Music Reviews and Influencers

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Are you a musician that produces great music that looking for a music review but no one seems to notice? Are you hoping that someone will simply stumble upon your music? Do you find it hard to get the attention from music blogs, podcasts, music communities and magazines?To get a music review can be worth its weight in gold. It will give you credibility, you will reach new fans. Bloggers and reviewers are connectors to a new audience. They are hurried people too. They get a lot of reviews every day, and they have a short attention span. At the same time, music is their passion and they love the unpredictable game of new music. They want to stumble upon the new great music. It’s the thrill of their job. You just need to do it in the right and most efficient way. This article is about that.

Overall strategy

To understand the process to get the attention from bloggers, get reviews and interviews you need to understand the basics as well as set up some kind of structure.

We will go through:

- The basics
- How to find your story and present yourself?
- How to make blog research and the list
- What you need to do before contacting music reviewers
- How to make the submission to bloggers
- To follow up or not follow up?
- What you could offer to music reviewers

Basics

Follow the guidelines

The most music review sites and blogs do have an FAQ or some kind of submission guidelines. You should read and follow them on each blog.

Sometimes a normal do is a don’t. Some blogs only accept physical submissions, some only digital. Sometimes you need to contact a blog before you submit the music and sometimes you should not do that. There is no one size fits all. The only way you could know this is to read their own guidelines and to follow their rules.

Attachment or not?

The most of the cases you should not attach any of your music. Why? Simply because it will take time to download and increase the load on the mail server of the music reviewer. With a streaming link, the music reviewer can access your music on the go in his phone etc.

If the service requires an MP3 or whatever, then make sure you follow the tech spec.

Don’t send mass emails

Personalize emails with their name. If you can’t find the name, use the blog name “Hey Pitchfork” is better than “to whom it may concern”. It’s even better to write “Hey, hope you have a great day!” than to write a completely unsolicited email like “to whom it may concern”.

Tone down your voice, don’t brag.

Don’t write that this is the most incredible music you have ever listened to. It will never be true. Try to be humble instead, but don’t lower the expectations too much. If you brag, the reviewer will only think for himself “can’t wait to put this in the trash bin”.

Don’t expect an immediate answer.

Reviewers receive a lot of emails, why would they have the time to answer you directly. Don’t be so self-centred (but a follow up is good if you don’t make them feel bad conscience). As always you should be polite and professional.

Don’t screw up

Yes, apologies for the general headline but artists do so often screw up by being dumb. Do this:

Proofread. Just take a minute or two to read the whole mail through. Make sure you don’t have any typos so use a spell checker from the beginning. Make a friend read the letter or email before you send it.

If you do get a contact, answer questions from the reviewer promptly. Don’t make it hard for the reviewer to do his job. Step into a Music reviewers head. If he won’t get what he is asking for or get 100 emails per day or making typos, he won’t be that keen to give you a good review or a review at all.

Do what you need to do but do it smart.

Bloggers and reviewers don’t like getting too many emails and follow-ups. Your brand is built on quality, and if you are thinking long term don’t do anything that the reviewer doesn’t want you to do. But do the work. Do send the follow-ups. Just not too pushy.

Don’t argue with your reviewer. Pretty self-explanatory. You simply can’t win. Don’t trash talk the reviewer if you receive a bad one. Yes, it hurts, but don’t be the douche. Simply thank him for the review and let your fans do the talking. A review is always a good thing. Learn from your mistakes.

Work on your music, concept and The story

Music

The most of the music reviewers are interested in your music and will appreciate your talent and uniqueness. If you don’t have any of those. Don’t waste your time and send out emails. At least you need to have vocal, instrumental or lyrical skills. And if you have all three it’s great. When you have this, you need to work on your story.

Concept

A lot can be written about this topic. But simply you music, story, pictures and video (and everything else) need to be coherent and have some kind of theme. Otherwise, no one will understand what your music is about.

Story

There’s a lot of talented musicians out there. Much more talented than most of the ones that are earning all the money perhaps. When talented musicians is a common good you need to stand out in some other way. You need to deliver a coherent look and a compelling story.

The “selling pitch” should be maximum 3 sentences in total. To cook down what’s unique with your music and career is pretty hard. It requires some thought. Try to fit this into the 3 sentence story.

How are you unique? What’s your mission as an artist? Why should the fans get a listen? How did you come into music? Try to be personal and specific. What experiences have led you to pursue a music career?

Maybe most important is to not use clichés like “I’ve been passionate about music in my whole life” or “I want to reach as far as I can with my music”.

Don’t be mumbo-jumbo either! Don’t talk about weird existential stuff that no one cares about or understands. Try to write stuff people can relate to but not too banal.

Making the list

When you have your music, concept and story in place, it is time to do your research which will result in a list of blogs, websites and magazines you can contact. **Do the research**. Read the submission guidelines. Get the relevant email address and make sure it’s someone that is interested in your kind of music.

A good way to do this is to use an excel-sheet or a google spreadsheet to save the list for later.

Don’t be irrelevant, it will just waste your time. Make sure you gather the correct email addresses and get the name of the contact. Use the johndoe@ reviews@ or music@ or the correct submission form.

Note the submission guidelines in the list for the respective blog.

A nice way to find relevant blogs is to see where similar artists like you have been reviewed. Then you can refer to them when contacting them. I saw your review for “Rolling Stones” so I thought you may be interested in our music since we have toured together. You get the picture.

Your list should have some kind of prioritization where locally is more efficient than distant. Closer to your genre the better. And sometimes the larger magazines and websites are not the first to go to. Better then to start with the smaller hipper blogs that the bigger guys are reading. By the way, touring could be a key to be local and newsworthy in a certain region.

The submission

(4-8 weeks before the first contact)

Identify the most important 20 blogs

If you are serious about your music you will definitely find at least 200 relevant blogs to add to your list no matter genre. However, all of these should not be prioritised. Identify the most important 20 blogs that you can reach based on size, relevancy and locality.

The idea here is to make the first contact less cold, to increase the chances that the reviewer will pick your music from the inbox. Don’t ask for a review the first time you contact a blog. To do this, follow the most prioritized blogs on Twitter, Facebook and read their blog. Start commenting on the blog. No self-promotional comments, please. This should be all about the blog and give feedback to them. Not just, “Hey, nice blog!” Write something relevant. Before you can receive you need to give. Yes, this is time-consuming, but it will be worth it. Bloggers read other blogs, so with one comment, you can actually reach a larger super relevant audience. The fact that they have read your name 4-8 weeks before the initial contact will make your email stand out in their inbox and seem somewhat familiar and nice.

During this period, if you haven’t read the FAQ and submission guidelines yet, now is a good time to do it.

Making the list

Personalization please

You need to be personal with the blogger. The submission needs to begin with their name “Hey John”. Second, best is the blog or magazine name. “Hey Pitchfork”, if you can’t do that, then you might consider not sending the mail. If you need to send it then “Hey, hope you are having a great day” is better than “To whom it may concern”. An unsolicited mail will appear in the trash bin. So don’t waste your time!

Try to find a few details on the blog so that you can stand out and that they know you have invested some time in their blog.

State you are looking for a review

Make sure that the blogger/reviewer know that you are looking for a review. Make your intentions clear from the beginning. Make their job easy so that they can add your mail to the right system.

Don’t ask if they want to listen

The most of the reviewers will just think it is a waste of time to say, “Yes, couldn’t you’ve done that in the first place!” But there are some blogs that require you to ask for permission, but you should have recognized this in the list making phase.

Be simple and brief

After the introduction text/cover letter where you prove that you are not a spammer, and stated that you are looking for a review, comes the short sales pitch of 3 sentences about your music. No one likes large emails. The idea is to just sell them to listen to your music. Then your music should speak for itself.

Remember the Contact information

Contact information should be easy to find. (Mailing address, phone, email, website URL).

As the music business, in general, are turning towards digital so are also the music reviews. The strategy is quite the same for both digital and physical submission, but the actual submission differs somewhat. Here’s what should be included in:

Digital submission

What should be included in a digital submission to a music reviewer?

Intro: Prove you are not a spammer.

Sales pitch: Short 3 sentence sales pitch about your music. You should have already developed your story.

Use a streaming link: Offer a streaming link as a rule of thumb from Soundcloud or Bandcamp (Secret link). Put your best song first! Usually, everybody in the music business hates getting their inbox full of attachment and mp3. However, you should read the Submission Guidelines to see if it states otherwise. Make sure no registration is needed to access your streaming link.

Use url shortener: Use a URL shortener. For example bit.ly, smarturl or Linkfire. Then it is easier to share and you can keep stats on clicks.

Build a landing page for the album: You want to keep the email short and easy for the reader to find the link to your music. Then if they are interested there should be a “more info” link to everything that they will need in order to write about you. You should also use a link shortener for this page.

The landing page should include:

- Streaming player. You can embed the Soundcloud player.
- Some intro paragraph that states what this page is about
- A video where you are talking about your album
- Your bio
- Links to social media
- Contact information
- Hi-res photos (Both landscape and portrait)
- Cover art
- Include references to other reviewers. Get at least one tiny testimonial.
- Touring dates

Make sure your presentation is congruent and follows the same theme as all your communication to give a professional look.

Physical submission

The physical submission is slightly different from digital submissions but in general, it is the same information that is included.

Brief cover letter: Should include the sales pitch that you already have developed. Then end with your sign. This is a good way to show to the reviewer that you have spent time on the submission.

Bio: Max 1 A4 page.

A CD/Vinyl: Remember to unwrap the CD's to simplify the job for the reviewer.

Contact information: Make sure you have contact information on everything you send. Quite often the bio gets separated from the CD and then it will be hard to get in touch even if your music is liked. Include a phone number, email, mailing address, website URL, and links to your landing page where they can find hi-res photos and everything they'll need if they like the music.

Don'ts: Don't use .zip files. Just no one will ever like to download zip files when it comes to music.

Don't add too much information the first contact.

To Follow-up or not follow up?

This is something that not all music reviewers agree upon and in the end, it is the submission guidelines that matter. From my opinion, I would say you should follow up **one** time and one time only. But give them something new in return. Add some extra information, a New angle, insight into your touring schedule or creative process or whatever.

Do follow up one time something like 3-6 weeks after the submission if you haven't received a response yet.

Offer something in return

In the end, like all humans, music reviewers will ask the question, what's in it for me. They have their own goals and their own agenda so you can never be sure. But if you step into a bloggers head and try to figure out what they want and need you can bet they want to:

- Reach out to a new and larger audience

- They want to be first/exclusive with great content
- They want to have the most interesting new content.
- They want to prove they have good taste.
- They want to have connections with artists
- They want to get stuff
- They want to give stuff to their audience.

So try to figure out in what ways you can give them just that. Here are some examples but first of all you should always include in your submission a line like this: “If you choose to post, send back a link so that we can promote it in these ways:”

Here are some examples of stuff you can offer a music reviewer:

Giveaways

Offer to arrange a competition for their fans and offer them to send the giveaway yourself. Use your old or new merch that you have around.

Share the post

This is self-explanatory but always share the link to your review on all channels you got.

State your numbers

State for the blogger that you will, of course, share the post in these ways. Make sure to add the numbers to your following. For example:

Facebook: 1200+ fans
Newsletter: 2500+ subscribers with 30-50% open rate
Twitter: 900+ followers
Instagram: 5000+ followers
Website: 3000+ unique monthly visitors. (Good for SEO)

Thank you letter

Always send a personal thank you letter to the reviewer. This is also a good time to give them the opportunity to subscribe to your newsletter to get more music in the future.