

How to Recession-Proof Your Music Career

37 Ways Musicians, Bands and Record Labels Can Reduce Expenses and Prosper in Today's Economy

Bob Baker

© by Bob Baker

You are welcome to share this PDF report with anyone you want, as long as you don't alter it or charge money for it in any way.

For more tips and tools for independent musicians, please visit www.TheBuzzFactor.com

It's all over the news: Recession, layoffs, downsizing, sky-high gas prices. It seems consumers are going out less, cutting back on entertainment purchases, and generally holing up in caves to ride out the storm.

Not to mention, both independent and major label artists are scaling back their tour dates as they wrestle with the high cost of fuel.

What's an ambitious indie musician to do?
Hint: The answer is NOT to run and hide!



When putting together this free ebook, I turned first to the readers of my long-running ezine, *The Buzz Factor*. With 10,000 subscribers strong, I knew I could turn to them for some great ideas on cost cutting and making the most of these challenging times.

The first series of tips in this book comes from these smart readers, followed by many other pieces of advice on making and saving money based on my own life and research. I hope the ideas on the following pages help you prosper with your music – in good times and bad.

-Bob Baker

www.TheBuzzFactor.com

1) Choose New Cities to Play Wisely

Scott Ference, a member of the Seattle band Ockham's Razor (www.seattlerazors.com), recommends that indie artists pick one location and concentrate on establishing a fan base there. He says his band has discovered an effective method for choosing which cities to focus on.

"Our drummer and I have family in Texas," Scott says. "We also have made friends with bands in that area. This allows us to fly to Texas, stay with family and friends, and eliminate hotel costs."



Once the band members figured out that Texas was where they wanted to tour, they soon booked two weeks worth of gigs around the Austin/San Antonio area.

"We've established a whole new group of fans in a new area," Scott continues. "We plan to repeat the process in Boston and then Chicago. This will eventually allow us to travel to these cities throughout the year as we continue to broaden our fan base there. Since we'll only return once a year (but will keep all our new fans up to date with our monthly newsletter), when we do play in their city again, they will be hungry to see us."

The next three tips are also from Scott Ference:



2) Make More Merch!

"If someone goes to see a band from out of town and they LOVE YOU, they'll wanna take a piece of you home, because they don't know if they'll see you again. We made \$1,600 from three shows alone selling T-shirts and our one CD. Can you imagine how much we could have sold with two or three CDs?"

Scott makes a great point. If you play out even a little bit and you aren't selling merchandise, start doing so right away. And if you only have one or two items for sale now, add more to your line.

Here are a few sites that create music merch at decent prices:

www.stickersandmore.com
www.zazzle.com/mk/music/learnmore
www.jakprints.com
www.contagiousgraphics.com
www.customink.com



3) Land a Mini Sponsorship

“Approach a local music store, a bar you play at all the time, or a company that does business across the country. If you ARE driving, offer to put a couple large magnetic signs advertising their business on the side of your van, if they’ll sponsor you to cover gas or motel fees. Take photos along the road in different locations with the band next to their ad on your van. Offer to mention their company during every show: “Thanks to So & So business for sponsoring our tour. We have some info about them on our merch table.”

Why not? Give it a shot.

4) Fly Instead of Drive?

“Some people argue that flying costs the same as driving, but I’ve found that once you add up the meals you buy along the drive, the gas, the motel rooms you need, the wear and tear on the band members themselves, I really think flying to a location where you have friends/family that will put you up really saves you not only money, but sanity, and it makes the tour much more enjoyable.”



5) Play More Lucrative Gigs

Scott also adds, “We are in a niche music genre (Celtic rock) which is a LOT easier to get higher paying, single bill gigs from new-music-hungry Irish pubs and venues than, say, a typical rock band which many venues consider a dime a dozen.”

Wisconsin singer-songwriter Nick Venturella (www.nickvmusic.net) agrees:

“Look into booking better-paying gigs. Always easier said than done, I know, but college shows and corporate gatherings (conferences, etc.) often have a budget for bringing in entertainment that tends to be higher than that of a bar or club venue. That makes such a show more worth your while financially.”

Nick adds, “However, this may not be a fit for you or the music you create. Plus, there is usually a lot longer lead time to book these kinds of shows.”

I like this line of thinking, though. Don’t assume everyone is broke and struggling. There are companies, events and venues that have a budget to bring in the right kind of entertainment. Why not you?

6) Get Tour Support From Your Fans

Susie Codd of Noteworthy Music Management in San Francisco offers a great grassroots fundraising idea:

“I’d love to see bands add a PayPal button to their web site, followed by an email blast asking for tour support from their fans. If the band puts out an SOS to their fans, and the donation process was easy and simple to execute, I bet they’d get a GREAT response and be pleasantly surprised at how supportive their fans would be in helping get them to come play in their city. This is also an excellent way to build community between the band and their adoring fans!”



See, I told you my ezine subscribers are incredibly smart people.

7) BetterThanTheVan.com

Susie also made me aware of a new web site called Better Than the Van. She says, “Its function is to organize a community of free places for bands to stay while out on tour. BTTV helps connect touring bands with those folks willing to provide sleeping accommodations in their homes while on tour.”

She continues, "It reminds me of the 'Pay It Forward' concept and I think it's a great idea! This web site just launched recently, so it still needs a little time to gain momentum. But it's a wonderfully creative approach to help bands deal with the economic challenges of touring."

Check out the site at www.betterthanthevan.com.

8) CouchSurfing.com

Sabine of the duo ArtemesiaBlack (www.artemesiablack.com) recommends another similar site.

"There is an amazing site called www.couchsurfing.com," she writes. "It's a brilliant site of like-minded travelers who support each other by supplying a couch for each other (as accommodations are so expensive). I was already involved on this site for a non-music trip I was about to make to Europe when a touring road trip opportunity came. So I thought, why not use this site for this tour as well.



"I have made some amazing new friends who we will be staying with on our tour. It means one must be a lot more organized with timing and dates and you cannot be totally selfish, but it's well worth it because not only do you save money on accommodations, but your host can show you around the town if you've never been there. You have someone friendly in that town to meet when you arrive and they might just become a great fan of your music and introduce you to all their friends. Brilliant, eh?"

Indeed!

9) LunaTravelnet.com

Reader Julie Brewer runs a site and service called Luna Travelnet. Its motto is "Rock Star Digs. Rock Bottom Rates."

Here's a description from the site: "City after city, venue after venue. Touring can be grueling and expensive. At Luna Travelnet, we'll find you a great place

to crash and save you a ton of cash. You'll be able to focus on your real job - getting your music out there!"

Pay a visit to www.twitter.com/lunatravel.

10) Webcast Your Music to the Masses

Natalie Gelman (www.nataliegelman.com) offers this excellent alternative to geographic touring:

"I think artists can thrive in a time like this. There are many online virtual webcasting tools that can help people connect to you and support your music," she writes.



"Besides performing live and streaming it, you could also create an online webcast or TV show. I have one on Justin.tv that I just started. I go on every Monday at 9 pm. It's a very effective tool. People immediately buy downloads, sign up for my mailing list, connect with me on other social media sites (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook). I think if someone has a webcam, they should be doing it."

Natalie recommends checking out www.ustream.tv and www.justin.tv, along with this advice:

"You don't even have to make live video interactive. I think it would be successful if a band just put it on while they were rehearsing or getting ready for a show. And if you have a wireless connection at a gig, it's a way to get even more people watching your live show."

Also visit these sites for more webcasting options:

www.live365.com
www.google.com/hangouts



Nick Venturella has another spin on this concept:

“With the power of the Internet, you can create short videos, or even audio recordings, that act as teasers to longer versions of those videos/audio recordings,” he says. “The teasers could drive traffic back to your web site, where fans can buy the longer versions as a digital download, and neither party is spending precious gas money.”

The next four ideas and quotes are all from Nick (www.nickvmusic.net) as well:

11) Get Busy Online

“Use the Internet to regroup and engage your audience more online. Blog a bit more, and simply ask your fans in what ways they would enjoy experiencing you/your music in these tough economic times that is impacting everyone. Then figure out which ideas you can actually pull off, and deliver them as best you can. This can help you find a solution to survive the tough economy while firming up your connection with your fans by delivering what they’ve asked for in a Web 2.0 way.”

Note from Bob: Consider starting a Facebook group or create your own social networking fan club at www.ning.com.



12) Feed Your Hungry Fans More

“Simply make those rare recordings (B-sides, live shows, demos) available as digital downloads or full discs available through an online store. Essentially, increase the amount of new consumable music you can offer via the Internet to keep your fans interested with new “stuff” from you/your band. This helps you maintain that relationship with your fans, and saves on your (and your fans’) gas money.”

13) Use the Buddy System

“To still allow rubber to meet the road, you can partner with other musicians from your area to book a complete bill at various venues, travel together, and split the travel expenses.”

14) Check Into House Concert Hotel

“Do house concerts, both locally and regionally, and as part of the agreement, have whoever is hosting the concert put you up for the night, which will eliminate a hotel cost and help your bottom line.”

Thanks, Nick, for all the great ideas!

15) Go Compact With Your Sound System

Scott Gordon (www.scottgordon.co.cr) has some good advice on how to save money when traveling with a sound system:

“Take a lesson from the home theater and computer 5.1 sound systems and learn just how little you need those big 15” speaker boxes. In a coffee shop, you can actually play through some of those high-end 5.1 systems with micro speakers and sound like you’re coming out of a much larger PA. And it can all fit in the trunk or backseat of a compact car.

“Larger sound systems can adapt by scaling down to smaller front cabinets and monitors, and letting one big (amazing what just one good 12” will do) powered subwoofer cabinet shake the stage floor and the room. You’ll like the sound a whole lot better and you’ll be able to hear yourself much easier, too – all while sounding ‘bigger.’



“And if you’re putting together cabinets yourself or out shopping speakers, the new neodymium magnets pay for themselves in extra cost by the drastic cut in weight and increased power handling, making the above tips work even better, and cutting down on worries about blowing the smaller speakers. You should now be able to upgrade quality while cutting quantity.

“You’ll also need less power for the same sound when using a satellite small speaker/monitor set-up. Your only real super amps needed will be for the subwoofers themselves.

“I hope this turns on some re-thinking about the most efficient use of speakers, in both weight and power. 15” cabinets with their big-on-distortion

super horns have always sounded horrendous anyway. You'll find a re-designed speaker array so much easier to carry."

16) Plan Smart and Profitable Road Trips

Kathena from the band The Hippy Nuts offers this personal account:

"We just booked two shows for the same weekend so that we could hit one show in upstate New York on Saturday, then another one on the way home on Sunday. This gave us two chances to get paid and sell CDs.

"We also stayed with friends both nights to offset the cost of gas. We also asked for a bigger fee for the wedding gig, because people are willing to pay more for special occasions. We also spend less on wardrobe and eating out.

"It's best not to panic about the gas prices because playing out opens up more chances for people to enjoy your music – and more chances to sell our music."

17) Coast to Gas Savings



Rob Richards, an indie musician from Johannesburg, South Africa, offers this quirky tip:

"I know this sounds weird, but what I've been doing for a while (and what I used to do as a student) is "freewheel" drive down the downhills! Johannesburg is quite a hilly city, so it's always up a hill

and then down the other side. Freewheeling and driving 10 km an hour slower has made my car about 2km per liter more fuel efficient, and you won't ever get a traffic fine for speeding."

18) Use These 5 Weekend Warrior Tips

Emily from Battle Victorious (www.battlevictorious.com) writes:

"We just went on a weekend tour to North Carolina from Memphis, TN. Here are some ways we made and saved money:

- Have yard sales
- Play LOTS of gigs (even small ones) everywhere
- Give homemade CDs away for donations (it's amazing how many donations you can get!)
- If you have an extra room in your house, rent it to a student
- Ask for prayer - life is so much bigger than money!

A big thanks to all the artists who contributed tips for the first part of this special report!

19 More Ideas to Help You Make the Most of Your Money

1) Make Use of Craig's List

Want to find great bargains on used gear? Got old equipment of your own to sell? Don't overlook www.craigslist.org as a place to buy and sell stuff you need or want to get rid of.

2) Maximize Your Recording Budget

Steve Sherrard of MusicTECH Productions offers these great tips on making the most of studio time:



"Just because you may have 24 or more tracks available, doesn't mean you have to use them all! Sometimes less is more. Don't try to squeeze extra parts into a song just because you have extra tracks available.

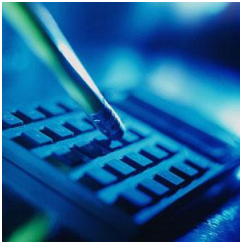
"Reserve the most time for the part that is the main focus of the song. If it's the vocals, spend the most time working on them. Build a strong foundation for the focal point of the song, but don't waste valuable studio time sweating small details that don't highlight the focal point.

"Don't waste time double tracking everything. Plan out ahead of time which parts should be doubled. You need to have contrast in a song for it to be

effective, and doubling a part can sometimes hide the subtleties that can give a song personality.”

3) Switch to Low-Interest Credit Cards

If you must charge your expenses and carry a credit card balance, make sure you're paying the lowest rates possible. A good site to find the best deals is www.bankrate.com/brm/rate/cc_home.asp



5) Calculate Your Income and Expenses

To get a solid handle on your finances, you must know the numbers and how they add up. Use these quick and easy online budget calculators to see where you stand:

www.fool.com/calcs/calculators.htm

4) Set Up Camp – for Free?

Camp near your gig location instead of staying at a hotel. If there is a state or national park nearby, camp or stay in a cabin and save lots of money.

Source: www.campgrounddirectory.com

Austin musician Shawn Madden (www.shawnmaddenmusic.com) tells me there's a KAO Kampgrounds program that allows musicians to camp free if they provide live music the night they stay. Look for KAO locations at www.koa.com.

5) Find the Best Airfare Deals

Just about everyone knows the big four online travel sites: Orbitz, Travelocity, Expedia and Priceline. But there are lots of newer and alternate sites worth searching for travel deals too, including:



www.kayak.com (which searches multiple sites for the best deals)

www.mobissimo.com

www.tripadvisor.com

www.lastminute.com
www.flyspy.com
<http://www.bing.com/travel>

Source: <http://moneycentral.msn.com/>

6) Get the Best Hotel Rooms and Rates

Hotels often have two classification systems for their rooms: the published categories, like standard, suite, ocean view; and the unpublished categories. These are secret, internal ways of tagging a room, ranging from the least desirable (that would be the one between the elevator and the ice machine, over the kitchen and under the disco) to the most desirable (usually, the presidential suite).



A hotel will classify its rooms based on how much you paid for it and where you bought it from. Did you score a cheapo room on a discount travel site? Odds are, you'll end up in the worst room in the house. Here's how to still save money and get a better room: Buy directly from the hotel's web site. It typically treats its direct-booking customers better than outsiders. Hotels will deny they do this when they're on the record. But off the record, they admit it happens.

7) Track Your Spending

Take the time to track your spending habits for one week. Make note of every single dollar you spend, even those sodas and candy bars purchased here and there. This will give you a bird's-eye view of exactly where your money is being spent and will allow you to refine your spending habits to save more money.

Source: www.savingsecrets.com/article_10steps.html



8) Make a List When You Hit the Road

Don't you hate it when you get three hours away from town and realize you forgot to pack batteries for your effects pedal or bring that extra case of mic chords? Then you have to make an extra stop to buy the stuff you have sitting back at home. The simple remedy is making a list of things you should take when you hit the road. Keep a copy on your computer and regularly update it as you discover items that need to be added to or subtracted from the list.

9) Check Your Tires Regularly

Want to save hundreds at the gasoline pump? It's easy. Instead of hunting for the best price in town, try checking the air pressure in your tires. According to an informal study conducted by Carnegie Mellon students, proper air pressure results in better gas mileage, which at \$3 per gallon could save you as much as \$432 per year. (This study was obviously done before gas prices hit \$4 in the U.S.)

And if money isn't a big enough incentive, how about helping to preserve the environment? Less fuel consumption results in less carbon dioxide being emitted into the atmosphere.

Source: www.cmu.edu/cmnews/extra/050921_tire.html

10) Purchase Gas on Indian Reservations

Since there are no taxes on gas on the reserves, it might pay to fill up the next time you are near an Indian reservation.

Source: www.savingsecrets.com/article_gasoline.html

11) Brake This Way

A car consumes most gas as it accelerates. It's a simply law of physics (force equals mass times acceleration). A moving car doesn't require much gasoline to keep moving (due to inertia). In real life, this means to improve your gas mileage you need to keep the ride smooth.



You can improve your gas mileage up to 5 percent around town if you avoid “jackrabbit” starts and stops by anticipating traffic conditions and driving gently.

Source: www.opentravelinfo.com

12) Put Your Car on a Diet



Let’s go back to force equals mass times acceleration. You already know you shouldn’t accelerate as much. You can also reduce the mass of your car by emptying out the trunk and removing heavy items you don’t need. Keep the spare tire and car lift, but get rid of the golf clubs or blown-out monitor you never use.

13) Join a Loyalty Club

Some gas stations, department stores and grocery stores offer lower prices when you present their membership card. Keep your eyes open and verify that their prices are really lower than other stations in your neighborhood.

Source: www.wikihow.com/Save-Money-on-Gas



16) Use These 3 Sites to Find the Lowest Gas Prices

<http://gasprices.mapquest.com/>
www.gasbuddy.com
www.gaspricewatch.com

Here are three great tips from www.JustaGuyThing.com:

14) Buy Only What You’ll Eat

Americans waste about 40% of food produced for consumption. According to WastedFood.com, that amounts to an annual cost of more than \$100 billion. Buy only what you need for the week and avoid stocking up with food that could spoil quickly. If you run out of food mid-week, it’s no big deal to make a second trip to the supermarket.

15) Reduce Your Heating Bill

By turning the temperature down in your house by just one degree you can save almost 10% on your heating bill. Also, you'll prevent about 240 kg of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere. Cheaper, and greener too!



16) Be a Late Adopter

I know it's tough to wait until the buzz surrounding the newest mobile phone or game console has died down – especially if you're a techno-geek. But if you can hold back from buying until at least six months after the new technology is launched, you could save up to 50%. Let other obsessed geeks drive the price down for you.

17) Never Shop When You're Hungry

It goes without saying that grocery shopping while you're hungry can be disastrous. Your cart or basket can fill very quickly with all kinds of goodies you don't need but look good because you haven't eaten since breakfast. Doing *any kind* of shopping can be a bad idea if you're hungry. You could end up spending more at the food court than you spend on what you went to the mall to buy in the first place.



Source:

<http://studentmoneyskills.bankofamerica.com/make-and-save-money/save-money/>

18) Use These 10 Steps to Get Out of Debt

Check out Leo Babauta's blog post filled with 10 practical ways he lived frugally and got out of debt

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/12/the-10-key-actions-that-finally-got-me-out-of-debt-or-why-living-frugally-is-only-part-of-the-solution/>

While you're at it, take a look at these posts from Leo too:

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/02/how-i-save-money/>

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/08/the-cheapskate-guide-50-tips-for-frugal-living/>

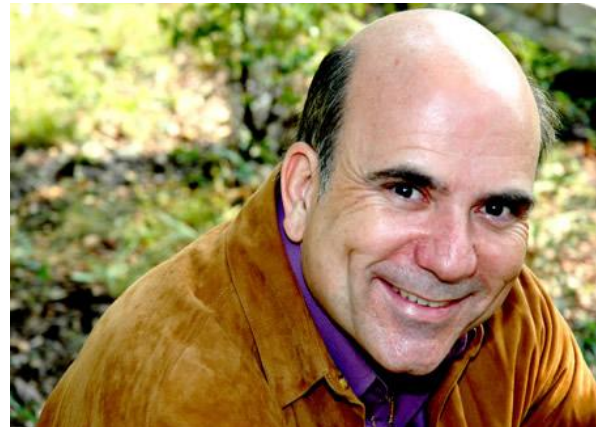
But here's perhaps the best advice of all ...

19) **Just Stop It!**

Here's an inspiring, in-your-face message from Joe Vitale that might shake some sense into you.

I first spoke with Joe in 1995 when we was a copywriter and marketing guy in Dallas (who also played a little music).

Since then he's become an Internet marketing guru who now weaves a lot of spiritual and positive thinking messages into his work. He's written dozens of books and was one of the teachers featured in the best-selling book/movie *The Secret*.



Here's part of an email Joe sent to his mailing list not long ago ...

Stop it!

Stop paying attention to the media.

Stop paying attention to the doom and gloom of anyone and everyone around. Stop getting sucked into being a victim.

STOP IT.

You won't go anywhere buying into the cultural trance that there isn't enough and times are tough.

You won't accomplish your big goals, or do anything of real greatness, as long as you give in to outer circumstances.

You have to take back your power.

You have to take back your control.

You have to "awaken."

Recently I told a woman who was interviewing me that I was homeless and in poverty only as long as I stayed stuck in survival "thinking."

As soon as I put my mind on what I "wanted" to have instead, I began to shift and get better results.

This can happen for you, too. It took me ten years. You can do it in one weekend.

But you have to stop listening to the media paint a picture of darkness.

The media paints it by finding something dark to report on, whether it's true or not. You and others listen to it, believe it, and before you know it, you have "created" what the media painted.

They predict a recession before there actually is one.

But people believe the media, fall into fear, stop spending, and suddenly a recession is here.

This has to stop. And it can stop right now.

Break free from money worries.

Break free from job worries.

Break free from health worries.

Break free from love worries.

Break free -- PERIOD.

Final Thought From Bob:

So ... are you ready to STOP IT?

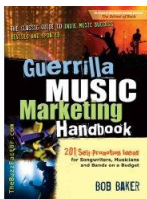
Are you ready to take back your power ... while making a lot of smart choices about how you spend and earn money with your music?

You can. Starting today!

-Bob



More resources from Bob Baker ...



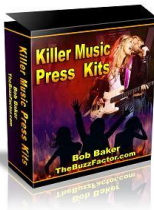
Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook

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



Guerrilla Music Marketing Online

135 Free and Low-Cost Strategies to Promote & Sell Your Music on the Internet



Killer Music Press Kits - Deluxe Edition

The 29 Most Important Elements in Creating Sizzling Music Publicity Materials

Find out more at www.TheBuzzFactor.com