

Artists In the Millennial Age

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The opportunities for getting music out to the masses have never been more plentiful or varied. In decades past it was the goal of nearly every aspiring artist to secure a major label deal and big league management so they could be free to simply focus on the music. But today's bands, whether signed or independent, are taking control and becoming "do it yourselfers." With that in mind, think of this chapter as a "tool box" filled with ideas that can work for artists at any level of their careers – whether aspiring or established.

To stock our tool box, we interviewed a handful of today's most innovative managers, producers, label heads and artists. We were eager to find out how they navigate today's rapidly changing music industry and what's worked for them – and just as importantly, what hasn't – so you can learn from both their successes and missteps as you chart your own course. Just who was on our "dream team"? Co-founder of Canada's largest independent record label, Nettwerk Productions, Terry McBride; artist rights advocate, solo artist and frontman for New York rockers The Rosenbergs, David Fagin; artist manager for the rock band A.i. and creative marketing consultant Kyle Mortensen; owner/founder of Brannen Creative Management and Ares Records, Benjamin Brannen; and noted film music supervisor, artist manager and record producer Spencer Proffer. We're grateful to all of them for giving so freely of their time, and once you hear what they have to say we know you will be too.

We genuinely believe if an artist or band takes to heart the suggestions being offered here, they'll be well set to have a long, successful and profitable career. Get your highlighters out.....

NOTE: Due to space constraints we were unable to include all of the pearls of wisdom from these individuals, however this chapter will be expanded into an "Artist Manifesto (or Playbook)" which we'll make available separately on completion. So look out for an even richer set of information on this topic.

First, Find Your Fans

The beginning is always a good place to start, and no artist or band will get far without first identifying, knowing and understanding their fan. In today's industry, the fan serves as your marketing department, your promotions department, your street team and advocate, your

retailer and ultimately your consumer. The better you know them, the better you can reach them with your message and your music.

"Every marketing meeting I have starts with finding and understanding your fan," McBride says. "If you don't have any fans yet, understand the music you're creating, which is probably very similar to the music you personally like, and then go figure out who those bands' fans are. Each band has a different fan. The first question we always ask is, 'Who is this artist's fan base?' Then the second question is, 'What does that fan do from the time they wake up until they go to bed?'"

For Nettwerk's politically- and socially-conscious band State Radio, finding an outlet for the message took some creative thinking. First, McBride's team found political and social sites and gave them the music. Since there wasn't a demand for a physical CD, Nettwerk sent the band out on the road while releasing their album digitally. The digital buzz led to interest and the eventual release of a physical CD. Now, nearly two-and-a-half years later, the band's last album has sold about 36,000 copies. But what's more important to Nettwerk is that in approximately 40 marketplaces they can draw between 750-2,000 people a night, which is the basis for a vibrant career.

Make the Connection

We're at a time now where the fan is one degree separated from the artist. As artists let their fans' creativity become part of the mix and benefit from that dialogue, fans get the satisfaction of feeling like they're making a difference in the career of an artist they love. They are actively involved and engaged in the artist's success. It's a win-win all around.

So once you know who your fan is, find ways to connect with them. Some artists may balk at getting too hands on, but McBride says even his megastars do in-store appearances. "And they don't just play, they do signings. Even Avril, on this last record, did in-stores and signings. Even in Mexico where we had to have armed guards. This is what it's about."

McBride isn't asking his artists to do anything he isn't willing to do himself. He saw a recent five-day Barenaked Ladies boat cruise as an opportunity to inform and inspire. In addition to lots of face time with their favorite band, the 3,000 hardcore fans on board were invited to a meeting with management where they were allowed to ask questions, offer input and hear what McBride's team had planned for BNL in 2008.

"It really becomes a collaborative process," McBride says. "I think I know what the band should do, but I'm not going to address it with them until I know what the fans want them to do. The A&R person inside the label used to be your champion. It's like having 3,000 dedicated A&R people."

For the Mortensen-managed band A.i., Kyle strives to make this sort of interaction a way of life. "I've been telling the band since day one, 'you've got to have a direct connection with your fans. Cut out the middle man, just go do it yourself,'" he says. "I remember they were doing a show in Westwood, Calif. [near UCLA] and I said, 'I want you to print fliers and then go and hand them out and start talking to kids.'"

"One of the things I make all my artists do is sit down, take a couple hours, and respond to all of your fans," Brannen says. "And once they start to get into that process, it's no longer a chore for them, they really do enjoy it."

Once you start gathering fans' email addresses, you need to make sure to keep them organized, and stay in touch with them. Fagin relies on Constant Contact. "They basically do it for you," he says of the program. "Put a link in your MySpace page and they keep all the names and all the dates in the database registered for you. And they keep everybody's zip codes in a certain geographic location so you can do an email blast to the southwest if you're heading down there and vice versa."

This fan interaction can also lead to practical benefits for cash-strapped bands. Brannen relies on a UK street team member who goes by the screen name ZaraBullets who helps him design pages for the band Bullets and Octane. "She's an avid fan, and she reached out and said if you need any AOL icons or banners for any of your bands, I'd love to do it for you just out of the love," Brannen explains. "She does great work and she's quick."

Others are also taking talented fans up on their offers to lend a hand. "We have some great fans," Mortensen boasts. "For example, we were in Portland a couple months ago and this A.i. fan who came out to the show said, 'if you ever need help with your website, just let me know.' We contacted him and he helped us get up our new site up in a couple of weeks."

Of course, it goes without saying that you want to make sure these eager-to-please fans have the skills to back up their generous offers and can deliver high-quality results on behalf of the artist.

Preparation Requires Perspiration

One thing everyone we talked to knows well is that you can't wait until a record releases to start promoting your band. The work needs to begin long before that.

"The more platforms you can get an artist exposed on before they put a record out to the public, the more awareness you can create," Proffer says. "In the old days, one would work with an artist creatively – either as a producer or manager (both roles in which I've served) – and you would make the record, turn it over to the record company, and leave it to them to go out there and create an awareness for the artist. But the game has changed. Now [it's about] utilizing all the resources that exist today in this new multi-tiered media landscape to get artists exposure before their music really gets mass-proliferated out to normal distribution channels."

By building a fan base before an album ever releases, it gives a group a huge head start. "It's like starting them on the 30-yard-line rather than starting in the end zone," Proffer says. "The mantra is: find alternative means of exposure before you put yourself out there for the public to judge and buy," he adds. "Find alternative means of getting eyeballs, awareness and impressions. That can be replicated by anybody if you are clever enough, industrious enough and have enough chutzpah."

And don't be afraid to fail. "You want to make mistakes," McBride says. "The 'right answer kills' innovation. We try to do everything we possibly can, and if we're batting 50 percent, we're happy."

If You Build It, They Will Come

Proffer looks at his job with young, rising bands like Crooked X and Flying Machines not necessarily as a manager but as a "career media architect."

Proffer is in partnership with Doc McGhee, one of the most successful and respected artist managers in the industry (KISS, Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe and many others).

"We're building a house brick by brick for these bands – we're not making a house out of straw – so that it will stand the test of time," Proffer explains. We're not trying to get a quick shot – in and out, you

hear the band today, where are they tomorrow." We help our bands develop healthy careers.

McBride agrees that it's a step-by-step process. If you keep that in mind, it will help keep frustration at bay. "It really is hard," Brannen adds. "The entire environment has changed, and it's hard to release a song and see, 'Wow, I only sold 10 downloads this week!' Well, that's 10 downloads. That's 10 people who thought it was great in one week. And if your music is good, they're going to tell others – and that's when things start to take off."

"The one thing we've all learned is you really have to be patient. Some of these things can take a long time to materialize," Mortensen says. "Often, you don't really see the results until maybe six, eight, 12 months down the road. You're just planting seeds out there and you have to water them every single day, add a lot of sunlight and then watch them grow."

And there are plenty of different seeds to plant. "Never before have we had so many tools to utilize for the exposure of these artists and these bands," Brannen says. Artists and managers just have to take advantage of them. All the tools are there.

Not only does the process of building your brand require a number of steps, there's an order artists should follow. First, understand who your fan is, says McBride. Second, understand how to find your fan. Third, understand how to engage your fan. Once those steps are complete, you can understand how to monetize your fan. "But don't think of the monetization first," McBride warns. "That has to be the last part."

The New Math

Speaking of monetization, the old money model had the majority of an artist's revenue coming from CD sales, but that doesn't work anymore (if it ever did). Add to that what McBride calls "collapsed copyrights," and revenue streams for artists are changing right before our eyes.

"It's the same intellectual property, it's just being sold differently," McBride explains. "Ten years ago, out of 100 percent of your income, the intellectual property would have been 20-30 percent. That hasn't really changed much, but your ability to take that 20 percent and grow it - that has changed due to artists owning their own copyrights.... With collapsed copyrights you haven't got all these situations where there are multiple owners who can't always agree on the value of those

copyrights. Because all money goes into the same pot, it's not really an issue. It becomes more about what's best for the artist." And the artist controls and keeps more of his own revenue streams.

Proffer couldn't agree more. "I believe artists should have the fruits of their labor under strong management because many artists don't know how to navigate," he says. "In our model we do not touch our artists' money. We take our same standard, traditional management commission for all the work we do (which is way above and beyond traditional management of just handling records, touring and merch, but virtually running all the media activities), and the remainder goes directly to the bands. With Crooked X [who are all minors], we set up trust funds for all of the kids, set up LLCs, and they will get every dime coming to them without it stopping at our door."

"The playing field is definitely shifting," Fagin agrees. "I spoke to a friend at Sony recently who is one of the heads of music clearances and she says it's so much easier when they can just go to the artist and it's a one-stop shop. For the publishers and the licensors who are looking to get the music as soon as possible and as easily as possible, if you can say I own the publishing and the writing share, you're good to go. It speeds up the process and the artist keeps more of his proceeds under that scenario."

The simplicity of collapsed copyrights naturally leads to more opportunities. Brannen says that when those in positions to place songs find out that his band Bullets and Octane owns both their masters and publishing they are thrilled. "When we were with Sony-BMG it was always a fight over the dollar and between the label and the publisher. We lost a lot of opportunities because of it, and we lost placement because of that. It was incredibly heartbreaking to the band. It's money out of their pockets, it's money out of their hard work and money out of our recoupable debt to both the label and the publisher," Brannen says.

Mortensen sees licensing as a great way to make money and is pursuing licensing opportunities for A.i.. "We've been working with a few agencies on a non-exclusive basis that are looking to get A.i.'s music licensed for film, TV or commercials," he says.

Fagin takes it one step further saying that when it comes to royalties these days for artists, he believes licensing is **the** most important thing. "You see ads for Cadillac using the band Hum along with Led Zeppelin, and you see Black Sabbath now on stuff," he explains. "The

advertising executives are a new breed. They're smarter than the guys who were in their chairs 10 years ago. And they're giving unknowns as well as nostalgic artists a shot on national television. It's a great thing because if you're unknown and you get a Volkswagen ad it boosts your career, and next thing you know you're on these iTunes commercial samplers.

"Advertising agencies are the new record labels. Starbucks is the new record company," Fagin continues. "There are many more venues and many more outlets that are open to using your music – and you can do it yourself. You don't even need to put a stamp on an envelope and put a physical CD in the mail anymore. You can hit 20-30 different music supervisors in an hour with just a link. It's so much different from when you used to have to put a cassette in the mail and wait five days in hope."

Rising Above the Clutter

All of this opportunity can make for a crowded marketplace. "It's just a cluster out there," Brannen says. "There are no barriers of entry into our marketplace so how do you differentiate yourself from anybody else? That's been the biggest challenge for us. What I've learned is you have to create a community around the artist. It's no longer taking a record and slapping it up against the wall, doing some marketing around the record, and hoping something works and a fanbase develops out of that. If one does develop out of that, it's so temporary; it's so disposable."

"That's where the social networking comes into play," Fagin says, "by meeting these bands in your hometown in Athens, Georgia or in Seattle or San Francisco or wherever you are. Don't worry about moving to LA, don't worry about moving to New York, because bands are coming from everywhere. If you find a band you like playing with, stay with them and you guys help each other. Then whoever makes it first, you piggyback. That's a really great way to do things and it's worked for us."

Also be on the lookout for accidental opportunities. "You book yourself the tour and you play for seven people a night and you think nothing's gonna come of it," Fagin says. "Yet you might be on a bill with two other bands and one of those bands might be the next Counting Crows. Silly as it sounds, ultimately it really comes back to community. If you give, you will get."

"By utilizing the tools that are available to us and making sure that we are on point all the time with the latest technology of mailing lists, mobile technology, text messaging, creating fan bases – every medium possible," Brannen believes you give yourself an edge. "I absolutely have found value in text messaging fans," he adds. "It's immediate, they respond, they enjoy it, it's cool. It's right there on their phone: instant information."

To do this, Brannen uses Mozes.com. For the chatroom he set up on Bullets and Octane's MySpace page, he turned to meebo.com. When it comes to technology for Fagin, he's a fan of Garageband.com. "It's great because you can post 50 or 60 songs up there. Everybody's got their MySpace site, but to me they don't have the greatest quality playback on their MP3 player, it takes forever to load and it crashes constantly. But if you can send someone a link to your Garageband.com page, you can post 50 demos up there. I've got my whole publishing library up there. I think it's a really valuable site for artists right now to be able to store their music for free."

Kids want to be entertained, they want to be part of a community, but you need an excuse to engage them. They're not just going to volunteer to come to your page and you don't want to abuse the technology that's available by communicating when you have nothing to say. "You need to have a reason to post a blog, a reason to post a bulletin, a reason to send out an email," Brannen says. "You need a reason for them to join your email list. I'm only going to join a list if there's information I want from that source. Give them an incentive, engage the fan, have them participate."

Meanwhile, Mortensen has found a smart way to approach radio airplay. "There's always this debate whether radio is really worth it these days. We worked with a great company called HushHush ATTACK!," he explains. "What they do is they target tastemakers at specialty radio, meaning we didn't go to KROQ trying to add our single to heavy rotation. But Doc on the 'ROQ has his specific show that's for one hour every week, and if you want to hear the latest in new music you're going to listen to that. We did a radio EP that went out to every tastemaker specialty show in the US. Our single came out and charted at No. 18 on the specialty chart and no. 8 on the albums chart. We were the only unsigned band to chart. We ended up getting about 60+ spins on some of the top stations in the nation. It didn't directly translate to record sales, but it definitely opened up a lot of others doors. The band was able to get in front of some of the biggest booking agents in the UK."

With all the great resources out there, one thing all artists need to watch out for is becoming overwhelmed. Work hard, but don't spread yourself too thin pursuing every single opportunity out there. Look at what's available and then focus on what's right for you – the best approaches and the best set of tools customized to meet your needs.

Now What?

Starting a band isn't the hard part. There's always a lot of momentum in the beginning, but once you reach a certain point it can be hard to know where to go next.

"I've had this happen to me again and again," says Brannen, "where a kid comes to me and says, 'My band recorded a CD, we've got a MySpace page, we shot a video, we threw it up on YouTube, we embedded that in MySpace, we can pull 100 kids in our hometown...now what?' There are so many artists getting to that "now what?" place.

"This is hard for an artist to grasp because it's their craft, but you need to look at yourself as a business," Brannen advises. "You need to allocate the money and resources you're going to invest in yourself across the entire business. As a brand, how do you create a sustainable business? Time, patience and continual investment. Don't spend all the money you have up front making a record. Maybe you have \$5000. Technology is so advanced now, find a friend with a Pro Tools rig and a great room. I've made records for \$1000 that sound comparable to anything else out there. Hi-fi is not the top priority for these kids. They're used to listening to music on phones and through tiny earbuds.

So instead of blowing everything you have on creating the content, allocate some money to marketing and selling your content. Go to purevolume.com, another website I've found incredibly useful. These other sites are social networks, but Pure Volume is for the listener, for the musician, it's a great site. They offer the front page for a very reasonable amount of money, you can buy the front page feature, one of the two side features, you can buy a Pure Volume promo pick, you can promote your shows there, and they get 2-3 million impressions a day."

In the same way you allocate your money, you can allocate your music as well. If you have 12 songs, record those 12 songs, Brannen says,

but release three songs at a time. This strategy gives people a reason to keep coming back. Get out of that mindset of plastic.

A hurdle for many artists without a major label deal is distribution. For that, Fagin turns to TuneCore.com. "The one thing the labels have had since day one over artists is distribution," he says. "Getting records out there, that was every band's dream. You can make CDs or tapes and hand them out at shows, but it's another thing to walk into Tower Records and have your CD out there. TuneCore has provided a means for bands to get direct distribution on all the major DSPs, and what's really great is they only take a one-time fee (\$.99 per track or \$19.98 per album per year). They take no cut out of any of the money because they're not actively doing anything to promote you, they're just giving you the means to get your record out there."

Redefining Success

For so long, the industry has been fixated on gold or platinum albums, but "the metrics of measurement within our business are all wrong," McBride says. Instead of dreaming of World Tours and platinum albums, he suggests focusing on the goal of trying to draw a crowd of 1,000 people per night. "Once you hit 2,000 people a night you actually can afford a tour bus, and then once you hit 3,000 people a night you're maybe affording a mortgage. At 5,000 people a night you can actually buy the house."

Up-and-coming artists need to shift their thinking about what success means in this rapidly changing industry.

"Everyone has their hands up in the air saying 'um, maybe this will work?'" Brannen says. "MTV doesn't play videos any more. Radio is losing its impact. Wal-Mart, Best Buy and Target are all shrinking their music shelf space. The hit model is going bye-bye because with the Internet, kids now have the power. They have the opportunities to listen to what they want when they want, and download what they want when they want. No longer am I going to let the subjective tastes of a few tell me what my personal tastes are. With this power shifting over to the consumer, of course record sales are going to drop.

That doesn't mean he thinks you should count the record industry out. "I think it's going to shift to these niche-based musicians," Brannen says, and I believe that in these niches there's going to be life and prosperity. Musicians that focus on their craft and don't just create disposable music to be part of a trend are going to find their voices in community-based, niche-oriented arenas. And they can develop within

those arenas with a long-term and continual roll out of content, and they'll find success."

Mortensen feels the future of the music business is "small business 101. Artists really have to become business people."

"Right now is an amazing time," Fagin adds. "You can sit in your house and you can make a record. You don't need Clive Davis to come along and give you a quarter of a million dollars. You can do it with a credit card and a Pro Tools system."

For Proffer, power comes in letting go – and banding together. "I totally support, embrace and am a fan of Terry's philosophy to give the artist the power," he says. "I think it's guys like us who can change it up and make a difference. Even if we don't manage or architect every band in the world – which we can't and we won't – we can build a blueprint that other people can draw from, and then it's up to them to know how to implement it."

For more information on the companies and bands mentioned by our interviewees, check out the following sites:

nettwerk.com

meteor17.com

myspace.com/crookedx

myspace.com/flyingmachines

aresrecords.com

bcmgmt.net

aimusic.com

myspace.com/ai

myspace.com/davidfagin

davidfagin.com

rosenbergband.com

garageband.com

constantcontact.com

mozes.com

meebo.com

hushhushattack.com

purevolume.com

allaccessgroup.com

passalongnetworks.com

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