

5 STEPS TO LAUNCH AN ONLINE MUSIC CAREER



SAVVY
MUSICIAN
ACADEMY

Congratulations on deciding to make a move toward your music career. You probably sense that the music industry has totally and completely changed in recent years. You're right, it has. The Internet pretty much turned the traditional music model upside down, yet so many people still wait around, hoping to be "discovered".

Guess what?

You no longer need to.

Today, you can do it yourself and put your music straight out to the public with no need for a "middle man" or label. Can you gain a following doing this? Yes.

Can you even make money doing this? Absolutely.

In actuality, you have a better chance at making money as an independent artist than you do if you were "discovered" by a major music label. In fact, most bands signed to a label are broke!

When you sign a deal with a label, it's like taking out a giant loan from a bank. You don't make any profits until it's all paid back. The label's main goal is to make a return on their investment (ROI), and you need to do anything and everything to make that happen, including non-stop touring and selling merchandise. It's sort of like signing up for slavery with the hope that you'll get rich and famous. It's not very likely. Even many bands that do get famous are still broke, and then as soon as they are able to break out of their contract, they start over as independent artists and raise money through crowdfunding instead, taking their fans with them. That is the reality of today's music scene.

It's scary to think about stepping into a huge overwhelming sea of music. I totally understand. I'm just a stay-at-home-mom, myself. I didn't begin making music until after I already had a family to look after. How would anyone hear my music? Well... after much trial and error, and lots of sweat and tears... I figured a few things out, and people did hear my music. It was very cool what happened after that. I've become a well-known recording artist in my genre, and I even raised over \$27,000 in a crowdfunding campaign all by myself! I learned many things the hard way, and experienced much frustration. I hope to spare you that and give you some valuable tips as to how you can get started the right way.

Understand, fist off, that the Internet drives the music industry today. Everything you do is going to revolve around this.

If you are just starting out, thinking of what it will take to start a music career, or have begun but are overwhelmed by what to do next, or wonder what the most important steps are, I'm here to help.

Ok, let's establish the most important keys to making it in the music industry. You can do all of these things and become successful without even needing to tour. If you decide to tour, it will be icing on the cake, but it will not be necessary to gain a following.

It may be helpful to print this out and use the spaces below to help you brainstorm and find your answers. Make notes all over this sheet and you'll be surprised with the things you come up with. Just write.

STEP 1: CHOOSE A GENRE

The first thing is **YOU. YOU** are the beginning. Whether you are a solo act or a band, this all starts with who you are. What are you all about? You will need to choose a larger "umbrella" genre to work from and then we will narrow it down after, which is an important step. You want to end up in a smaller niche, which will help people find you better and help you stand out. You can start to narrow this down by considering a number of things:

- What bands/artists/genres do you already love and are drawn to. It's OK if you have a wide variety of taste. We will use this to your advantage.

- Look at any current songs you already have written. What genre do you think you already fall into? Think broad for now.

- Have someone else listen to your voice or your songs and ask what they hear. If you add or take away certain kinds of instruments, would it completely change the genre?

- Have someone else listen to your voice or your songs and ask what they hear. If you add or take away certain kinds of instruments, would it completely change the genre?

- If you could combine elements of your favorite bands, describe what they would be and how it might sound. There is nothing new under the sun, but you can combine elements of your favorite sounds to make it sound fresh and different. Different is good.

STEP 2: CHOOSE YOUR SONGS WISELY

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The same works with songs. So, first of all, you need to write what **YOU** love. You need to pick topics that resonate with **YOU**. Make a list of your lyric themes that seem to come up time and time again (this will also help determine your genre/sub-genre and keywords later on):

Unless Disney (or a company that dictates the subject and keywords you must use) hired you, I suggest not trying to write for a specific audience. Music is not about people pleasing. It will sound cheesy and manufactured if you do that. Some of the biggest hits have had totally weird and bizarre lyrics that almost make no sense at all (Spice Girls' "Wannabe" anyone??). It doesn't need to be groundbreaking; it just needs to be authentic.

If you are a songwriter, list all your best songs, or ideas that have the most potential. If your budget is very limited, pick the best three to five songs. If you have no songwriting skills, you can choose very old songs that have public domain and do your own rendition of them, or hire someone to write songs for you, or work with a band to create your own songs. List them here:

STEP 3: RECORD YOUR MUSIC

This might seem like an obvious step, but there is more than one way to go about this.

If you have a budget: recording drums in a high-quality studio is the most important thing you can spend money on. Do not try to cut corners on this! If you start with a sloppy or canned sound, the rest of your music will not make up for this. You can get away with recording a number of other instruments at home or in a friend's home studio, but drums are vital to a professional sound. Vocals can sound great for very cheap. I have sung in a closet before and it turned out great.

If you have zero funds to record a few songs, here is what I suggest: do an acoustic performance and literally videotape it and then upload it to YouTube. Find someone with a HD camera, and record your live performance at a gig, or even in your own home. If you're a singer/songwriter, play the piano and show us your voice and songwriting ability. Lots of people gain YouTube subscribers just doing cover songs and gain a following that way. Once you have a loyal following, you can do a crowdfunding campaign to record a proper album.

List here, which instruments you need for your project, and mark beside them who will play them, and who you need to hire:

STEP 4: BUILD AN EMAIL LIST

What? Build a list? How unromantic-sounding.

Yup. Build a list.

This will be one of the most valuable things you can possibly do for your future career in music. How will you do this, you ask?

By giving away your music for free, in exchange for an email.

What? Give my music away for free?

Yes.

If people like your songs, they will want to know where they can download them. If they can find them on a file-sharing site, they will get it from there with no benefit to you.

OR.... You can give it to them and gain both the traffic to your site/page and get their email for future contact. You can do this very easily with a free music hosting site like Bandcamp. There are other ways of doing this if you have a Wordpress website, but it will take some technical skills and it can be frustrating if you're not the technical type.

Once you have a list of emails (Bandcamp collects and composes a nice excel document for you), you can upload them to a free email service, like Mailchimp. Then anytime you have an important announcement, or new music for sale, you can contact all those people who are already fans of yours! This is how you build a loyal fan base that will buy everything you put out!

STEP 5: YOUTUBE IS YOUR BEST FRIEND

The Internet is constantly changing, so what might be trending today might not be trending a month or year from now. Where people are hanging out is constantly evolving.

But I can tell you this: YouTube is currently the #1 place people discover new music.

Just from browsing around, suggested videos that are similar, and viral sharing, your songs can get quite a few views just from this site alone. That's a lot of exposure, considering that you might be sleeping while it's happening! This is the beauty of the Internet. You don't need to play 100 gigs per year to get exposure to only a few people. Instead, you can put out a great song, learn how to get the most out of your YouTube channel and reach thousands of people... while you're not even there.

Tagging is very important.

By the time you upload your video to YouTube, you should know what your genre is, or at least some similar bands. If you were to play a world tour with your favorite bands that are in a similar vein as you, who are they? Tag those names in your video settings.

Tag the genre.

Tag the sub-genre.

Tag your artist name.

Tag your song title, any key words in your lyrics, any similar song titles.

These are all things that end up in people's searches.

Even things like "relaxing music". That's not exactly a genre, but it's something people search for.

Put yourself in the shoes of someone looking for your type of song or music. Try to think like someone looking for you. What kind of mood might they be in? Tag it.

Learn how to use "annotations" in your YouTube video, and link back to where they can download your song for free (so you can build your list – aha!).

Remember to include your lyrics in the information below your video, as well as links back to your website. Sometimes a phrase in your lyrics might be in someone's search and they stumble across YOU! What a happy accident. I can't tell you how many fans I've gained that way.

I hope these 5 tips are helpful to you and I wish you much luck in your future musical career!

XOX, Leah McHenry
Savvy Musician Academy



For in-depth strategies on how to launch and market an album online, please see this introductory workshop to Leah's full Online Musician program:

