

THE MUSICIANS GUIDE TO..  
**WORLD DOMINATION**

Your Definitive Guide to Succeeding  
in the Music Industry.

By Marcus Taylor

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# How to Get Signed to A Record Label

## **An Introduction; Unsigned or Indie?**

Historically, record labels were the purveyors of successful musicians, any artist not fortunate enough to be signed to a record label had near to no chance at all of getting any recognition in the global cut throat music industry. But then the Internet was born and everything changed..

The Internet has enabled musical artists to develop their own careers and expose their music to a worldwide audience without the need of a record label. So why is there still a fuss over landing a record deal when you can do it by yourself with just a computer and a bit of dedication? Why give away your creative control, royalties and submerge into a world of deadlines when you could travel at your own pace and keep 100% of the profits?

The answer is simple; a good record label will speed up the process, let me explain with an analogy. Music artists are a lot like high school students - the thought of going to college to receive more deadlines, more work and being controlled by someone else can be unappealing to a college student in the short run, but in the long run the student will gain education, friends and improve his chances

of getting into university and landing the job of his dreams. By signing to a record label you will inevitably meet important contacts in the music industry, you will be constantly motivated and worked hard, you will also learn a lot about the music industry, and just like universities, the major record labels often only consider the most experienced candidates in their field and you can bet your bottom dollar that having been signed to an independent label in the past is certainly a criterion on any major record label A&R (artist and repertoire) scout's checklist.

Of course, you can achieve just as much success as an unsigned artist, but this requires incredible amounts of self-motivation and hard work, so be honest with yourself, if you know that you are the kind of artist who would benefit from having the support of a record label pointing you in the right directions and assisting your career then get the demo's in the post, and keep those fingers firmly crossed!

## **Are you ready for a record deal?**

Hold your horses! Before you start burning off the CD's and sealing envelopes, answer yourself truthfully, are you actually ready for a record deal?

One of the most common reasons why artists are refused from getting record deals is due to the artist not being ready in the eyes of the record label, in other words – the record label don't think the artist will justify the record labels investment of time and money, this may be because the artist doesn't have a big enough fan base, or they don't have enough material (music), or perhaps they're just

too inexperienced and it would be too costly and time consuming for the record label to educate them with the required knowledge, whichever reason, it's a good practice to have as many boxes ticked as possible before you start contacting record labels. That said, all independent record labels will be managed in different ways with varying criteria for signing new artists, so there may be cases where the record label can see so much potential in your music at an early stage that they're happy to develop you whilst you are still inexperienced or lacking professional material, regardless of this optimistic possibility, your first impressions are incredibly important so in most cases it's probably best to wait until you are frequently performing gigs, have a growing loyal fan base and have a good understanding of how the music industry works before contacting record labels.

Most independent record labels will also want to see that an artist is proactive in promoting him or herself as widely as possible, for the record label folk, this is an indication that the artist is motivated and hard working. Your press pack should convey this by summing up your most innovative and impressive promotional efforts and music related achievements.

### **The perfect demo submission**

Admittedly, the demo submission is one of the trickiest letters that any musician will have to write in their music career, but if you master the art of the perfect demo submission, you might just raise your chances of getting that deal.

Luckily, many A&R scouts like to be approached in the same way; the way that is least time consuming for them, and makes their decision of whether or not to sign a new artist easier, so how can cater the approach to the A&R scout's needs in a way that will give the artist the highest chance of success?

I have always persuaded artists to treat their record label pitches in the same way they would a job application. Always starting with a covering letter, with an attached press pack and demo (representing your 'musical CV'). Like a CV, a press pack should be no more than two pages with an emphasis on relevant, persuasive and concise content that is both enjoyable and memorable to read.

I want to now share with you step by step, what I believe to be a perfect record label demo submission structure.

### **The covering letter**

If your music is unique, fits the record labels agenda and you already have a loyal fan base then you are many steps ahead of the rest, but one thing to keep in mind is that there is a large variation in the types of record deals and in order to get the best possible deal for you, you're going to need a whole lot of bargaining power!

A record label will often have a considerable amount of bargaining power when it comes to signing an unsigned artist, but the more the record label want to sign the artist, the more bargaining power the

artist has. Bargaining power is often determined from an artists demo submission, so in theory the better the demo submission pitch, the better the record deal the artist will receive (perhaps more cash advance / a higher percentage of royalties / more creative control etc). With this in mind, it's worth making sure your cover letter is as good as possible; after all this needs to convince the reader to open your press pack. When it comes to producing a great covering letter, there are just a few tips to keep in mind:

- Keep it personal (find out the recipient's name if possible) no one really likes to be addressed 'Dear A&R Scout', but using a name shows that you're an artist that goes the extra step to impress (and we like that!)
- Keep it short and concise; simply outline why you're getting in contact, who you are, where you are from, and at most two or three facts to persuade the A&R executive to read your press pack and listen to your music.

### **The music**

Other than artists not being ready for a record deal, the second most common reason submissions are refused for record deals is due to the music being either:

- Poor song writing quality
- Unoriginal / unmarketable
- Unfitting to the record labels agenda / genre

Just a mere ten minutes research will go a long way when writing a record label demo submission. First and foremost, find out if the

genre of music you are looking to submit is one that the record label releases. Almost a quarter of demos received by Starharbour Records last year were for genres that the record label don't even release and a large proportion of the music that is of a genre released the record label, still didn't meet the requirements due to reasons listed above.

When sending your music to record labels, most record labels now accept online demo submissions, If this is done via email I would recommend including both a link to download two or three of your best demo recordings in 320kbps mp3 format as well as a Myspace link in the email signature in case the recipient would rather stream the songs. If you are sending your demo CD in the post, be sure to write your artist name, track names and contact details on both the disc and the CD case.

### **The Press pack**

As stated previously, your press pack should be a maximum of two pages and presented in PDF format (PDF files are universally accessible, difficult to alter and easy to print), it should include all of the information the record label requires in order to decide whether or not they are interested in signing you. This should include:

- A photograph of the artist
- A detailed, but concise biography
- Press clippings or reviews from credible music industry contacts.