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Your Band.com



Feature Story

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Generate new buzz without a lot of cash

by Bill Koch, Editor, *The Right Note*

You know you want it. All the other bands are doing it. And from what you've heard, it has totally helped their music and their careers.

So, if all the cool kids are doing it, why aren't you? Why aren't you launching a Website for your band?

If you think you don't have the money or the time, read on. Websites don't have to be monsters. Done well — and even done cheaply — they can boost the buzz for your band in ways you haven't even imagined.

Who should be on the Web

Matt Mrowicki, president of Impression Technologies, LLC, has worked with many bands to build killer sites. The bands have used the sites as an integral part of their marketing and promotions.

"A Website is no longer optional," Mrowicki says. "If you're looking to make money with your music, either full-time or on evenings and weekends for extra cash, a Website can benefit you by projecting your image and your music — to those to want to hear your music and may want to work with you somehow."

Most bands think that they can't afford a Website. Yet many bands don't realize how much money they are spending on old-school promotions, when they are definitely not trying to attract an old-school audience.

Mrowicki says, "I don't think a lot of bands realize how much they spend on postage, copies, CD media and other expenses. Most often, these things are not very effective and have a limited lifetime. If you print fliers for a show, those fliers are worthless when the show's over."

Instead, Mrowicki urges bands to consider putting money already being spent on outdated marketing and promotions into building a solid Website.

"A good Website is an amazingly efficient and cost-effective means of promoting a band," Mrowicki says. "Make the Website the main source of news and information about the band, then come up with simple and cheap ways to send people to it as often as possible."

From the ground up

You've donated plasma. You've sold a few vintage C3PO figurines (still in the box) on eBay. You've taken some money out of your marketing budget and you're going to build a Website. Where do you start?

"The Website should contain all of the important information about the band," Mrowicki says. "Who you are, how people can get in contact with you, where you are performing and, if applicable, what CDs and merchandise you have available. Then, the band should drive fans to the Website regularly."

Mrowicki feels there are three things every band should do before they sit down to build a Website.

1. Purchase a domain name that reflects your band name.

"Most bands struggle to name their band, but there is a new twist now," Mrowicki says. "When you're looking for a name for your band, check and make sure that you can get the domain name for it as well. This is also an easy way to see if a band name is already taken. If you start a band and come up with a great name, but aren't ready for a Website yet, buy the domain name and hold on to it until you're ready to do so."

2. Write a bio and take photos.

"If you're ready to start promoting yourself, you better be able to describe your band, even if just a paragraph, to let people know who you are," Mrowicki says. "If none of the members of the band feel like they can write such a bio, either find a Web designer who can also write a bio or find someone else who can write one for you."

Mrowicki continues, "Also, in this age of digital cameras, there is no reason not to have band photos. Get a friend to take photos during some shows, or even at band practice, and take the best five photos to use for promotion. Or, just head out to some cool-looking spot in your area and do a photo shoot."

A lot of bands don't like doing this sort of stuff. But, Mrowicki believes that if you can't spend an hour or two a week doing things like this to promote and market your band, you're wasting your time and will never be successful. He adds, "Setting up a Website is a great way to tell if you have the discipline to promote your band full-time."

3. Create at least one good MP3 of the band.

"If your band isn't able to produce one track that you could put online and distribute, you're not ready for a Website," says Mrowicki.

Although having several tracks recorded at a primo studio and engineered, produced and mastered by the cream of the crop would be ideal, you may not have the budget for that at first. An alternative is to record some live songs at one of your shows through the sound board. (If you're not sure how to do that, you can ask the sound guy at any club.)

Your Website is also a great place to feature special "underground" tracks that your fans won't be able to find on your regular CDs or anywhere else.

When your site doesn't click

Even if you have those three good things in place, not every site inspires hoards of fans to keep on clicking. When asked about some of the bad Web presences Mrowicki has seen, he says, "Most bands start out by having their Website done by a member of the band, or a friend or family member," Mrowicki says. "In the majority of cases, this person isn't a professional."

While you may get that person to do the site for next to nothing, it can lead to bigger problems later on. "A nonprofessional person often gets too ambitious and tries to do a lot more than he or she is really capable of. The site looks cheap and amateurish."

What if you can't find — or can't afford — a pro? "If the person doing your site is not a professional or is just getting started, keep the site as simple as possible," Mrowicki says. "Make sure the most basic content that needs to be on the site is there. Once that person's skill increases, more bells and whistles can be added."

Speaking of special effects, Mrowicki feels they should be kept to a minimum. "While motion, sound and other high-end design elements are great, when done poorly, they only distract."

Even pros should remember that less is more. "I've seen too many sites where the designer clearly spent hours and hours designing a really cool opening Flash movie on their splash page, but the rest of the site is terrible," Mrowicki says.

"Most people skip Flash intros, and even the band's most loyal fans will look at one once or twice

and then just skip it. Try to avoid Flash intros. Instead, focus on building a solid site with updated information your fans will come back to again and again.”

If you’re still going the cheap route, be sure to set clear expectations for the person designing your Website. “Make sure it’s clear that the site has to be maintained and updated,” Mrowicki says. “I’ve seen a number of bands get really stuck because the friend or family member doing the site for them for free takes forever to do site updates. Sometimes they get tired of doing it and just walk away.”

“Your Webmaster should be like your drummer,” Mrowicki says. “If that person can’t cut it or doesn’t have the professionalism and teamwork that you’re looking for, replace him or her.”

Keep it fresh

Having a Website where nothing changes is about as exciting as reading a museum brochure in a hotel lobby. The whole point of the Web is that information can — and should — be current and red-hot. You want your fans to feel like they are always getting the latest information directly from you.

What should bands update on a regular basis?

- Update show dates as often as possible, even daily if necessary. Remove past dates from the site after they occur.
- Add a new photo gallery or even a few new pictures when you can. Include the dates of the pictures so that viewers know they’re very recent.
- Post a message from the band about what’s new. If you have a band member who likes to write, have that person write a quick blog section to communicate with fans.
- Post a new MP3 every once in a while — from your latest CD, a rough studio track or a live recording off a sound board. New tracks like this — from unusual sources — give fans an ‘insider’ feel.

“For bands establishing themselves in a local area, Websites can be a great way to build a fan base,” Mrowicki says. “If fans can check out your site and see photos from a show they were at or hear an MP3 from that great cover that you did, it makes them feel more connected and a part of what’s going on.”

Beyond showing just how cool your hair is, your Website should provide a lightning-fast and always-on way for your band to connect with your fans. “Remember, it’s all about building a community,” Mrowicki says. “So build a mailing list and keep them informed.

“You want fans to feel that they are part of the band and its music. You want bookers to feel that you can bring customers into their venue. The Website serves both ends. It promotes the band to the fans who buy and listen to the music, as well as the bookers and others in the industry who the band wants to attract.”

Building that cyberbuzz

Before you make another trip to Kinko’s, think about putting that hard-earned cash into a Website for your band. It doesn’t have to be a huge badass site, just yet. Concentrate on providing basic information for your fans — and booking agents — so they can learn more about you. If you already have a fan base, inside information will keep them coming back for more.

As Matt Mrowicki says, going without a Website is no longer an option. If you are serious about making money with your music, you need to go cyber. The good news is: It doesn’t have to cost a fortune. Be creative — even with a limited budget — and hire a pro to build a site that really reflects who you are and what your music is about.

If you can get your band out of the garage, you can do this. Come on — even Air Supply has a Website. You need to do this now.

Matt Mrowicki is president of Impression Technologies, LLC (www.imprtech.com), a Web and graphic design firm that specializes in projects relating to music and the arts. He has over 10 years of experience in the IT, marketing and design fields and his clients include national and local musicians, both signed and independent, as well as public relations firms, management companies and venues.

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