

Smart Manager Jump Starts Music Artist

Like Shrieve, I have to disagree with you on at least one count about the dearth of singer/songwriters out there. In general, it's a genre that lends itself to b-minus/c-plus material. The world is populated with talented guitarists who have gorgeous voices....but it isn't as amply staffed with songwriters. On the otherside though.....I think that when there is someone who delivers something truly great....people are more open to it than ever.....as long as you can find a way to get them to hear it.

As my evidence I offer a young kid I recently started working with named Joe Pug. We self-released his debut EP in May, mainly just intending to shop it. In the six months since then, however....he has proceeded to sell out his first two headlining shows in Chicago, pick up a major booking agent (Monterey International), taped a set for NPR's Mountain Stage, picked up radio play on Morning Becomes Eclectic, XM, Sirius and NPR, sold over 2000 copies of the EP, toured with Susan Tedeschi, Rhett Miller, Joe Ely, Robert Randolph and featured in Paste with a slot on their CD sampler. (one of the rare unpaid slots, at that)

Obviously there is the standard issue PR push, but I think the real success we've had with Joe came from something completely unique that we did. I started with the knowledge (or, some might say, assumption) that with Joe's songs....especially the "single" Hymn #101, if people heard it, they would love it. There are so few great songs being written that I knew people would connect immediately. So how to cut through the white noise? With no label, no PR firm, and no money to speak of?

We decided to put an offer up on Joe's website and myspace. We told any fan that if they knew anyone who might be interested in Joe's music that they could send us an email and we send them as many copies of a two-song sampler CD as they wanted. Free. We even cover the postage. To keep costs down, we invested in a cd publishing system that burns and prints them robotically. Each CD has two songs, contact info, myspace, and a reminder that the full cd was at iTunes. If someone lived near a place where a show was scheduled, we printed that show info on there as well. People requested as few as 2 and as many as 50. We sent all of them. Requests continued to pour in, and the more we sent out the faster the new requests came in. We're at the point now where we get about 15 a day. Joe writes a thank you in each and every one. And almost instantly, sales took off. Attendance jumped noticeably and myspace/website action began a steady upward arc. More importantly, we built an incredible database of his most hardcore fans. And after receiving a mailbox full of cd's for free, they are willing to do anything to help forward the cause. And it is the ultimate in target marketing.....you have people who already like your music passing it on to their friends, whose tastes they presumably know.

To some degree this is contrary to most of my "music 2.0" instincts, but I believe in this case the physical connection is crucial. A package in the mail, with a handwritten letter from the artist creates a connection that a download never could. It's not the cheapest

avenue on earth, but compared to what a mid-level PR firm charges it's a goddamn bargain.

In return we treat them like gold. Whenever there are extra guestlist spots in a city an email goes out to the people in that area who helped pass them out. We are planning a private house show for those in Chicago who have helped.

Of course, before I get lost in self-congratulation, I'll add that this particular formula only works if you truly have songs that connect with people. In all the marketing speak I think a whole lot of people lose sight of that.

Anyway, thought that you might find this interesting. If you want to check out the actual offer it's on www.nationofheat.com and his myspace is www.myspace.com/thejoepug

Yrs. long windedly-

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