

# **Guerrilla MUSIC Marketing Handbook**

**201 Self-Promotion Ideas**  
**for Songwriters, Musicians**  
**and Bands on a Budget**

**BOB BAKER**

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*To Jay Conrad Levinson, the godfather of Guerrilla Marketing.  
Thanks for shining the light, blazing a new trail,  
and inspiring millions (including me) to take  
the guerrilla path less traveled!*

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***MySpace Music Marketing: How to Promote & Sell Your Music  
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# I want to give you a **FREE** collection of music promotion reports, tip sheets and tools!

Thank you so much for making the decision to open this book and read it. I'm confident that the principles and suggestions you'll find in these pages will inspire you and boost your self-promotion efforts to new levels. But the journey shouldn't end there.

**That's why I invite you to download a free copy of *Indie Music Marketing Secrets*.** To get it, just visit <http://report.thebuzzfactor.com/>

You see, I'm on a mission to empower musicians and creative people of all kinds. I've watched too many truly talented artists squander their potential because they bought into outdated myths about the music business or convinced themselves that marketing was "hard" or "expensive" or "lacking in integrity."

What a crock!

But instead of complaining or throwing up my hands in frustration, I decided long ago to do something about it. I've dedicated my life to uncovering the secrets of successful independent musicians and sharing my findings with smart artists who are willing to listen and learn. Are you one of them?

In the *Indie Music Marketing Secrets* report, you'll discover:

- A rarely used marketing trick you can steal from restaurant menus
- How to create a 12-month music promotion Action Plan
- A simple technique that forces people to listen to your CD
- Your two most important music career actions – hands down
- Understanding the music fan "Attractor Factor"
- And much more

Again, **download your free copy at <http://report.thebuzzfactor.com/>**

To your success!

-Bob Baker

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**Visit [TheBuzzFactor.com](http://TheBuzzFactor.com)** for even more marketing ideas for songwriters, musicians and bands on a budget. While you're there, sign up to get Bob's free music marketing tips by e-mail.

# Introduction

*Welcome to a new way of promoting your music!*

That's how earlier editions of this book began: talking about a "new way" to promote yourself and build a music career. I'm happy to report that this strategy is not so new anymore. Musicians of all stripes the world over are taking their talents and empowering themselves to build their own fan bases, book their own gigs, sell their own CDs and merchandise, and create business models that work for them.

It's an exciting time to be an independent (also known as "indie") musician and not have to rely on A&R big shots, record labels or "the industry" to rescue you from obscurity. Today, you can rescue yourself and build your own music career – on your own terms.

## **Old habits are hard to shake**

For decades, aspiring musicians thought the only legitimate route to success was landing a recording contract with a major label. It was also assumed that a new band needed to be on commercial radio and in major retail outlets to have a fighting chance to survive.

The times have definitely changed. The Internet and low-cost recording technologies have created a thriving do-it-yourself music movement with unlimited options to get exposure and reach fans. Unfortunately, thousands of songwriters and artists still believe the road to widespread recognition can only be traveled through a record deal.

***My advice:*** *Wake up and smell the gigabytes!*

I believe the best way to approach a career as a musician who writes and performs original music is to take control, get your hands dirty, and market your music

yourself. No one will ever feel as strongly about your craft as you do. Which means you're the best person in the world to spread the news.

Sure, promoting your own music takes a lot of effort. No doubt. But it's well worth it. And despite what you may have heard to the contrary, it can be profitable.

## **Artists who have succeeded on their own terms**

Here are several inspiring examples of self-empowered musicians:

- Over the past 20 years, Loreena McKennitt has sold 13 million of her "eclectic Celtic" albums worldwide. Her independent music career spans seven studio recordings and one double live CD. She is completely self-managed, self-produced, and the head of her own internationally successful record label, Quinlan Road ([www.quinlanroad.com](http://www.quinlanroad.com)).

McKennitt's music has won critical acclaim and gold, platinum and multi-platinum sales awards in 15 countries across four continents. She continues to manage her own career to this day.

- In 1988, Lorie Line ([www.lorieline.com](http://www.lorieline.com)) got a job playing piano for customers at a Dayton's department store in Minneapolis. Little did she know it would lead to Lorie Line Music, Inc., a family-run business that has released 26 of Line's CDs, with sales exceeding 5 million copies. She has also published 20 complete books of piano music.

Line attributes her success to the basics – hard work, talent, perseverance and gut instincts. She is involved with every aspect of her company: management, sales, direct mail, public relations, marketing, tour scheduling, web site management, and music creation.

"It's hard to believe that the company I started in my basement is now the second largest artist-owned record label in North America," she says. "People always ask me how we do it all by ourselves. It is overwhelming if you think about it too much. But, because I do something that I absolutely love, my job is rewarding and continually fun."

- Does the name Mark Maxwell ([www.romanticsaxmusic.com](http://www.romanticsaxmusic.com)) ring a bell? Perhaps not. But he's one of the best-selling saxophonists in the world. And although his name is not a household word, his 17 self-promoted solo releases have sold nearly 500,000 copies (yes, half a million) without the support of a record label or significant radio airplay.
- David Nevue ([www.davidnevue.com](http://www.davidnevue.com)) quit a good-paying tech job a few years ago to become a full-time musician and author. The move wasn't exactly a risky one. Over the previous six years he had spent much of his

spare time building awareness for his spiritual solo piano music on the Internet. Through hard work and persistence, he went from obscurity to being one of the most widely played independent New Age artists. He now has thousands of fans and earns more than \$5,000 a month from his various independent music activities. Nevue shares his secrets in a book called *How to Promote Your Music Successfully on the Internet*.

- The Philadelphia-based indie band Clap Your Hands Say Yeah used online buzz and word of mouth to sell 270,000 copies of its debut CD. Guitarist Robbie Guertin told *Spin* magazine, "What can [a record label] do for us that we can't do ourselves? Maybe if someone came up with a good answer, we'd sign. But no one has yet."
- John Taglieri ([www.johntaglieri.com](http://www.johntaglieri.com)), a solo singer/songwriter from New Jersey (featured in Chapter 8), has sold more than 12,000 of his own CDs primarily using the Internet.
- It took her more than four years and 200 live shows a year to do it, but singer/songwriter April Nash ([www.aprilynash.com](http://www.aprilynash.com)) sold over 60,000 copies of her self-released CD.

## Doing it yourself

You've most likely heard of singer/songwriter Ani DiFranco. At age 20, she started her own label, Righteous Babe Records ([www.righteousbabe.com](http://www.righteousbabe.com)), and began performing a growing number of solo acoustic shows. Coffeehouse gigs led to colleges, then larger theaters and major folk festivals.

Over a seven-year period she sold more than 400,000 copies of her many independent releases (an average of 66,500 units per year). In one year alone, DiFranco performed 130 shows and generated almost \$2 million in gross ticket sales. She's been written about in glowing terms by just about every major magazine and newspaper.

**Note:** DiFranco was one of the early indie music pioneers who, in the 1990s, accomplished all of her success without a major record label, commercial radio airplay, MTV exposure, or advertising. "If you are disgustingly sincere and terribly diligent, there are ways for any serious artist to operate outside the corporate structure," she once told the *Los Angeles Times*.

According to the Righteous Babe web site, "Along the way, she has inspired countless other musicians to rewrite the rules of the recording industry by striving for self-sufficiency and refusing to allow art to be subsumed by commerce. Small wonder, then, that Ani made CMJ's list of the 25 most influential artists of the last 25 years, taking her place alongside U2, Nirvana, the Pixies, and Radiohead."



So the next time you get down in the dumps because that major label recording contract hasn't come your way yet, pause and realize that – like DiFranco and other self-supporting musicians – you may be better off as an independent artist.

And don't think that the examples I use here are rare, isolated cases. Granted, most indie acts don't reach such impressive levels. But there are thousands of songwriters, musicians and bands turning a decent profit. And they're doing it their own way – doing something they have a real passion for: making and sharing music.

## **Putting your music career in focus**

This manual was written to help you get a grip on the confusing topics of music marketing, promotion and sales. The concepts, ideas and suggestions in these pages are simple. That's not to say they're always easy. There's work to be done here, but it's the kind of activity that's well within your ability to pull off.

The problem with most independent music people, even the ones who take lots of action, is that their effort is wasted on the wrong activities. By the time you finish reading and working with this book, you'll have a much clearer idea of how to direct your energies.

There are a few essential principles that run throughout these pages. They include the following:

- 1) **Question everything you've ever been told about the music business.** If you get involved in the music biz for long, you'll encounter plenty of people – some with impressive résumés – who will offer you their best music business advice. That's fine. The more information you take in, the better educated you'll be. But remain flexible and open-minded. The rules are changing quickly, so beware of anyone with an outdated, black-and-white view of the music world. These days, *you* get to pick and choose which existing "rules" truly apply to you – and you can create more empowering rules that suit you along the way.
- 2) **Give yourself permission to succeed.** The biggest mistake you can make is waiting for someone or something else to deem you worthy of pursuing a music career. You don't need an official sanction or a green light from anyone other than yourself (and the segment of the fan population you serve). So go ahead and give yourself approval right now!
- 3) **Whenever you take action to promote your music, you must know exactly why you're taking the action to begin with.** Action by itself is not enough. You must know the purpose behind your actions. What is the real outcome you desire? The best way to make sure you're going about things effectively is to come up with a plan that makes sense, have very

focused goals, and realize that you need to provide a benefit (or solution) to everyone you connect with in the music business.

- 4) **Think outside of your mental box.** Human beings are creatures of habit. We become victims of our own routines. Therefore, it's no surprise that we slip into a narrow way of doing things. Habits are quite useful when they involve brushing your teeth, getting dressed, and driving a car.

But when it comes to promoting your music, this routine way of thinking – and acting – is stunting your progress. When you market yourself the same way you've always done it, or the same way a thousand other artists have done it, you become part of the great indie music swamp in which everyone looks and sounds the same.

## Your music marketing challenge

In this manual, I'll poke and prod you to be different, to expand your thinking, to focus your goals and actions – in essence, to become a true Guerrilla Music Marketer. We won't be talking about national advertising campaigns, music videos on MTV, or worldwide retail distribution. Instead, the following pages will show you how to:

- Work from the trenches, with little or no money
- Use often-overlooked techniques to give your music wider exposure
- Build a following one fan at a time
- Use each small success as a stepping stone to a bigger and more significant success story

I'm also going to ask you to do some serious soul searching and then commit your thoughts to paper by filling out the two Activity Worksheet sections. On these pages I take the main points covered throughout the book and give you a space to craft your own responses.

I implore you to use these worksheets! For it is here where my assorted suggestions come to life and become your own. By writing in these sections, you'll get a clearer idea of where you are and in what direction you need to be heading.

## Guerrilla techniques in action

It was using these same guerrilla tactics – while capturing my thoughts and goals on paper – that led me to start playing music when I was 15. (The year was 1975, in case you're keeping score.) In the 1980s I played the club circuit full time throughout the Midwest as a singer/guitarist/songwriter, and I later played in bands that each put out independent releases. I continue to play music part-time to this day.

I used many of the very ideas in this book to launch my own local music magazine in 1987. I didn't have much money to work with and had no connections or experience with publishing. What I did have was a good concept and a knack for writing. That newspaper, called *Spotlight*, grew and flourished for 10 years until I stopped doing it in 1997. I put the paper to rest so I could concentrate on writing and publishing resources like this one.

In 1993, a company published my first book, *101 Ways to Make Money in the Music Business* (now out of print). I realized then that being an author would be a big part of my future. Later that year I founded the St. Louis Regional Music Showcase, an annual music conference that ran for five years in the Midwest. In 1996, I self-published the first version of the book you hold in your hands.

## **Evolving over the years**

In the mid to late 1990s, after years of writing music success columns in the print world, I established an online presence for indie music marketing tips at TheBuzzFactor.com. At last count, my e-zine, also called *The Buzz Factor*, was approaching 10,000 subscribers. In more recent years, I've also been publishing blogs, a podcast and video content.

I've also cranked out many more books and spoken-word audio programs, including *Music Marketing Crash Course*, *MySpace Music Marketing*, *Unleash the Artist Within* and *Branding Yourself Online* – while also speaking at music industry conferences.

Why the résumé listing? To make a point: I wasn't born into a wealthy family. I don't have friends who wield great power, nor do I have any special abilities. I'm certainly not a super salesman and I don't have a hyper, Type-A personality.

**Insight:** But I realized early on that I had a mind, just like everyone else's, that I could use to make things happen. The only thing was, it seemed so many people around me felt as if they were victims of circumstance; that life handed them their fate and they were just along for the ride. That wasn't good enough for me.

After reading many inspiring books and pondering about life for a while, I came to the conclusion that our lives are simply a reflection of our accumulated thoughts and actions. There's a great quote by Earl Nightingale that goes, "We become what we think about most of the time." If you truly comprehend that simple statement, it will change your life.

## **The secret to musical success**

The problem with people living dead-end lives is that they think dead-end thoughts. People who enjoy successful lives think successful thoughts – and then reinforce those thoughts with positive action.

Once I realized this simple but powerful truth, I started directing my thoughts in more productive ways. And the actions followed quite naturally. No doubt, I've stumbled many times on my journey through life and the music business (and I continue to), but the rewards have been many. And they keep growing every year.

**Bottom line:** *Thoughts are things.* What starts as an intangible concept grows into a reality as a result of mental focus combined with real-life activity. In fact, this is exactly how all songs are created.

So I ask you: What thoughts do you have about your present and future as an independent musician? And what actions are materializing as a result?

The *Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook* will help you sort out the answers, open your mind to the infinite possibilities around you, and motivate you to take the steps necessary to climb higher up the ladder of success with your music.

## How to use this book

Many of the chapters in this manual were originally written as separate special reports. While I have arranged them in a sequence that makes sense to me, you don't have to read the segments in any particular order.

However, I do suggest that you read Section 1, "Guerrilla Music Basic Training," first. These chapters give you a good foundation for the information contained throughout the rest of the book. Other than that, feel free to examine the sections and chapters that relate to whatever marketing or music career topic you want to focus on at the time.

**Warning:** While I've gone to great lengths to load up this book with creative marketing tactics and techniques, I encourage you not to get so consumed by the tactical details that you lose sight of the big picture: making great music and sharing it with a growing number of fans. It's not the web site, media exposure, or CD cover art that's most important. What's most essential is how those things help you connect with more fans in a meaningful way.

I'm grateful that you're allowing me to share these ideas with you. I sincerely hope you soak up the tips revealed in these pages and put them to good use. I look forward to one day hearing about your far-reaching musical achievements.

Much success to you. Now get out there and promote yourself!

-Bob

## **Section 1**

# **Guerrilla Music Basic Training**

## Chapter 1

# 3 Simple Steps to Effective Music Marketing

Ready to dive into this first chapter? Great. Here's a simple question for you:

### **What is music marketing?**

Sure, you know it's something you have to do. You have at least some grasp of what is it. You recognize it when you see it (most of the time). But at its most basic level, can you explain what it is?

And more importantly, can you spell out the basic elements of *effective* music marketing? Because, after all, if you're going to invest your time and energy in promotion, it better be effective. Right?

Don't worry if you can't come up with a quick answer to my question. On the other hand, please don't curse me if you think you know the answer and feel my probing here is pointless. Because it isn't.

If you plan to read this book and use these ideas to create a music promotion plan for your music, you better damn well know why you're doing it. You need to understand the underlying principles at work here. These elements are simple, but they're often glossed over by eager musicians who just want to "get their name out there."

Getting your name out there is fine. It's better than doing nothing at all. But mindless music marketing – without focus and purpose – usually leads to frustration and continued obscurity.

**The solution:** Look under the hood and get a grasp of what's at the core of every effective music promotion plan.

## The three stages of music marketing

When it comes right down to it, music marketing consists of these three elements:

- 1) **Creating awareness** – taking action to communicate your identity to a specific audience
- 2) **Making connections** – starting and maintaining relationships with a growing number of fans and media/business contacts
- 3) **Asking for the sale** – generating cash flow and creating incentives for fans to spend money

There they are. The three stages of marketing. In a nutshell.

Seems simple enough, right? Then why do so many music promoters get it wrong? They spend time on one or two of these stages but ignore the second or third. Or they get busy doing a bunch of marketing “stuff” but don’t stop and think long enough to ponder how their efforts fit into the three-stage process.

### Don’t make these mistakes!

Want some examples? Have you ever seen a band or record label run an ad that shouts out something along the lines of “*Wakeup Call*, the New CD From the ABC Band. In Stores Now!” Just the name of the band, the name of the CD, and the fact that it is now on sale. Perhaps you’ve even created an ad or flier like this yourself.

What’s wrong with this picture? Well, with this ad, the band is creating awareness, and it is asking for the sale. But it leaves out an entire, all-important stage: developing relationships with fans.

This error would be especially unforgivable if this was the only marketing method the band was using. Why? Because consumers typically need repeated exposures to something before they’ll get out their wallets. In addition, they need to feel a connection to the music and the artist. This ad does nothing to facilitate the relationship. And that means wasted money spent on advertising.

**Another example:** Have you ever known (or been in) a wonderful band that does a good job of creating awareness and a great job of connecting with fans – perhaps through their live shows? But then they drop the ball when it comes to asking for the sale and generating cash flow. They don’t make people aware that they even have CDs for sale and don’t make enticing offers for fans to buy now.

Again, they're only putting together pieces of the puzzle. And it's the missing pieces that are stopping them from reaching the music career level they really want to be at.

To help you use the three stages of music marketing better, let's examine each stage and go over a summary of how you can make the most effective use of each one.

## **1) Creating awareness**

This is the crucial first step. You really can't do much with the next two stages until you're getting results from this stage. Obviously, exposure is your main goal here. But before fans, the media and other people in the music business can help you, they need to be aware of you. They need to be familiar with your name and the type of sound you create.

As you'll read in a number of chapters throughout this book, there are certain things you need to do before you march out into the world and start promoting yourself. First, you must:

- Define who you are as an artist.
- Determine who your ideal fans are.
- Come up with a way to clearly communicate your identity to these ideal fans (and media/business contacts).

Once those issues have been addressed, you take action to communicate your musical identity (and the benefits you offer) to a specific target audience. Some of the ways you accomplish this is to:

- Perform live as often as you can.
- Pin up posters to promote your gigs.
- Register a domain name and create an artist web site.
- Set up a MySpace.com artist profile.
- Post music video clips on YouTube.com.
- Research and discover where your ideal fans congregate online and off.
- Contact influential bloggers and podcasters.
- Pursue media coverage online and off.
- Set up shop on sites like GarageBand.com, SonicBids.com, Last.fm and more.
- Write and distribute press releases.
- Pursue radio airplay online and off.
- Determine the words and phrases that potential fans use to search for new music like yours.
- Optimize your web pages so they're more likely to be found with those key words and phrases.



- Determine what popular artists you sound like and tie into those artists' existing fan bases.

This is just a quick overview of the steps involved in this stage (I'll get into more details about many of them later), but it should give you a good idea of what creating awareness is all about.

## 2) Making connections

This is the step way too many aspiring musicians try to skip over. And they do so at their own peril. Quite often, artists don't even realize they're turning their backs on this step, or they don't comprehend the importance of it to begin with.

**Core idea:** As an independent artist, you can't think only in terms of marketing to the masses. That's an old-school, major-label strategy. So stop thinking about marketing as a way to catapult your message to an enormous, faceless crowd from a distance.

Guerrilla music marketing is personal. It's often delivered one-on-one. And even when you do direct a message to a sizeable audience, that audience is targeted and predisposed to like you. And, when communicating to crowds, your tone should be warm and personal. In fact, that's one of the things that sets you apart from bands that are mass-promoted and "handled" by corporations.

So, how do you start and maintain personal relationships with a growing number of fans and music business contacts? Here are just some of the actions you can take:

- Build a mailing list by collecting names, e-mail addresses, and snail-mail addresses at your live shows.
- Talk to people at your live shows and become friends with your fans.
- Put an e-mail sign-up form on every page of your web site.
- Create incentives for fans to join your e-mail list.
- Send e-mail updates to your fan list at least twice a month.
- Mail post card announcements to your fan list every other month.
- Communicate with editors, reviewers, bloggers and podcasters in your genre and nurture relationships with them.
- Reply to all fan and industry e-mails promptly.
- Respond to people who post comments on your pages at MySpace, YouTube, etc.
- Start a blog and share your music-related thoughts and experiences with your fans.
- Thank your fans often and treat them well.

Can you see how important this step is? Your job is not only to make people aware of you. Your job is to notice the people who connect with you the most (or who can potentially help you the most) and cement the bond between you.

### **3) Asking for the sale**

When I encounter musicians who ignore this step, it always leaves me scratching my head. Why don't more artists ask for the sale and encourage fans to spend money? Well, sometimes they simply forget to ask. Other times they're too shy or they fear they'll be perceived as cheap hucksters.

My advice: Get over it!

Want to know the biggest reason musicians avoid this essential stage? Insecurity. It's the feeling that their music has no value and is not worth paying for.

That's too bad. Because if they'd only take a few more steps to encourage fans to buy, these artists would find that fans have a different opinion. Most consumers who spend money on music feel that it enriches their lives and have no problem parting with a small amount of cash to take home new music or download it to their computers.

So get it into your head that your music is worth paying for. And make a commitment to this important third music marketing ingredient by doing the following:

- Announce that you have CDs and merchandise for sale at your gigs – and have some fun with it.
- Set up an attractive, efficient merchandise table at shows.
- Make every music CD you release available for sale on CDBaby.com.
- Sell your CDs on Amazon.com through its Advantage Program.
- Use CD Baby's digital distribution program to make your tracks available on iTunes, Rhapsody, eMusic and other major music download services.
- Stress customer benefits, not the features of your CDs.
- Use testimonials from satisfied fans and the media.
- Offer a money-back guarantee on sales from your own web site – yes, even for digital downloads.
- Sell more by offering a collection of your CDs and merchandise at a special bulk price.
- Make limited-time and limited-quantity offers.
- Offer lots of free bonuses to fans who buy now or at a minimum purchase amount.

Selling your music is not the evil deed many musicians make it out to be. On the contrary, it's an essential element to a successful music career.

So commit these three simple steps to memory. Engrave them in your brain. And the next time you create a new promotion plan, make sure your efforts are hitting on some combination of these three effective music marketing steps:

- Creating awareness
- Making connections
- Asking for the sale

Keep your eye on these three simple elements at all times. Doing so will make a world of difference in your pursuit of indie music success.