid it, but you can't really afford to...

You don't need to monkey around with your page too much. Keep your best tracks online and your gigs up to date, and you're about done: the neater the changes you make to the page the better. Highly patterned or coloured backgrounds only make a page harder to read, and the point of having the information on your page up there is so people can read it... Don't be afraid of a little modification though, just make sure it doesn't obscure your page, and fits in with the image you're presenting.

Make sure you've got links up to wherever you're selling your music (we've got an iTunes linkmaker on our tools page) and merchandise (see the guide on being a paypal seller).

There is a swarm of other music social network sites out on the web, and you should probably have some presence on each of them. I wouldn't recommend slavishly maintaining each of 20 profiles though – set up something simple on each one you feel like using, directing readers to your main profile on whatever-it-is.com and keep them updated using artistdata.com's profile syndication service. It's a bit like TubeMogul, but for gig dates and blog posts, put updates on artistdata and they're forwarded to each of your accounts, once you've got it set up right.

It's still worth checking in to all your accounts and making sure they're all working properly, sifting through the inboxes. Just do it once a month and you'll be fine.

Concentrating on one channel or site means people will know where to come to find your properly updated material, you won't lose the opportunity to get fans from minority sites, search engines will have an easier time finding you, and you won't bash your brains out keeping a hundred half-arsed profiles running.

A good shortcut when you're trying to build a fanbase on social networking sites is to get your fans and peers to promote you. Offer other bands you like a mail-swap; write to your fans about them and ask them to write to theirs about you. If you write the mailout for them you're more than likely to get a yes to the swap. You can also try the same with anyone in your fanbase who's got a million friends – offer them a CD or a t-shirt if they mail their friends about you. It seems mercenary, and it is, but it will get your name out there, with a personal recommendation.

Retail Site Promotion

The front page of a music retail site is usually plastered with recommendations or featured bands. They are being promoted because the site thinks it can make money by selling them. You want to be one of those bands that gets the support of a big retailer, don't you? Good. So, you need to offer the site something special to make them pay attention to you. If you're just a small fish, then you need to prove to them how all that's preventing you from becoming big time is a lack of promotion, and that if they help you, they'll reap extra rewards.

Primarily you need to have a package that's commercially viable. Retailers won't bother putting you up on their front-page pedestal if they don't think they're maximising the potential that space has to offer. Sorry, but there it is. Commercially viable doesn't mean you have to sell out and go pop, quite the opposite, it means you have to have something unique and attractive about your music, your image or both, that will make people take notice and want a piece of you. Figure out what this is. Think about the image that you're presenting of yourself and play to that.

Capitalise upon your strengths, match them up to the audience of the retailer that you're approaching and give them a ready made package. Get together tracks, pictures, press releases, merchandise, everything you can muster, and give the retailer a bundle that they can just plug in to. It's a big effort, but a big payoff if you can beat the crowd of artists who want that slot.

Now go and make:

SproutBuilder

On the RouteNote tools page you'll find a magical little thing we built for the People's String Foundation, called a widget. This is essentially a self contained little webpage that can be stuck into other web pages by putting in a little bit of html code linking back to the site where you made it.

This widget was made in the Sprout Greenhouse – a drag and drop flash widget creation web application. You want one of your own, you say? Well OK... Below is a list of things you'll need to collect together on your computer before heading over to <http://sproutbuilder.com> and clicking the 'GET STARTED' button.

- A google documents account
- Mp3's of the best 3 tracks you've got up on iTunes
- Cover art for those 3 tracks
- Your favourite photos of your band or yourself performing
- Any good videos of your act – you could upload these to youtube first if you like (use tubemogul!)

A band website or myspace page

Got all that? Excellent.

Click the get started button. Now click the start building now button. No, I don't know why they have two of them either...

Pick the blank slate from the templates that the greenhouse page offers you. Name your project, probably just your band name will do. Put a brief, keyword loaded description of what you're building in the appropriate box. Try and think of words that will accurately describe your band and the content you'll be putting in this widget so that search engines can find you.

Set the size of your widget – the PSF one on the RouteNote tools page is 400x400 pixels, which is plenty of room to play with, and will fit on a myspace page without squashing everything else up. That said, play around with the size, and go with what feels right.

Got a blank slate to start on? Begin by making four more blank pages with the 'New' link on the toolbar at the bottom. The 5 pages you end up with will be:

- 1) start page
- 2) music player page
- 3) photo slideshow
- 4) mailing list form
- 5) video page

Name them as such by clicking the titles under the little page icons at the bottom of the page. Now click the assets tab at the top of the page and import all of your photos, videos, tracks and album art into the project. You'll do this by either uploading from your computer or providing a url if you've already uploaded your photos to youtube or flickr etc.

Once your pictures are in place, put a picture as the background on each page apart from the photo slideshow page.

Select the music player page. From the media section of the component menu on the left, drag in a jukebox. You'll be prompted to add in music – open up the assets tab at the top and drag in the tracks you uploaded earlier. Once the tracks are in place you can shift the player around the page and change it's size so that it fits in with your photo background.

Now drop in some text from the tools panel on the left. Put in the word 'back', or 'home', or whatever you think is appropriate (change the font and colour if you want), and while the text is still selected, open the Links and Tracking section of the Properties panel on the right, and make the text link back to the start page (which you should have called 'start page' if you were paying attention).

Now move to the photo slideshow page you made, and from the General section of the components panel on the left, drag in a slideshow. Add your photos to this as you did with the tracks to the jukebox, pulling them in from the assets tab. Add another text link back to the startpage and link it up in the properties panel.

Now for the mailing list. Drag in a google form from the services section of the components panel. It'll come up with a box of instructions. Read them, then save your widget (this means setting up your account with sprout, but the site leads you through it) and keep the sproutbuilder page open. In a new tab or window go to your google documents account and in the new menu, select a new form. You'll want at least four questions: add them into the form with the button at the top left.

Your minimum four question fields should be:

- Name
- eMail address
- Postcode
- Mobile number

The first three should be compulsory, but leave mobile phone as an optional field. Make questions compulsory by ticking the box at the bottom of each question's section that says 'Make this a required field'.

You can of course add in more questions to the form, but remember that you've got limited space in the little widget you're building, and people don't want to fill in their life history when all they need is to be added to your mailing list.

Once you've finished your form to your satisfaction, save it. You'll notice at the bottom of the page there's a line of text reading something like:

You can view the published form here:

<http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?key=p4xTeWuspKmFczOpC3EeHVO>

Copy the text of the `http://` address onto your clipboard (ctrl + c) and go back to your sprout widget. In the properties panel you'll notice a new section titled 'Google Forms'. Paste the `http://` address into the 'Form URL' field (ctrl + v). The form should update itself with your questions. Resize it and jiggle it about until you're happy with it. Once this widget is live, you'll find that anyone filling in the form will cause a new entry to appear in the spreadsheet attached to the google form you created. Find this in your google documents account later on, and cherish it. It will make a mailing list for you, bringing in results from wherever you embed the widget, without you having to do any data entry. Joy! Put in a link back to the home page, link it up in the links and tracking section as before.

Now for the video page. A blank background probably works best for this page. Just drag in a video from the assets panel and size and jiggle it till you're happy. If you've got more than one video, you can make more pages the same as this one, but don't try and squeeze too many onto one page, they'll be too small to see. You could just put a text link to your YouTube profile on the page, putting the URL (web address) from the youtube page in the links and tracking panel. Stick in a link back to the homepage of your widget.

Now for the homepage. You should have your four content pages set up, so now you need to put links to them on the title page. Put in some text and make it pretty within the context of your background picture. Size each text box up correctly, so they don't overlap. You can even put buttons in from the general tab of the components menu if you're feeling slinky, it'll just depend on your aesthetic judgement what object you use to link. Probably better to be clear than obscure and super-clever though... Once you've got your link objects (the text boxes) set up, select the appropriate link for each in the links and tracking section. You'll find a little drop down menu with the pages you've made listed on it. Make sure you choose the right one.

Now click preview. Check all the links take you to the right places on and off the widget. Check the video plays ok, and the tracks are in the right place. If you run into any problems at this point, hopefully you're familiar enough with the interface by now to fix them. If all is ok you can publish the widget. Hit the publish button at the top right. Once the publish menu pops up you'll have a list of website icons on the right. Click the one you want to put the widget on, and follow the instructions. Congratulations! You've made a lovely widget!

You can now dish out the code to anyone who'll post this online for you. The more copies of it there are out there, the more eyes will see it, and the more people will sign up to your mailing list.

Good luck...