

New Music Strategies

# The 20 Things You Must Know About Music Online

by Andrew Dubber

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Dubber's background is in both radio and the music industry, and he has written numerous articles, book chapters, and conference presentations about these sorts of new strategies and technologies in both of those sectors. He is the co-author of a book about new technologies for broadcasters in developing nations, commissioned by UNESCO, and is a member of the steering committee for the Radio Studies Network.



New Music Strategies is a website devoted to helping small-medium music businesses and independent artists use new online technologies and strategies in order to make money and thrive in the new environment. The site also provides a Newswire service that delivers daily links to articles about the latest developments in the music industry.

Dubber also maintains a personal blog, an mp3 blog and a tumblelog. Somehow, he still finds time to go to work and talk to his family.

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# Introduction

You're always hearing that the music business *has changed*. That's not quite true. In fact, it's *changing* – and that's quite a different thing.

Facing that change, and negotiating it as it happens, is one of the biggest challenges for independent music businesses. The best way to navigate in such interesting times is to really understand what's going on around you, so you can adapt and respond appropriately.

You don't have to be a computer whiz – you just have to understand some basic principles. I reckon there are about 20 of them. If you understand these, and apply their principles, you're off to a good start in the new media environment.

They're in no particular order. They're all important. I'll start by listing them, and then I'll go into each in a bit more detail.

# 1 Don't Believe the Hype:

Sandi Thom, the Arctic Monkeys and Lily Allen are not super famous, rich and successful just because of MySpace, and nor because they miraculously drew a crowd of thousands to their homegrown webcast. PR, traditional media, record labels and money were all involved.

# 2 Hear / Like / Buy:

It's the golden rule. People hear music, then they like music, then they buy music. It's the only order it can happen in. If you try to do it in any other sequence, it just won't work.

# 3 Opinion Leaders Rule:

We know the importance of radio and press. There are now new opinion leaders who will tell your story with credibility. You need to find out who they are — or better yet, become one of them.

# 4 Customise:

A tailored solution at best, or at the very least a bespoke kitset approach to your web presence is crucial. An off-the-shelf number will almost guarantee your anonymity.

## 5 The Long Tail:

Chris Anderson has pretty much proved that the future of retail is selling less of more. Put everything online. Expand your catalogue. You will make more money selling a large number of niche products than you will selling a few hits.

## 6 Web 2.0:

Forget being a destination — become an environment. Your website is not a brochure — it's a place where people gather and connect with you and with each other.

## 7 Connect:

Your website is not a promotional strategy. Learn how to tell a story, and learn how to tell it in an appropriate fashion for web communication. Think about how that could be translated for both new media and mainstream PR outlets.

## 8 Cross-promote:

Your online stuff is not a replacement for your offline stuff, and nor does it exist independently of it. Figure out how to make the two genuinely intersect.

## 9 Fewer Clicks:

This is especially true if you want somebody to part with their money. If I have to fill in a form, navigate through three layers of menu and then enter a password, I don't want your music any more.

## 10 Professionalism:

If this is your business, you need to be businesslike. Treat your online profile the same way you would treat any of your business communication.

## 11 The Death of Scarcity:

The economics of the internet is fundamentally different to the economics of the world of shelves and limited stock. You can give away a million copies of your record in order to sell a thousand.

## 12 Distributed Identity:

From a PR perspective, you are better off scattering yourself right across the internet, than you are staying put in one place. Memberships, profiles, comments, and networks are incredibly helpful.

## 13 SEO:

You need to understand how Search Engine Optimisation works, and how you can maximise your chances of being found. Be both findable — and searchable.

## 14 Permission:

Your message must be welcome, relevant and personally useful. Letting people choose to engage with you is a far more effective targeting strategy than spamming them.

## 15 RSS:

Provide it, use it and teach it. RSS is the single most important aspect of your site. Treat it as such - but remember it's still new for most people. Help your audience come to grips with it.

## 16 Accessibility:

Not everyone has a fast computer or high speed access. Not everybody has the gift of sight. Make everything you do online accessible. It's easy to do, it's important, and it stops you from turning people away at the door.



## 17 Reward & Incentivise:

Everything is now available all of the time. Give people a reason to consider you as part of their economic engagement with music.

## 18 Frequency is everything:

Repeat business is one of the most successful commercial strategies in the cultural industries. You want people to come back? Give them something to come back to that they haven't seen before.

## 19 Make it viral:

Whatever you do, make it something that people will want to send to other people. Your best marketing is word of mouth, because online, word of mouth is exponentially more powerful.

## 20 Forget product — sell relationship:

The old model of music business is dominated by the sale of an individual artefact for a set sum of money. The new model is about starting an ongoing economic relationship with a community of fans.

## Thing 1: Don't believe the hype

**There's a great deal of discussion about music online in the mainstream press, and there are a couple of predominant threads to that coverage. Mostly, it's not true.**

It pays to be able to separate fact from fiction and hype from reality when it comes to the online music environment. Especially when your livelihood depends on it. Here are the two most important things to watch out for:

### 1) Technological determinism

There is a popular idea, particularly in the mainstream press, that technology drives history. According to this idea, changes to technology alter the rules that govern the ways in which we operate our lives, our businesses and our leisure. Usually this manifests as either progress or decline: a brave new world of opportunity, or a loss of an older, more natural way of operating.

**Progress:** In the case of online music, we see these things very clearly: MySpace 'gave us' the Arctic Monkeys and Lily Allen. Home-spun webstreaming led to the Sandi Thom success story. Technological determinism says that the new internet environment allowed for the traditional gatekeepers to be circumvented, and that a groundswell of public support grew up as a result of the sheer power of a great artist connected directly to the masses.

**Decline:** There is also the story about how the internet is 'killing' the record industry. Downloading, and the practice of burning CDs is single-handedly responsible for the impending demise of the major labels, causing the decline of high street retail and is undermining traditional, 'natural' models of music distribution and consumption — and consequently preventing rights holders from receiving their deserved reward for their part in the creative process.

Nonsense.

In fact, technology does not 'cause' these things. Technology changes and we choose our response. We have agency and can negotiate these shifts in media, as long as we understand them as they happen.

## 2) People tend to lie

Well, maybe 'lie' is too strong a word, but if you're reading about music online, chances are you're reading PR and marketing. Don't be fooled — conservatively around 70% of what makes it to the media starts its life as a press release. Probably that figure is higher in reality.

Assuming that what you read began as a press release allows you to look for bias, spin and partiality. This should not be a new skill for you, but it seems that most people forget it when it comes to things they think they don't quite understand — and technology is one of those areas.

So... if, for instance, you read that bands are making it big on MySpace, the first thing that should pop into your head is the question 'who stands to gain if I think that's true?'. Then you remember that what sells a band is a great story. The more that story is about them being genuinely great, rather than simply marketed, the more successful that sell becomes. You might even recall that the guy who owns Fox News is also the guy who owns MySpace.

So when you hear that Sandi Thom was signed to Sony because 100,000 people were tuning in to her nightly live webstream from her flat in London, you first remember that you only heard that story AFTER she had signed to Sony. The first thing you think of is the press release, and you wonder who might have sent that press release, bringing all those photographers to the 'signing'.

Then you recall that bandwidth costs money, and that there are technical limitations on upstream internet bandwidth from home connections. If Sandi Thom had that many listeners / viewers without corporate support, she was pretty much running her own ISP, with outgoings in the thousands of pounds, and no income of which to speak.

Finally, you begin to realise that Sandi Thom had a publicist early on — and, most likely, was already signed to Sony when she started.

The groundswell of unsolicited support thing is a great story, and has the same impact as that story that everyone seemed to buy into about Norah Jones being a word-of-mouth phenomenon — when actually, there were billboards, tv ads and radio airplay all over the place.

## In short:

The moral of the story here is that hype prevents us from understanding what's really going on, and to what extent. If we don't understand those processes, then navigating them ourselves becomes problematic.

If you want to make any headway in the music business in this day and age, you cannot be relying upon a magical MySpace success story, and nor can you fear the dangers of a hostile environment littered with thieves and 'lost sales'.

Better to distrust the stories about online success and calamity, and simply view the new technologies as a range of tools that you can adopt, and a series of changes to the business environment to which you can adapt.

## Thing 2: Hear / Like / Buy

**There are lots of sophisticated tricks and tips for marketing music, online and off. But if you mess up this one fundamental principle, you might as well not bother at all.**

Music is pretty much unique when it comes to media consumption. You don't buy a movie ticket because you liked the film so much, and while it's conceivable that you might buy a book because you enjoyed reading it so much at the library, typically you'll purchase first, then consume.

DVDs are, perhaps, a little closer to the music buying experience. You love a film, so you buy the disc. But equally, you tend to love the film because you once took a chance and paid to see it in the cinema.

But music is different — and radio proves that. By far the most reliable way to promote music is to have people hear it. Repeatedly, if possible — and for free. After a while, if you're lucky, people get to know and love the music. Sooner or later, they're going to want to own it.

This isn't just true for pop music. It's not just about getting a hook stuck in someone's brain so they hum it to themselves as they take out the rubbish. So-called 'serious' music also benefits from familiarity — perhaps even more so. The more challenging a work, the more exposure is required to really get inside it and appreciate it.

Likewise, liking music is not just about entertainment. Music consumption, to many people, is a serious business. And by consumption, I don't just mean buying or listening. It also involves collecting, organising and making sense of the music in relation to a personal canon. It takes more than an impulse purchase to break into that sphere.

But either way — whether it's a pop tune, a heavily political punk album, or an experimental, avant-garde suite — the key is very simple: people have to hear music, then they will grow to like it, and then finally, if you're lucky, they will engage in an economic relationship in order to consume (not just buy and listen to) that music.

That's the order it has to happen in. It can't happen in any other order. There's no point in hoping that people will buy the music, then hear it, then like it. They just won't.

This is not, I trust you'll agree, rocket science. It's perfectly obvious, straightforward and practical. And yet it's the one mistake that most people make when promoting music online.

Nobody really wants to buy a piece of music they don't know — let alone one they haven't heard. Especially if it's by someone who lies outside their usual frame of reference.

And a 30-second sample is pretty much a waste of your time and bandwidth. In fact, it's worse than useless. That's not enough to get to like your music. Let them hear it, keep it, live with it. And then bring them back as a fan.

More than ever before, you have to build that relationship, because it's easier than ever before to just not bother and simply go elsewhere. No matter how good your music, it's competing with millions of other choices. Millions.

The simplest way to promote music and build an economic relationship with a consumer is to let them hear it. Let them hear it repeatedly, without restriction. Let them grow to love your music and hear it as a part of their collection. Then they will want you to have their money.

This is not just a truism about music online — it's also just how capitalism works. You provide value, then you are rewarded with money.

You don't get the money first — and you don't get to decide what value is.





### 3: Opinion Leaders Rule

**How do you know what music to buy? Often, another person tells you - generally in some mediated way. Different media, different people, same principle.**

Other than hearing, then liking, the most common and reliable way to find out about music is via the opinion leader. Often this will take the form of a press review or column — or some sort of radio feature. Occasionally, it'll come from the telly. If you happen to respect the opinion of the person or institution telling you that the record is great, the chances you'll be persuaded are reasonably high.

You can't beat the persuasive power of an informed opinion — and this is the reason record labels spend so much time and effort getting their music into the hands of the people whose opinion is respected on these matters.

This is not new information.

But what has changed online is the proliferation of opinion sources. There are internet-only publications with readerships in the tens of thousands, whose writers may wish to say nice things about your music. You should know, for instance, about [PopMatters](#) and [Pitchfork Media](#).

Bloggers, too, are becoming increasingly important. With daily visits and subscriptions in the hundreds of thousands, some of the top blogs need only mention the coolness of something, and that thing's web traffic will soar through the roof. Look at [Boing Boing](#) for instance. They don't talk about music and records per se — but when they mention something, it becomes

the most read about and actively pursued topic on the internet.

More important still are the bloggers who do specifically discuss music. The ones worth paying attention to have developed a level of trust amongst their readers over time. When Jim from [Quick Before It Melts](#) says something is good, those of us who read what he has to say will likely be persuaded.

It's even more interesting when you consider that you're unlikely ever to see a bad review on an mp3 blog. This does not mean a complete lack of discrimination — quite the reverse. An mp3 blogger will not even bother mentioning something unless it is absolutely, unreservedly recommended. In the traditional music press, the good, the bad and the indifferent all take equal space and the target audience is as broad as it can possibly be. Most mp3 blogs are narrowly focused on the niche, and will only mention the truly great.

So who's likely to want talk about your music? Well, the best place to start are a couple of comprehensive lists online, courtesy of [The Hype Machine](#) and [MonkeyFilter](#).

But going through a list like that and finding the hundred or so who are likely to intersect with the tastes of those your music targets seems a tricky business. Perhaps a better way is to focus on the blogs who are talking about the people who are like what you do.

This is where [The Hype Machine](#) comes in handy.

Let's say your music shares broad areas of similarity with Green Day. A quick search of The Hype Machine reveals a bunch of blogs who have recently posted about Green Day. Those would seem like reasonable people with whom to initiate conversations about your music. Send them a promo. They

already nearly like your music and may be inclined to say favourable things to the people who respect their opinions on these matters.

You might even consider becoming an opinion leader yourself. I'll talk about the power of blogging in more depth later, but for now, just plant that seed in the back of your mind. What better way to surround yourself with an audience of people likely to like your music, than to become a reliable expert on the kinds of music that people who might like your music, might also like?

Blogging's easy to start, and easy to do — but can I direct your attention towards MOG? It's an online community — a bit like MySpace, only good — and all about the discussion of music. Becoming an authority in that environment, I'm told, can be a smart way to sell records.

But opinion leaders don't have to just be knowledgeable individuals. Online, a crowd can be an opinion leader — if it's the right crowd. One of the most effective ways of upselling online (though it might more accurately be termed 'cross-selling') is the Amazon model of 'People who bought THIS also bought THAT' (or, as one cynical friend would have it: 'People who bought crap, also bought shit').

I know one very smart cookie who bought up a hundred or so of a very popular record on Amazon.co.uk in the same genre as the one he was trying to sell — and each time he did, he also bought a copy of his own label's record. Before long, the website knew for a fact that people who bought this particular THIS also bought his particular THAT.

Selling the unwanted extra copies at a bit of a loss was a little time consuming, but he factored it in as part of the cost of promotion — and by all accounts, it turned into a successful strategy.

I'm not recommending this to everyone, but it does illustrate a point. Reliable opinions, whether generated by consumer activity like an Amazon cross-sell, or the considered musings of an informed individual, are powerful tools.

The moral of the story is that other than Hear/Like/Buy<sup>1</sup>, a trusted recommendation is the best promotion your music can get — and that sort of recommendation is far more readily available online than off.

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<sup>1</sup> See Thing 2

## Thing 4: Customise

**All this talk about the music industry online overlooks one simple fact: there isn't one. There are many. One size does not fit all.**

You've seen the website. It has a landing page with a photo on it and a little bit of blurb. It has a fairly simple navigation system along the top or down the side. The links say things like About Us, Gallery, Downloads, Contact, Our MySpace — and the links take you to exactly the things you might expect when you get there.

These things are not, in themselves, bad things. In fact, it's desirable that you don't try and reinvent the wheel. People have expectations, and they don't want to have to learn a new navigation system just for your website. This is not the problem I'm identifying here.

The problem I want to draw your attention to is the uncritical default position about what a website should be. In fact, the website should communicate you and what you do. More importantly, it should do it in such a way that your target audience has the perceptions about you that you would like them to have.

Your music company is unlike any other. You do things others do not. You deliberately avoid things others do. If nothing else, your music (at least hopefully) says something unique. Having a cookie cutter website does that no justice at all.

So your website should do a few things. One of those things — perhaps the most important — is to reflect you and the ways in which you wish to communicate. Because that will be different for everyone, all I can say is *“think carefully about what that means”*.

That said, I can give you some examples to try and show you what I mean.

I think of the artist website that allows her fans to communicate with each other on a message board that resembles notes pinned to a board. That’s the front page. Everything else stems from there, because the board is the main thing return visitors come for. It’s not on the ‘discussion’ page — it’s first and foremost.

There’s the venue that has a ‘TONIGHT’ flyer as their front page, with information about that evening’s gig taking up the first page. That’s a reason to bookmark and revisit that page — because that’s what they found everyone wanted from the website: “who’s on tonight?” Having to click half a dozen times to get at that information, once you’d gone past the lovely photo of the front of the bar with the smiling staff, and the page about live music and bookings.

There’s the music publishing company that wanted to focus specifically on getting synchronisation deals for their artists, and so played different video clips with different music attached to give an idea of the ways in which those sorts of things would work.

There’s the record label that decided they didn’t want a website, but opted instead to build websites for each of their artists — with links to each of the others — on the basis that people don’t go looking for music by specific labels as much as they go looking for interrelated music.

And you don't have to stick with building your own site. These days you can cobble together so many pre-existing ingredients that will effortlessly embed themselves into your own framework. This is one of the joys of Web 2.0 (about which, I will speak in more detail soon).

You can have Google Maps embedded on your website — perhaps on your touring page so people can find your gigs easily. You can put a customised Amazon store right into your site and make money on the commission. Or you can sell t-shirts through somebody like Spreadshirt.

You can use RSS Feeds (again, more on that soon) to embed the latest news and content that's relevant to your audience from all over the web and customise it to make it your own.

You can even publish a 'Skype Me' button, so that users of your website can speak to a real human at the click of a mouse, if that works for what you do. It'll even let them know when you're not available.

This is just the beginning. The web is a kitset – or, if you prefer, a bit like Lego. You can pretty much put it together however you like. But don't lose sight of the design aspect. If you can't find the piece you want, you can always build from scratch. A combination of those two things is usually best.

What's most important here is that you don't simply get an off-the-shelf number. It might be enough to get you up and running and on the net — but if this is your livelihood, then you'll want to differentiate yourself in a positive way. Having the same website as everyone else, following the same old formula will not help. Not in the way you want it to.

## Thing 5: The Long Tail

**The economics of the internet are different to the economics of the offline world. The ways in which it's different are still being shaken out, but the most well-established principle is that of The Long Tail.**

Originally an article by Wired Magazine editor Chris Anderson, and then a blog and a very successful book, The Long Tail is actually a very simple concept. It's a model for describing an important characteristic of the online environment.

The top left of the graph represents a very small number of popular items that have a very high number of sales. These are the hits. The tail towards the bottom right represents the vast number of items that sell in smaller quantities.



The main point of Anderson's article is that the internet enables the large number of non-hits to expand to the extent that they economically outweigh the hits. And, he argues, this is exactly what's happened.

In a sense, it's all about physical space. In the offline environment, there's only a certain amount of shelf space. Online, storage is not a problem. In traditional record shops and bookstores, only the most popular items can be offered. Online, far more things can be made available, and that raises some issues.

The first issue that arises from this is that the more things you make available, the more people will explore the non-hits. The repercussion of this is that the



sales of the most popular items suffer. If 100 things are available, those 100 things will enjoy sales success. If a million things are available for sale, the 100 most popular things will still enjoy sales success, but a greater proportion of people will explore the tail instead of consuming the hits.

The second issue is that the more things you make available, the more things people will consume overall. Amazon.com sells more books than any other bookstore because it sells a greater range of books than any other bookstore.

The third, and perhaps most important aspect, is that the Long Tail provides not only greater potential for mass market retailers moving online by reducing the problem of shelf space, but also a route to market for a wide range of niche products that might not otherwise have been made available by more traditional means.

The book has had two subtitles (in the American and UK versions), each with different emphasis. The first is: 'Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More' — that is, the trick is to make everything available, and sell a small quantity of a large number of items, rather than the other way around. The second subtitle is: 'How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand' — a slightly more problematic assertion, but it does carry a message of hope to niche businesses.

The simple fact is that economics are transformed online. An online music retailer will never sell out of a record. They will never have to stop stocking an item in order to stock another. There is no reason for labels to delete catalogue and every reason to reissue everything.

And the more easily searchable you make it, the more you will benefit at the business end.

The real reason the major record labels are experiencing problems is not the issue of piracy or filesharing. It's that they no longer have only to compete with other hits. Now they have to compete with a range of choice that is exponentially greater than anything they've ever come across. The age of the hit is over.

Because the simple, powerful fact is this: for the first time in history, the sum total of the economic value of the tail is now greater than the sum total of the economic value of the head. Amazon sells more books overall that are not in the top 100 bestseller list than those 100 combined. Probably more outside the top 1000 than in it.

Add all the sales of all the records that made it into the charts in the last year, and the economic value of everything that never made it close eclipses it.

This is something that requires more reading — because understanding these concepts could radically transform both how you approach what you do for a living, and how much money you could make doing it.

Search out the book – or at least read [Anderson's blog](#).

## Thing 6: Web 2.0

**Your website is not a brochure — it's a place where people gather and connect with you and with each other. No? Well, it should be.**

The internet is in phase two of its existence. The old version was about documents, and the way that we talked about it was in terms of transporting ourselves from place to place: we'd *visit* a webpage, use Netscape *Navigator*, go on the information *superhighway* and the activity it most resembled was *surfing*. Advertisements would ask us where we want to *go* today.

When we got there, we would read the website, or look at it. Sometimes we'd even listen to it or watch it — maybe even buy something — but we had travelled to another place, and what we did there was inspect the document that awaited us. And then we'd go somewhere else.

That's web 1.0.

Web 2.0 brings a new model, and it's one that has little use for navigation metaphors or the inspection of documents.

These new websites are *environments within which we do something*. They are not the document, they are the tool with which to *create* our own documents, *organise* them according to our own preferences, and *connect* with other people over them.

Examples with which you may (or should) be familiar include:

- [MySpace](#) - social network, teeming with bands
- [Flickr](#) - photo sharing
- [Facebook](#) – networking and social applications
- [Google Reader](#) – RSS feed aggregator
- [Tumblr](#) – scrapbook blogs, or ‘tumblelogs’
- [Wikipedia](#) - all of human knowledge in editable form
- [Google Docs](#) - spreadsheets and wordprocessing
- [Del.icio.us](#) - social bookmarking
- [YouTube](#) - video sharing
- [Bloglines](#) - RSS feed aggregator
- [Writeboard](#) - collaborative document creation
- [Netvibes](#) - personalised homepage
- [Last.FM](#) - customised music consumption
- [Odeo](#) - create and share audio & podcasts
- [Streampad](#) - Internet audio player
- [MP3Tunes](#) - backup and archive your music online
- [Clipmarks](#) - collaborative web clippings
- [Dropcash](#) - make your own fundraiser
- [43Things](#) - share your goals and ambitions
- [Ta-Da Lists](#) - to-do lists
- [Twitter](#) - microblogging what you're up to right now

- [Backpack](#) - collaborative working
- [Feedburner](#) - customise and enhance your feed
- [YouSendIt](#) - send big files without clogging email
- [Amie Street](#) - price-per-popularity music community
- [Wordpress](#) - blogging platform
- [Omnidrive](#) - free online storage
- [Vimeo](#) - video sharing and management
- [Imeem](#) - music playlist, video and photo sharing
- [Jumpcut](#) - online video editing and remixing
- [Reddit](#) - popular links shared and commented
- [PBWiki](#) - make your own wiki
- [Gmail](#) - webmail that's better than webmail
- [Feed43](#) - make an RSS feed out of any site
- [Cambrian House](#) - Crowdsourcing community
- [Dropload](#) - send big files
- [RunFatBoy](#) - make your own exercise programme
- [Diigo](#) - social bookmarking and annotation
- [Slideshare](#) - Youtube for Powerpoint presentations
- [Vox](#) - social networking through blogging
- [Workhack](#) - whiteboard to-do list
- [Mog](#) - music sharing through blogging

These websites, and others like them, do a wide variety of things — but here's what they tend to have in common:

- 1) They are more like software than like documents;
- 2) They are social, rather than solitary;
- 3) They are environments within which you do something;
- 4) They involve user-generated content;
- 5) They allow users to organise and tag content;
- 6) They are different every time you turn up;
- 7) They make use of RSS feeds (this will get its own 'Thing' - don't worry).

This is how the web is now. These are some of the things that will make your website better. Allow the users of your website to interact with you and each other. Let them provide some of the content — make it their own space.

The analogy I like to use is the record shop that is also a cafe. It's the centre of my community. I go there to socialise, to work, to listen to music, to talk about music and to connect with people I like. Sometimes I also buy records.

People like to spend time, hang out, find their space, form groups, discuss common interests and contribute. Your website can provide those things for people. A Web 2.0 approach to your site means it's not just a brochure with a cash register attached. It's a place where people come and spend time. Chat to other music fans. Write their own reviews. Maybe remix your music.

But Web 2.0 can also provide you with a range of tools with which to connect your music business to the world. Building a web page that has web 2.0

elements is one thing — but you can also join, use and adapt the existing web 2.0 tools mentioned above to help you connect with a community, engage in the conversation, and make and organise media.

You can incorporate [Flickr](#) slideshows and badges into your site. You can connect using social networks. You can embed [Youtube](#) videos. You can upload your music to [Last.FM](#) so people can discover it, connect with it and integrate it into their own maps of music-they-like. You can use [Backpack](#) to collaborate on projects.

Web 2.0 isn't the answer to all of the music industry's little online problems — but it does give us an ever-growing range of tools and a much broader set of concepts around using the web that surpass the simple Web 1.0-style static webpage.

## Thing 7: Connect

**It might seem an obvious thing to say about using the internet, but if you don't connect, then you might as well not bother switching the damn thing on.**

A friend of mine once made the very sensible observation that making a webpage, putting it online and expecting people to read it is a bit like writing a book, sticking it in the library — and then coming back a year later only to wonder why nobody had ever checked it out.

Having a website is *not* a promotional strategy. If you're going to *have* a website, you need to have a promotional strategy.

Your promotional strategy should generate traffic — and, more importantly, repeat business. In order to get people to check out your website, it can't just be tucked away on its own little shelf in the world-wide-library (to stretch the metaphor).

You need it to connect.

There are three main ways in which your website must connect:



## 1) Your website must connect to other websites

In order for your website to be found, it must connect to a network of other interlinked sites. The more external links you have coming into your site, the better — but likewise, it's important to have outgoing links too.

Having outgoing links (ie: links to websites other than your own) provides users with a sense of where you fit in with the rest of the world. It makes you part of something — and, if you're lucky, to some of your visitors you will become central to that little world: a place to start when dealing with that conceptual territory. Perhaps not a 'home', but at least a base camp.

If you do it right, then rather than simply become a regular destination — which is good in itself — you'll be the bookmarked leaping-off point. And that's easily better.

## 2) Your website must connect with itself

Clear and obvious navigation is incredibly important. If someone has taken the trouble to find you, make sure that locating what they want from you is nice and easy. Your site should be searchable, the links within your site should be entirely obvious, and the structure of your site should be entirely intuitive.

If, when you put new content on the page, you refer back to something you said in a previous post on your website, then you must link to that. Don't expect that all of your website visitors are returning to your site. Assume they've never been there before, and everything you tell them is new information.

Having said that, do make sure that you do reward repeat visits. If your website looks exactly the same and says exactly the same thing everytime I go back, why bother visiting?

### 3) Your website must connect with other media environments

This is, perhaps, the most important connection to make, because it brings people who aren't already hunting for you to your website, where you can give them the opportunity to engage with you in an economic fashion.

By other media environments, I mean anywhere else communication is going on: print, radio, television, posters, flyers, live events. Everything should cross-promote everything else (on which, more in the next section), and your web presence should be an integral part of what you do.

When you think about it in this way, you start to approach a lot of things differently. You start to think about how your band bio might look if cut-and-paste by a lazy journalist into a piece in the local rag. You wonder what it might look like if someone pointed a camera at a computer and showed your website on the telly. You think about the US college radio DJ looking for something interesting to say about one of your acts.

The most important thing is to have a story to tell. While the internet may be a world of information, facts in themselves — even gig dates — aren't that interesting. People connect with a story — a real one with characters and development, plot and human interest. If you can work conflict and resolution in there as well, you're on to a good thing.

People connect with stories.

In order to make these kinds of connections, you need to be clear about your story, be able to tell it in a way that suits the web environment, and present it in a manner that can be adapted for every other medium. Not the simplest of instructions, I'll admit — but it's certainly something to aim for.

Brevity's a good start (yeah – I'm one to talk...).

Finally, there's a fourth means of connection that needs to be considered — and it's so powerful, it gets its own 'Thing' further down the line. It's letting the people who come to your website do the connecting for you. That's the whole viral thing, and if you can make that work, then you've moved to the next level.

## Thing 8: Cross-promote

**Your online stuff is not a replacement for your offline stuff, and nor does it exist independently of it. Figure out how to make the two genuinely intersect.**

This one's not rocket science, so I'll try and keep it brief. Everything you do — online and off — should link back to your website.

If you make posters or flyers, they should include the name of your website. If you write emails, your web address should be in the signature. If you talk about what you do, you should mention the website. If you stand up on a stage, you should direct people to your website. If you have sleeve notes for your CD, they should include the URL. Stick it on your t-shirts. Write it into the lyrics of your songs (I'm only half-kidding here).

These are some simple and obvious things that reinforce your website as the centre for your activity and engagement with the outside world. They're what I call *passive* cross-promotional strategies. But there are some fairly *active* ones you could employ too.

I'm going by some examples I've encountered in the past, and they apply specifically to live performance, but these should act as springboards into new ideas for you as well:

**Photoshoot:** The band, on stage, takes a photo of the audience. Next day, it'll be up on the website for the punters to download, save to their desktop or email to their friends.

**Photoshoot with contest:** As before, but with the lure of a free download or CD. The artist circles a punter or two in the photo. If they identify themselves in that photo, and reply to the website, they win.

**Ringtone:** Live on stage, the artist records a quick, impromptu 30-second musical 'This is (name of artist) / telling you to pick up your phone / pick up the phone / your phone is ringing... (etc.)'.

I don't know why people like ringtones either, but they seem to.

As before, upload it to the website after the gig so attendees can have the ringtone they witnessed being recorded before their eyes.

**Promo card:** Give an mp3 away to the people who turned up to the gig. On the night, distribute a card with a direct link for punters to go to your website and download.

You might also want to ask them for their email address while they're there, so you can build up a relationship with them as customers / fans.

These things take a bit of thought, preparation and effort. They also apply specifically, as I mentioned, to cross-promoting live performance with the website. Naturally, this is a two-way street. The website should promote the live event, obviously.

I've just mentioned a few, and there are many variations on this theme. I'd be interested in your ideas — or instances you've come across that we should add to the list. Feel free to get in touch with me via the [New Music Strategies](#) website with your suggestions.

## Thing 9: Fewer Clicks

**The fewer clicks required to do anything at your website, the more likely your visitors are to take that action. Exponentially. Think how important that is if you're asking them for money.**

I've taken my own advice here with a redesign of the [New Music Strategies](#) website. Things that don't need their own page have ended up in the sidebar, or have been dumped. Why would I make you navigate to a whole new page just to subscribe to the blog, or sign up for the [Newswire](#) email newsletter?

The guiding principle has been to reduce, where possible, the effort of navigation on your part, for the maximum benefit.

The same applies — only more so — if you want people to use your website as a means to give you money. I'm delighted to say I have an example of good practice to share with you.

I bought some music on the internet recently. I'm pleased with my purchase, and I'm particularly happy with the difference between this experience and the experience I had at another website the last time I attempted to buy music from an independent label's online presence.

The music I just bought (and am now happily listening to) was from [Type Records](#) whose purchasing interface is a model of ease. They do some other things very well too (podcasts, RSS feeds, user interface, '[breadcrumb navigation](#)') — and I really like what they release. Kind of a perfect storm of online music experience.

One of the smartest things they do is to use [Paypal](#).

It's an internationally accepted method of payment, it's comparatively hassle-free, safe and reliable and — most importantly — pretty much everyone who has ever done anything on eBay (tens, if not hundreds of millions) already have an account.

This eases up the process considerably.

The next thing they do well is to make it entirely clear what the purchasing procedure entails. There is a graphical display at the top of the download shop page that lays out the process as follows:

Browse Music > Your Basket > Checkout > Get Your Downloads

And the process is exactly that simple.

In fact, it would be difficult to find a way to simplify it further. The 'Get Your Downloads' page was duplicated with an email containing a link, but there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, this assures the purchaser that if anything goes wrong with the download (plug gets pulled from the wall — that sort of thing), then there is still the opportunity to go direct to the download without having to appeal to the site or the e-Commerce provider for a second chance.

Better still, whole albums were zipped (with artwork) for my convenience. Instead of having to click to place a tick to select each of the songs, I could instead simply click once to download the album in its entirety. This was easier (and considerably cheaper) to do — and so it's exactly what I did.

A single zip file is better than 13 individual mp3s. Fewer clicks.

But there are other areas in which the fewer clicks principle applies. In fact, it should apply everywhere to everything.

Don't make me look for things. Show them to me. Drilling down through layers is not what I'm here for.

Don't make me work for things. Give them to me. I shouldn't have to jump through hoops, navigate using arcane drop down menus or pass by your advertising to get to where I want to go.

I won't tell you who it was that provided me with the example of bad user experience. Suffice it to say that it broke all of these guidelines with gusto, and used a payment method that was, frankly, convoluted. And they didn't end up with my money.

Above all, this is a matter of website usability. For further reading, I strongly recommend Jakob Nielsen's [Useit.com](http://Useit.com) website.



## Thing 10: Professionalism

**If you want to make a living from music — online or off — you need to be appropriately professional. More than anywhere else, the web is where you can manage perception and leave an impression that says ‘Let’s do business’.**

You might not have a terribly impressive office. You might not have an office at all. I’m hoping you have business cards and that you carry them around (I don’t care whether you’re a drummer in a metal band or a music publisher, a music teacher, retailer, manager or roadie — you will always stumble across people who will be both willing and able to help you or work with you, or will remember and recommend you *as long as they have the details*). Generally speaking, though, the impression you leave is not a corporate one. It’s a personal one.

Online, you don’t get to make that impression personally. Your website has to do that for you. And what most people think of you depends entirely on what they encounter when they find you online.

Here are some of the things to remember to think about when creating the impression that you’re for real, trustworthy and long-term.

### Remember perception is everything

You’re eventually going to have to back up the impression you give with actual results — but there’s nothing that says your website *has* to give an accurate picture of your current circumstances. It’s the easiest thing in the world to give the impression that you have a decent budget when actually, you could stick your entire online and PR budget under a glass.

You know you're worth spending money on, but you have to convince other people of that.

I know it sounds hokey, but give the outward impression of the kind of success you aspire to, and the universe will rearrange itself to make that a reality. The universe doesn't like inconsistency.

Another, slightly less embarrassingly 'Law of Attraction'-ish way to think of that is just that something is true if enough people believe it.

Simply put: *fake it till you make it.*

## Have a proper domain

I've written in the past about the kind of mistakes that people make when choosing a domain name for their website, but most important of all is to actually spend the few quid, dollars, euros or shiny beads it takes to get a domain name in the first place.

It's about the price of a pint of beer, and at the very least, you can set it up to redirect to whatever free hosting service you're currently using. For the extra price of a couple of CDs, you can get out of the free hosting service and have a grown-up website.

## Spend some time thinking about colour palette

I happen to be colourblind (red and green). It's something I have in common with 40% of the male population of the planet — and most of them don't

realise it. But it's still important to match colours and think about the message that different colours send in relation to your message.

You're not going to put pastels in a page about punk music — but does it always have to be white text on black with some red in it? I found this [very helpful page](#) that will help you find colours that work together — and you don't have to be an interior decorator to spot the improvement. I've gone for a sandstone thing on the [New Music Strategies](#) site. You like?

## MySpace is not your website

I can't say this often enough. If you're relying on MySpace for your web presence, then you're just not in the game.

I once wrote about [the five mistakes you're probably making with your MySpace page](#), and I put this as the number one transgression. I'm starting to question whether MySpace is more trouble than it's worth, but if you're using it, think of it like it's the pub. Meet people there, socialise, exchange details — and then, if you think you can do business with them, take them back to your office — or in this case, your real, professional website.

## Learn to spell

Seriously. This is important. Grammar makes an impression. Apostrophes matter.

Yes, the language is changing and developing and that's what a living language should absolutely do. But using *affect* instead of *effect* or *your* instead of *you're*

makes you look like an idiot — and while you might think that most of your customers don't care, they're not the only people looking to give you money. If you don't give proper consideration to your written communication, then you're probably going to be lazy or unreliable elsewhere.

Yes, I'm a university lecturer. Yes, this probably concerns me more than it does most people — but you're trying to business here, right?

If you get stuck, there's always [Grammar Girl](#).

## Use high-quality photography

Photography is a professional skill. People devote their lives to the study of the craft and to developing a style. If you want photography on your music website (hint: you do), then find someone who knows what they're doing. Taking snaps on your cellphone or cheap digital camera is not going to cut it. You may not be able to afford to commission a professional photographer right from the outset — but there are levels above enthusiastic amateur that you can make good use of. Some newcomers to the industry are trying to build a portfolio, and music-related shots can add to that.

One way to track down a talented photographer is to trawl through [Flickr](#). Do a search on your town, or on your type of music, and see what you come up with.

There are some stock photography websites that have free images along with the paid one. They're worth hunting out too.

## Get a web designer who understands design — not just code

Looking at other people's websites might give you an idea of the sort of thing to ask for, but do bear in mind that most web developers are code monkeys first, and visual designers second. The cheaper they are, the more true that becomes.

But design is not just about look — it's about user interface, accessibility, search engine optimisation — and other things that I'm going to be talking about shortly. If you're getting a website built, refurbished, updated, overhauled or worked on, make sure that the person who's doing it has an understanding that goes beyond CSS, PHP, MySQL, XHTML and Python — or which button to press in Dreamweaver.

And if anyone says the words Microsoft FrontPage — just smile and back away slowly.

## Your website is not a brochure

I'll end with one of the most important conceptual leaps that so many businesses fail to make: Your website is not an electronic pamphlet about your business. It's not promotion for your business. It's not a way of generating business.

Your website IS your business.

## Thing 11: The Death of Scarcity

**Declaring the death of scarcity to an economist would be like declaring the death of gravity to a physicist. But the fact remains: the Internet breaks Economics. How the world used to work is not how the world works any more.**

I studied Economics at school when I was 15. And I remember that there was one fundamental, unbreakable law. It was the law of Supply and Demand — and it had to do with scarcity. It was clearly an important concept. It seemed the more time you wrote the word 'scarcity' in an Economics essay, the more marks you were awarded.

As you may not have attended the fifth form at Edgewater College in Pakuranga yourself, and so are not privy to the same kind of sophisticated understanding of the field of Economics, allow me to explain.

There's a limited amount of stuff. Stuff is scarce. If there are 3 packets of cornflakes on the supermarket shelf, and the supermarket sells 3 packets of cornflakes, then there are no more cornflakes. If nobody buys the 3 packets of cornflakes, then the supermarket is stuck with the cornflakes. If cornflakes are really popular, the supermarket can put the price of cornflakes up. If the price of cornflakes is too high, people won't want the cornflakes as much. If the cornflakes aren't moving off the shelf, you can create more of a demand for cornflakes by cutting the price. These were the natural laws of economics in simpler times.

Enter the internet, where it all breaks down.

If an online music store wants to sell a song, they keep one instance of that

song 'in stock'. If they sell 1 copy or a million, they still only ever have one copy of that song in stock. It's like a magical packet of cornflakes. There is no need to worry about being stuck with the leftover shelf space, and nor is there concern about ever running out. There is no scarcity of that song.

So for someone who wants to make a living through the business of music, it means everything changes.

There may have been a time where you would press a thousand copies of a CD, give away a couple of hundred as promos, and try and sell the other eight hundred. Now, you can press a thousand, give away a million, and still sell the thousand.

The death of scarcity makes a nonsense of the notion of the 'lost sale'. If someone would never have bought your music in the first place, but acquires the music through some other means (perhaps as a recipient of one of those million promotional copies), you haven't "lost a sale", you've gained a listener.

More importantly, you've gained *attention* (remember that word — it becomes important).

The death of scarcity in the online environment also means that super-serving niches is now a better market strategy than banking on hits. We've already discussed The Long Tail. Just to recap, it's Chris Anderson's fairly indisputable idea that the future of business is selling less of more.

Well, Anderson has taken his ideas a step further, and has introduced the phrase The Economics of Abundance.

As David Hornik explains:

The basic idea is that incredible advances in technology have driven the cost of things like transistors, storage, bandwidth, to zero. And when the elements that make up a business are sufficiently abundant as to approach free, companies appropriately should view their businesses differently than when resources were scarce (the Economy of Scarcity). They should use those resources with abandon, without concern for waste. That is the overriding attitude of the Economy of Abundance — don't do one thing, do it all; don't sell one piece of content, sell it all; don't store one piece of data, store it all. The Economy of Abundance is about doing everything and throwing away the stuff that doesn't work. In the Economy of Abundance you can have it all.

Best of all, abundance means that the tools of production and distribution are far more widely distributed. I'm not saying we live in a utopian media landscape where all messages are equally conveyed, but the balance has certainly shifted in what most of us would consider to be the right direction.

Look at broadcasting. There's a scarcity of broadcast spectrum, so the way to become a radio or television broadcaster was always to either be a major corporation, or a government (or a 'criminal' and a pirate).

Leaving aside whether I think streaming audio online is 'radio' or not, there are certainly far more channels available to far more people than ever there were — simply because there is an abundance of 'space' online, and so the price of entry is considerably lower.

Maximum capacity for FM stations in any given town? Probably about 50. Maximum number of online audio streams available for reception in that same town? Practically infinite.



And not only are things abundant by nature online, they are *increasingly* abundant. Look at hard drive space and bandwidth. The 56kbps dial-up modem was a revelation. Now, it's unthinkably slow. Ethan Zuckerman gives the example of online mail storage:

Hard drive storage has become abundant to the point where GMail is able to give users 2 gigabytes of mail, instead of the 2 megabytes Hotmail used to give you. "Your mailbox is full? What was that about?"

Moreover, as Michael Goldhaber points out, the basis for economics online shifts from a concern with the scarcity of goods and services to an economy primarily centred around attention (there's that word again).

Attention is the basis on which success is measured online, because there is no shortage of the goods and services. But this is not to say that money is not part of the equation:

...money now flows along with attention, or, to put this in more general terms, when there is a transition between economies, the old kind of wealth easily flows to the holders of the new<sup>2</sup>.

It's no accident that Google spent in excess of US\$1.5b on YouTube — and more than twice as much on its recent acquisition of DoubleClick. Money flows to the attention — and both of these services, while providing no actual content themselves, generate masses of attention. Google itself is the most looked-at site online.

That's not to say that money will automatically turn up in the pockets of whoever gets the most eyeballs (or ears) to take note online. Rishab Aiyer

Ghosh critiques this position in an article entitled Economics is Dead! Long Live Economics!. Have a read if you wish to go deeper with this. Suffice it to say his position is “well, actually, it’s more complicated than that.”

And this is a topic you *should* read about. Despite what I thought when I was 15, Economics is actually important. Understanding the economic environment within which you work is crucial for your survival as a music enterprise — or any enterprise for that matter.

I’ll talk about how to get that attention in an upcoming section about *Search Engine Optimisation*. But for now, have a quick ponder about how the death of scarcity might impact upon what it is you do for a living. Just remember that you’re not going to run out of music, and there’s no shortage of products, services, or — for that matter — customers.

*For more on this, you should have a good read of the excellent series of articles available at TechDirt.*

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<sup>2</sup> *The Attention Economy and the Net*, M. Goldhaber, *First Monday* (2:4), 1997  
[http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue2\\_4/goldhaber/](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue2_4/goldhaber/)

## Thing 12: Distributed Identity

**From a PR perspective, you are better off scattering yourself right across the internet, than you are staying put in one place. Memberships, profiles, comments, and networks are powerful online marketing strategies.**

Ze Frank once joked that the reason MySpace pages are so ugly is that they're designed to send people away. And, of course, he was right. Membership sites like MySpace provide an opportunity to direct traffic to your own professional website.

The return on investment seems to be diminishing in that respect (for a number of reasons, that I'll go into at a later date) but it serves to demonstrate the principle: having a website is important — but it's unlikely that people will just stumble across it, unless you're finding those people in other places.

In marketing there's a phrase that goes along the lines of 'You've just got to get yourself out there'. That's so much easier on the internet — where you can be pretty much everywhere at once. Who you are online — your internet 'identity' — needs to be distributed far and wide.

There are many ways to make yourself visible — just as you might make yourself known in the 'real world' by turning up at events and networking meetings.

What follows are some of the best ways to distribute yourself online, so that you can be in many places at once, inviting people back to your place for a spot of music business.

Try these strategies for a start:

## 1. Email signature

You probably send more e-mail than you make phonecalls, write letters and have meetings with people combined. If you have a website, and you want people to visit it, then at the end of your email is the ideal place to put the link. Email tends to go beyond your immediate network of friends, and expand to a wider, but related, community. Putting the address at the bottom of your mail won't guarantee they'll click the link - but not putting it there guarantees they won't.

Better still, write a short line that says what they'll find when they go there. Something like this, perhaps:

Hi James,  
Thanks for all your help. Much appreciated.  
Cheers,  
Andrew Dubber

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Advice for independents at New Music Strategies:  
<http://newmusicstrategies.com>

Whatever email software or webmail platform you use, there'll be a way of putting together an email signature file that will be automatically attached to the bottom of every email you send. Keep it short and sweet, give them a reason to click it — and get yourself in the desktop of everyone you ever write to.

*IMPORTANT: Don't spam. Sending unsolicited marketing emails is not only rude and offputting, it's also illegal. Put your links in the signature of legitimate emails that people will actually want or expect to receive.*

## 2. Blog comments

Another way to get your identity out there is to leave comments in relevant blogs. Feel free to try it here. Most blog sites give you the opportunity to include your URL, and whatever you write in as your name will act as a link back to your website. Other people who read the blog, and then are interested in what you have to say in response to it will often click on the link to go back to your site and find out more about you.

Again — the spam rule applies. Write something appropriate, interesting and relevant. People won't click on the link of someone who just posts to get the link. Besides, most of us use comment spam filtering systems like [Akismet](#).

A related strategy is to link to other people's blogs on your own site. Most blogs publish 'Trackbacks' - which are snippet quotes and links to other sites that have linked to their own. With Wordpress (the blogging software I use), it happens automatically. If you link to this page from your blog, this page will automatically have a link back to your blog on it.

## 3. Forum activity

Another excellent strategy for providing links back to your own site is the activity of posting in a relevant forum.

In a forum, you can build a reputation, get people genuinely interested in

your contribution to whatever the conversation happens to be, and then want to look at your profile and head back to the page that you put in there to find out more about you and your interesting personality.

Tolerance of time-wasters and spammers is especially low in this environment, and punishments for transgression are swift and harsh. Spend your time finding the right conversation, and contribute to it as you would if the people were in the room with you. Nobody likes a troll.

#### 4. Social networking

This is where the idea of distributed online identity really comes into play. There are so many web 2.0 sites online (some listed above), and many of them require that you construct and maintain an 'identity' or 'profile'.

You have a profile on MySpace already, no doubt, and it links back to your site. You can also have a profile on Mog, Last.FM, Flickr, Delicious, 43 Things, Facebook and more.

There's a [list of social networking sites at Wikipedia](#). Go and hand pick a few, set yourself up an account and start using them.

Do bear in mind that there's a time commitment associated with the success of each of these. You can't just open a MySpace page and expect people to read it any more than you can expect to launch a website and expect people to just find it. They are social networking sites. Be sociable. Network.

Each of these sites has its own rules, culture and expectations. Get to know them, and the people there. Then there'll be a reason to belong to those sites — and the effort will have been worthwhile.

Above all, remember that becoming an 'identity' in each of these arenas strengthens your overall online presence. What do you want to project about who you are as an individual, a company, an artist, a group or an organisation?

## 5. Multiple sites

This one's a bit of an 'advanced user' tip — and it can have its problems — but it's definitely worth mentioning. Having more than one related website can really help your cause. This is particularly true of independent music companies that do more than one core activity.

Let's say you're a promoter, a distributor, a record label, and you manage a handful of bands. Each of those should have its own website, and those are the sites that you should direct people towards in regard to those specific things.

If your company is (let's say) *Plank Music*, you should have [plankrecords.com](#), [plankdistribution.com](#), [plankpromotions.com](#) — and they should link back to each of the others, with a simple home page ([plankmusic.com](#)) that directs outwards to each of the different branches.

Those links between each of those pages strengthens the identity of each aspect of the business — and also the main brand.

As I say, it can cause you problems — especially if it's unclear to your visitors which of your sites they should be going to — but ultimately, with some careful planning, you can distribute your own identity under your own umbrella.



## Thing 13: SEO — My top 10 tips

**You've got your website. Now all you need is for people to find it. You can email links to people till the cows come home, but the way most people are going to find you is through a search engine.**

Spend any time trying to do business on the internet, and you'll come across the acronym SEO. It stands for Search Engine Optimisation, and it pretty much does what it says on the tin. It's a strategy for optimising your website so that search engines will favour it over other, similar sites.

In other words, if you run a record label that sells ambient electronic music online, you want to be at or near the top of the search engine results when anyone types the words 'ambient' or 'electronic music' into Google or any of the more than 200 other search engines around these days. Even if you're the only game in town — say, an avant-garde remixer of 1930s bluegrass recordings — you still want to be found by your niche audience.

Fortunately, there are some very proactive things you can do so that when somebody types the name of your band into a search engine, your band is what they find. I've compiled a list of the **Top 10 Things That Will Affect Your SEO** — in no particular order.

### 1. Meta tags

In the code of each page of your website, between the **<head>** and the **</head>** tags, is a place to put metadata information. Metadata is information about the information that can be found on your website.

There are three main categories of web page metadata: Title, description, and keywords.

The *title metadata* on your page is crucial. That's what shows up in the blue bar at the top of your browser and it's what your browser's bookmarking and navigation remembers. To a search engine, that is what your page is essentially all about. There's a real art to writing a good search-engine-friendly title.

Copyblogger has some great tips about [how to write headlines that get results](#).

So... knowing this, it should come as no surprise to you that having the same title on each page of your website is a complete waste of time. If the titlebar of your browser doesn't change as you click from page to page in your website, it needs fixing. You need title metadata on each page.

This is particularly important if you have a record label, and each page is about a different artist. If the name of the record label is all that shows up in the title bar on every page, you can be assured that people are searching for your artists by name in Google and not finding them on your site.

Seems important.

Search engines will use the *description metadata* as the text it uses to describe your page in its results. This also counts toward the overall relevance of your site for the topic in question.

The keyword metadata is where you should put a list all those things (including misspellings) that you think people will be searching for when they want to find your page.

Overdoing the metatags can be counterproductive though. Google knows when you're just trying it on. Go for half a dozen to a dozen really relevant keywords. Think about the kinds of searches that your website would be a good answer to.

## 2. Header tags / bulletpoints

Search engines are pretty clever. They're not just looking at the keywords and metatags to figure out what the important terms in your site are. They're also interested in anything that is a header of some description — either with an `<h1>`, `<h2>`, `<h3>` descriptor tag — or even just something that's in **bold** or *italics*.

Headings, subheadings and emphasised words are a good indicator that this is what's important on the page, and so that's what the Search engine algorithms remember. You should bear that in mind when composing a page on your website. Ask: "what are the most important phrases, and would they be the kind of thing I'd like people to have been searching for when they found me?"

Again, word has it that overdoing the emphasised words can be counterproductive. A good rule of thumb is five per page.

### 3. Link text

What you link to is very important, as it connects you to a network of other similar sites. While you may not wish to help your competitor by linking from your site to theirs, bear in mind that it helps you as much as it does them.

More importantly, carefully consider the words you use to link to the other sites. Using the phrase [click here](#) or [this link](#) is next to useless, because it contains no information other than the URL itself. However if you link the words [Birmingham punk label](#) to an actual punk record label in Birmingham, then you're giving good information, for which you will be Googlingly rewarded.

### 4. Site map

This requires a bit of extra expertise in the web design department. You have a website, and it has sections, pages and subpages. One of the most helpful things you can do for your website visitors is to provide a [sitemap like this one at Flickr](#). It helps them find their way around, and locate the content they want easily.

Better still, it helps the search engine 'spiders' (software that crawls through websites, indexing the pages for the search engine) to do the same thing. A sitemap is an addition to your website that will improve your findability, and increase the profile of each individual page on your site.

Wikipedia has a good, brief [article about sitemaps](#) — and, more importantly, some good links to places that will generate a sitemap for you with little or no effort at all. There's also a good [sitemap plugin for Wordpress](#) — the blogging software I use on this site.

## 5. Relevant inbound links

This one, of course, is a little more tricky than most — but it's the pot of gold at the end of the SEO rainbow. This is when websites other than yours link to your pages with helpful linking keywords. To the search engines, this is evidence of relevance, authority and reliability. The more inbound links you have, the more reliable your site will appear to Google & co. — and up the rankings you will go.

Even more importantly, people need to be clicking on those inbound links. If my site sends a person to your site, your search engine rankings improve. You become exponentially more trustworthy the more sites link to you. After all, if 1000 people are linking to your website, you must *really* know all about that topic that's described in your keywords — and so, you'd better go right up the top of those results.

It's a bit of a black art with closely guarded secrets – but there are people who know what they're talking about. Have a read of some of the [top SEO bloggers](#).

## 6. Content

Here's the one thing you probably have more control over than anything else: the words on your site. If your website only has 20 or so words on each page, and the rest is made up of images, mp3s and videos, then there's not too much a search engine can do with that (though Google are addressing it with their new "[universal search](#)").

Likewise, if you have screeds of dates, venues and times, but no actual descriptive information or narrative, there's no real meat for a search engine (or a human brain, for that matter) to grasp hold of.

Having said that, images can be of use to you if you remember about the ALT tags. That's the alternative text information that shows up if the image doesn't load, if your visitor is using a screen reader (for the visually impaired, usually) or even if the visitor just hovers the mouse over the image.

Make your ALT tags descriptive and keyword-laden.

## 7. Choose the right keywords

It's all very well writing great headlines and putting good metadata in. It's great that you're linking relevant-sounding phrases to the pages that will be helpful. But, as you know, people are a problem. They're unpredictable. They're likely to choose poorly when searching for sites like yours.

I think that a good search term that should help you find this site is '**online music business**'. In fact, far more people will search for '**internet record label promotion**'. Having the right keywords is a bit of a guessing game, and something of a juggling act.

There are some websites online that will help you find the keywords that people are using to search for sites like yours. Most of them will charge you money. You can search for them online if you want to use them — but my rule of thumb would be to anticipate unfocused thinking, and you're probably about 80% there. And you can keep your money.

## 8. Updating content

It turns out that having good, relevant content is not enough. Nor is having large quantities of content. As far as Google is concerned, a far more worthy indicator of relevance is how *regularly updated* that content is (this is why blogs are so great for SEO).

You could create the perfect website and not want to touch it for years because you think it does and says everything you want it to. Give it a few months, and Google will think it's a ghost town and not send people there any more.

Write and post often. If your website doesn't change every week, you're not doing something right. Daily is even better.

## 9. Beware Flash & Java

If pages with animated Flash intros have to have 'Skip' buttons on them, why would you bother with the Flash animation in the first place? In fact, if you ask me, Flash is of limited use other than for distracting web games and video embedding. Generally speaking, search engines can't read your flash animation, so they're just ignoring it. If that's where all the good content lies, then it might look great — but you have successfully hidden it from the outside world.

Relying on Java to make a website sing and dance might be impressive to the eye and ear, but it means little to the search engine spiders.

## 10. Stick with your domain name

While it's true that newly updated content will result in smiles and benevolence from the search engine people, your site itself should be well established. The older your site, the more trusted it seems to the search engine people. This is why changing your domain name is never a decision to be taken lightly. You'll have to build up that track record from scratch again.

Sometimes that's worth doing — but hardly ever.

And here's a free bonus tip:

Google's pretty smart about tricks. Putting in lots of keywords, generating hidden text (white on a white background) with screeds of SEO-facing keyword-riddled content or making links on all your social networking sites and clicking on them hundreds of times each will only result in a downgrading — if not an outright ban — of your site on the search engines. After all this effort, that would be a disaster.

It might seem back to front, but if you write with your target audience in mind, rather than try and play the game to get noticed on the search engines, then you're probably going to be far more successful with SEO for your website.

Do it right, but just make sure you do it. No point spending all that money on a website if you're just going to hide it like that, is there?



## Thing 14: Permission and personalisation

**This is very basic stuff — the stuff of etiquette and ethics, rather than of technology and innovation. There is a special level in hell reserved for those who spam.**

I don't need to tell you the importance of permission marketing. One person who has asked you for information is easily worth ten thousand people who haven't heard of you and aren't interested. Sending unsolicited messages will generally result in a negative, rather than a positive impact upon your business.

Let people opt-in.

More importantly, make the information you send them relevant, useful and welcome. People like to be spoken to as if they are the *only* person being spoken to. That's true of pretty much all media communication (I ban my radio students from using the phrase 'all you people out there'), but it's especially true of online communication.

Online media consumption is mostly a solitary affair. Even though Web 2.0 is all about socialisation, when you step back and look at it, there's only ever one person sitting at that computer. They're not designed to be shared. So talk to the one person looking at that screen.

## Personalise your content

You'll probably notice now that that's what I've been doing here all along. I don't talk to an audience. I talk to you. We're in this together, you and me.

The same should go for anything you do online — whether it's your website, a mass e-newsletter mailout or a podcast. Don't just think about the information you need to get out there — think about what the person you're talking to wants to know.

That rules out long lists of dates and catalogues of upcoming events. Those should never be emailed. Think about it: how much attention do you give to emailed lists?

We come across so much text in our lives these days, we've all developed coping strategies that involve scanning and ignoring all but the most personally relevant information. We prioritise personal messages.

That's not to say the information shouldn't be available, but put it online in some searchable format.

Instead of sending out a long list of upcoming gigs listed by date, why not email your (opt-in) mailing list members and say something like: *'Hey — we're coming to play in your town soon. Looking forward to seeing you there. Check this page for details'* – and then give them a link?

## Introductions are important

One of the best ways to get your message out to people that you don't know is to get people they DO know to introduce you.

One of the ways you can do that is to encourage them to send your message on to their friends that might appreciate it. I hate unsolicited communication from complete strangers, but generally speaking, I welcome messages from helpful friends who have clearly been thinking of me as they surf the web.

Having the 'Email this' link at the end of each blog post (made with the help of this Wordpress plugin) will hopefully help you forward New Music Strategies on to someone you think might find it useful, if I ever write something you think is of sufficient value or is particularly noteworthy for an individual you have in mind.

Even better, why not send this e-book to someone who might appreciate it. I bet you can think of two people right now who could use this sort of advice. Just copy and paste this link into an email, and send it to them:

<http://newmusicstrategies.com/ebook>

See how easy that was?

## Don't be longwinded

Remember too that people tend to scan. Before this was an ebook, readers of this section on the New Music Strategies blog didn't absorb every word. In fact, chances are you're skimming yourself right now — but I know that your eyes have landed on certain key phrases along the way, right?

Knowing that important piece of information, it becomes clear that it's a good idea to drop in paragraph breaks. Don't run all your text together in one big, long scroll. Break it up. That way, scanning eyes have got clues as to which bits are important (usually the first sentence of each para) and your communication can be long without being longwinded.

Subheadings can be really useful in that respect too.

It's also a good idea to keep it simple. Tell one story (and it should be a story). If you have half a dozen things to tell people in a mailout, try sending slightly more frequent emails with one important thing in each, rather than one long occasional post that makes you seem like hard work.

## It's quite simple

As I said, this is simple stuff. Just communicate in the way you'd like to be spoken to by the kind of person who does what you do. Put yourself in your audience's shoes and take it from there.

Got any thoughts or recommendations for further personalisation or use of permission? I'd love to hear your comments. Drop me a note at the [New Music Strategies](#) website.

## Thing 15: RSS

**RSS is quite simply the single most useful technology to come about since the invention of email. If it hasn't already, it's going to change everything about the way you use the internet.**

If you had the time and energy, you could locate hundreds of useful news and information websites, and then every day, you could visit each of those websites, one after another, and check to see if there's anything new that might be of interest.

It would be time consuming of course, but just think how informed and ahead of the game you'd be.

Wouldn't it be nice if you could do exactly that, but without having to actually visit any of the websites?

You see where I'm going with this...

RSS is a way of bringing that content to you, and it can be assembled into something not entirely unlike a customised newspaper that only includes things that you're genuinely interested in — delivered direct to you.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. RSS can make you money, find you new audiences, position you as an opinion leader and quite possibly make you more attractive. It's really very clever stuff.

RSS stands for Rich Site Summary or, more usefully, Really Simple Syndication. It's a way of distributing regularly updated web content like blogs, news sites or podcasts.

From the user's perspective, it's a way of subscribing to interesting content, and getting it delivered without having to seek it out.

## Free subscription

Bear in mind, when you see the word *subscription*, it doesn't mean that somebody is going to ask you for money in order to receive these feeds.

It's subscription in the sense that you put your hand up and say "Yes please — I'd like to receive this from now on, whenever you have something new to say."

News sites like the BBC, entertaining and distracting blogs such as I Can Has Cheezburger?, useful sources of geekery like Techdirt and helpful online music business information and consultancy sites like New Music Strategies tend to provide RSS feeds, so that the articles and updates we provide can be delivered directly to you as and when they become available, without you having to pop in every now and then to see if we've got anything new.

In order to read those RSS feeds, you use a piece of software or a web service called a Feed Reader or RSS Aggregator. The Feed Reader does the work for you, regularly checking on all of those websites and updating the list of 'what's new and interesting'.

Sites will usually let you know if they publish a feed of their content by putting a little badge or button on their page that contains the words 'feed' or 'subscribe', or the acronyms 'RSS', 'RDF' or 'XML'. You might also see the word 'Atom'. Same thing, really. For our purposes today, these terms are pretty much interchangeable.



I'm a little less subtle than most people and I've opted for a giant orange button, featuring the standard RSS feed logo that you'll often see in a much smaller size on other, more tasteful sites.

Go on, click it. See what happens.

Some people don't publicise their feed — but generally speaking, if they're running a blog or a news site, they have one -- they're just not very smart. A little bit of digging will find it. Put their website's URL into your feed reader and see what turns up.

There's quite a number of RSS readers available. Some are sophisticated pieces of software that look like email programmes. Some cost a little bit of money, and many of them are very popular. Personally, I prefer the free ones. I've used most of them, and there are a few I can recommend unreservedly:

**1. Google Reader** — I've recently switched to this one and I'm completely sold on it. Google have really thought this through well, and will get you started with subscription packages around topics of interest for you. I chose 'Geeky' and 'Technology' among others. No surprises there...

**2. Sage** — this is a plugin for the Firefox web browser, and it loads the feeds in the sidebar. Sage will search for a feed in any page and will usually

find it. I recommend you try this one if you're using Firefox. I only let go of it reluctantly, and it does some things that many users will prefer. If you're still using Internet Explorer to browse the web, then [download Firefox](#) and evolve.

**3. Bloglines** — this is a website that's been delivering RSS aggregation to members longer than most. Better still, it's loosely configured as a social network, so you can read other people's favourite sites and use that as a way of discovering new and interesting things to subscribe to. Not as mind-bogglingly simple as Google Reader, but friendly and useful nevertheless.

Personally, RSS enables me to selectively read a far greater number of websites a day than I could if I had to go to each individual site to get the latest information about the online music world (and [pictures of cats with funny captions](#)). At last count it was around 950 sites -- and I do it all over my morning cup of coffee.

*Warning: be careful with coffee near laptops. I learned this the hard way recently.*

RSS is also the technology that enables podcasting. The media file is enclosed within the RSS feed, and is automatically delivered to your podcast software ([iTunes](#) is a popular choice).

Best of all, once you understand what RSS feeds can do, you can implement them in all sorts of interesting ways for your own ends.

For instance, you may have noticed that New Music Strategies has a [Newswire](#) service. It's simply a list of links to articles from around the internet that have to do with music business online.



To provide that service, I use RSS in a number of ways:

- First, I find the pages to link to in my morning laptop coffee ritual (the drinking and reading — not the spilling and panicking).
- Next, I bookmark those pages using [del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) (strongly recommended) and I tag those articles with the word '[newswire](#)'.
- Del.icio.us provides an RSS feed of every page and so there's one automatically generated for my bookmarks tagged with that word.
- I then embed that RSS feed into a webpage on this site.

By so doing, I end up with an incredibly useful page on this site that has all the latest links to all the latest articles about music online, and I don't even have to update that page.

Just by bookmarking the articles I find useful, the page automatically updates, and I end up looking helpful with almost no effort at all.

Better still, I use [Feedburner](#) to manage the RSS feed, and they even provide an email subscription option. Just by typing your email address into the Newswire signup in the sidebar of the website, you can get a daily list of the latest links sent directly to you. Automatically. Free.

It might sound a bit complicated when I lay it out like that, but actually, this is a set-and-forget proposition, and it's one of those things that you can put together in all sorts of different and useful ways.

From a business perspective, you can use RSS to establish an ongoing relationship with your customers, without having to rely on them to keep coming back.

It's a way of alerting people to your new releases and concert information.

You could do the embedded RSS news thing, and become the one-stop source for all things to do with your particular scene.

But best of all, by using an RSS aggregator (or feed reader, if you prefer the term), you could stay absolutely ahead of the game without having to laboriously visit all the same websites day after day. Just open your [Google Reader](#), [Sage](#) or [Bloglines](#) — and see what's new in your world.

Just watch your elbow near that coffee cup.

## Thing 16: Accessibility

**Not everyone has a fast computer or high speed access. Not everybody has the gift of sight. Make everything you do online accessible.**

I've said this before, and I'll no doubt say it again: There's nothing that irritates me more than a website with a purposeless landing page. Especially ones with complicated animation, long loading times and a 'Skip Intro' link. Every time I have to go back to that website, my annoyance increases exponentially, and my likelihood of returning is reduced even further.

The likelihood of parting with me from my money under those circumstances is precisely nil.

If you have to put a Skip Intro link on your front page, then you should have simply have skipped it yourself in the first place. You are not only wasting my time and bandwidth with your inane flash show, you've also clearly wasted your money on it. The only person you've made happy is the person you paid to make the logo whiz around like that.

But my grumpiness is not your problem — and nor is it the issue. Putting a large flash animation on your website is the equivalent of putting a couple of big, burly guys in shades on the door, and having them say 'Not in those shoes, mate' to everyone who doesn't have the latest of the latest computer kit.

You're turning your customers away with your inaccessible, high-spec, high bandwidth website.

Worse, building your whole website in Flash might look cool on the display screen, but you manage to discriminate against nearly everyone in the process. Well over half the internet-connected world still operates at dialup speeds on computers three years old or more. More importantly, you're actively discriminating against disabled people.

## Putting a rope ladder where your wheelchair ramp should be

Considering accessibility on your website is as important as considering accessibility within your workplace. It's actually the law – in the UK you're looking at a fine in the thousands of pounds for not getting this right.

More to the point, it seems counterintuitive to assume that people who don't have the ability to see don't like music enough to get any value out of your website.

Maybe it's just my experience, but the visually impaired people I know are avid consumers of music, and they are continually frustrated that the worst offenders in terms of not being able to use their screen reader on a particular website are often music businesses.

Fortunately, it's not difficult to make your website accessible, and there are handy guidelines to help you do that. The [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) has a range of useful documents on its website. You can also check to [see if your website is XHTML compliant](#), as it should be.

You may be interested to know that there's also a strong correlation between usability and accessibility. The more thought you give to one, the more likely you are to be doing the other well.

Jakob Nielsen's [Use It](#) website has a wealth of helpful tips on web usability. He talks about browser compatibility, how people use websites and he has helpful [top 10 things people do wrong](#) lists.

## Accessible does not mean vanilla

There's no need for an accessible site to be an ugly site. CSS is a great way to style a web page (check out the [CSS Zen Garden](#)), and any web designer worth their salt has brushed up on all the latest standards in this respect — and knows how to make it sing, visually speaking.

But most of all, your site should be well thought-out, intuitive to use, quick to load and fit-for-purpose.

I'm not saying that if people like and can use your website easily they're more likely to give you money — I'm just saying that if people **don't** like it and **can't** use it easily — they simply won't.

## Thing 17: Reward and Incentivise

**Let's face it, there's a lot of choice on the internet. No matter what you're offering, there's an alternative somewhere else that will do just fine.**

I've said before that people hear music, then they like music, then they buy music. It's important to realise that you need to go a step further than just allowing that to happen. You have to remove all the friction in between.

People may love your music. They might be enormous fans. But let's not forget they're no longer a captive audience, enslaved to the tyrannies of geography or time. You might be the most specialist baroque chamber music retailer or bhangra act — chances are you're not the only game in town anymore.

You have to give people a reason to choose you — and then *keep* giving them reasons.

In these days of mp3 blogs, streaming radio and on-demand services, the low-quality 30-second sample just isn't going to cut it any more. It was never really enough to give people a good idea of whether they like your music or not, and now it's pretty much laughable.

In fact, it's worse than useless. The 30-second (or 1-minute) lo-fi streaming sample makes you look mean and suspicious. You don't have to give away the whole catalogue, but a couple of full tracks of each album's a great start.

This is particularly true for customers who have bought from you in the past (or engaged with you in some other economic fashion — substitute your own business model here). There's nothing that encourages an ongoing economic relationship than gifts, rewards and incentives.

It doesn't even have to be the music itself. Popular gifts and incentives include ringtones, wallpapers, preferential bookings for events, discounts... anything that will turn an interested punter into a repeat customer.

And one of the best rewards is to make the customer / audience feel as if they are *part of something*. Membership is its own reward.

One of the ways to incorporate your audience — whether you're a musician, label, retailer, promoter, venue or some other music business — is to encourage them to participate in your website. A forum — or better yet, a group blog — that allows communities to form around what you make and do can quickly take on a life of its own.

But be careful: without critical mass, a forum can seem like a bit of a wasteland, and then you just look a bit Johnny-no-mates. Get a decent conversation going, and you can turn your satisfied customers into your best advocates. You just need to give them a reason to get going.

Reward. Incentivise. Enjoy the economic karma.

## Thing 18: Frequency is everything

**It's not enough that people come to your website. You need them to come BACK to your website. And they're only going to do that so many times unless there's something new to see when they get there.**

It's important to have a good looking website with great content. It's far *more* important to have content that changes on a regular basis. I've talked about the value of an RSS feed, and hooking people as subscribers of your content.

But even for the occasional visitor, it's far more compelling to be met with a bunch of stuff that constitutes new information. It might even prompt them to pop back from time to time... perhaps with their credit cards.

Just as there's nothing that says 'active, happening and vibrant' like a website that seems to have updates every day — there's nothing as despondent and neglected as an abandoned-looking website or a disused forum. Here are some hints to keep you fresh and up to date.

### 1. Use a Content Management System

Is your website hard to amend? Do you have to go through your web designer every time you need to change something or add a concert date?

These days, there are great CMS packages that can either be integrated into your existing site or (let's face it, it's getting on a bit now) replace your current site all together. A CMS will let you update your own website easily — with no tech skill required — at the drop of a hat. Day or night. It'll even do all the layout and design stuff for you. Easier than sending email.



Some content management systems are even free. I use Wordpress for this site — and I can thoroughly recommend it. Joomla's supposedly very good too — especially if you need more bells and whistles (I didn't).

Tell your web developer, if you have one, that you want a Content Management System. Insist on it. Tell them you know that you can get one for free if the need arises.

## 2. Preplan things to talk about

Don't just post when you think you have something to say. Plan the things you're going to talk about in advance. Depends on what you do, of course, but how about having posts up your sleeve on 'why I like this brand of guitar strings' or 'something you may not know about the artists on our label' or 'an interview with the work experience kid who puts your CDs in the envelope'.

## 3. Drag in content from elsewhere

It's not a sin to republish content, as long as it's properly accredited.

Naturally, as an academic, I would encourage you to contextualise, explain and comment on the wise words of others you bring into your site, rather than simply cut and paste — but honestly, the bulk of the hard work can be done (at least some of the time) by other people who are talking about issues from your sector of the industry.

Don't tell anyone I said that.

## 4. Talk about current stuff

Draw from current events and relate them to what you do. As with dragging in content from elsewhere, you should add a bit of value for your customers, but springboard off the work of others.

## 5. Capture everything and post it online

Play a gig? Do a promotion? Send out a press release? Sell your thousandth unit? Find an interesting pebble? Take a photo, write a paragraph and put it on the internet. Everything you do — not just putting out an EP or playing a concert.

There is something magical about frequency. It makes you look professional, busy and popular. If you publish something that says 'Hooray — our album has been lauched!' and then that message is still there a year later, people will rightly assume that nothing happened, and that the nothing that happened was something you deserved.

People want to spend time and money with something that's happening now. Not something they've missed, and wasn't good enough to keep on going.

Because more than anything else, economic engagement is the result of perception management.

## Thing 19: Make it viral

We've talked at some length now about how to get your customers to come and visit your website repeatedly, and engage with you in some economic form through your internet activity. Now it's time to get them to bring their friends.

**To:** Everyone I've ever met

**From:** Andrew Dubber

**Date:** 14 May 2007

**Subject:** FWD: Check this out!

I posted a [music video](#) on the New Music Strategies website a while back. A clever and cute music clip in which a band called the Sneaks take their public funding to the racetrack and bet it on a horse. It's a funny, surprising idea, and it's ended up doing the rounds.

I found it on a website that I read often, and people that read [New Music Strategies](#) have sent it to friends of theirs.

As a matter of fact, not much later I was sent a link to [the YouTube video](#) by somebody in Australia who knows someone who knows someone who reads the blog. They wanted to know if I'd seen it, because they thought I'd be interested. They even put the phrase 'Check this out' in the subject line.

The Sneaks video had gone viral.

Not Nizlopi viral, perhaps – but viral nonetheless. And, you know, there’s still time.

Perhaps someone will submit the video to Boing Boing or Neatorama — and that will put a rocket under it (if jet propulsion is indeed the way to make viruses more virulent).

Personally, I hope it becomes huge.

## Effective Marketing

I have no doubt that the key to success online is effective marketing. And the good news for our purposes today is that like many things, effective marketing can be magnified many times over by the involvement of the internet.

It’s a friction-reduced environment for word-of-mouth advertising, where it’s just as easy to tell 100 people a good story as it is to tell one. And as for flying — imagine if everyone you gave a flyer to your gig was able to give a dozen of their friends the exact same flyer. And then they could do the same. That’s what perfect endless replication of digital media allows for.

But you’ve got to do the marketing right. And the laws of marketing *do not change* online.

It’s about having a good story — something that people will want to tell other people. That story can be in video form, as was the case of the Nizlopi and Sneaks viral marketing — but it can just as easily (or, rather, almost as easily) be done with text or audio.

There are many examples. Here's one of each to get you started:

## Audio

The Lascivious Biddies did very well out of their podcast, in which they bring the audience behind the scenes — to rehearsals, trips to the gig, backstage moments — as well as excerpts of live performances and conversations. Not only was the podcast itself a hit, it was an internet word-of-mouth phenomenon. Every other podcaster talked about it, and you could listen to the steep curve of their success show by show.

## Text

Bloggers make a point of creating flagship content: helpful or fascinating articles that people like to send each other links to. Copyblogger's Copywriting 101 is something I'm always referring people to.

Good marketing's not a secret — although there *are* secrets of good marketing. At its most simple, though, it's about connecting the right message to the right people using the right channels at the right time.

But this goes to an earlier observation: your website is not a promotional strategy. You need a promotional strategy *for* your website.

Have a compelling story. A Unique Selling Proposition. What is different, unusual, special or otherwise notable about what you do?

Telling people that what's cool about your band is that you sound like Green Day is not a USP. Sounding like Green Day might be a plus for your target audience — but there has to be a different story to be told.

The thing that makes you *different* as a band, a company, a product or a service is the thing you want to be putting out there. And you need to be putting it out there in a way that will encourage other people to send it on. Find a strategy to get people to retell your story, and re-retell it.

## My Own Attempt

For me, the strategy I'm trying out is what you're reading right now. This e-book.

As a pdf file, it can be downloaded from the website, emailed to friends, printed off and filed away for reference.

If you like The 20 Things, you can simply email the link to other people you think might be interested — or just forward the pdf file as an attachment to your entire address book, if you felt so inclined.

More importantly, I'm doing a couple of extra things with it to help make it viral.

First, I'm not making people jump through hoops to get it. You just go to the website, ask for it, and I'll send it to you. It's free, *gratis*, no catches.

Once you have it, you can always give **The 20 Things** away from your *own* website if you like. I have no problem with that.

You can even print it up, change all the fonts, put lots of pictures in it, get it bound, stick your logo all over it and give it to — well, whoever you want to give it to. Hell, you could make an audiobook version, set it to music, or work it into an interpretive dance routine, if you like. Knock yourself out.

I only ask a couple of things:

1) you say it was written by me;

2) you include a link to [New Music Strategies](#);

Fair enough?

More importantly... see what's in it for me? Exactly.

Obviously if you want to use it in a commercial context, we can have a conversation and work something out. But for the vast majority of people who just want to read it and refer to it to make sure their music business (or, actually, pretty much any small-medium business) is on track, this is my gift to you.

Hope you find it useful.

## Check This Out

Whatever you do or make, give a thought to making it something that people will want to send to other people. Your best marketing is word of mouth, because online, word of mouth is exponentially more powerful.

Whatever it is you do, try and think of a way to encourage people to include it in an email with the subject line: 'Check this out!'... and then look forward to seeing it come round again in a week or so with the subject line 'FWD: FWD: FWD: FWD: Check this out!'



## Thing 20: Forget product - sell relationship

**There have been several major phases in the history of music as a business. All of them have quite different models of monetisation. Welcome to the newest one.**

While there are still transcribers and publishers of sheet music, they are no longer the dominant force in the music business they once were. Nor is performing in the Music Hall the career it once was.

Let's look at some of the main ways in which people have made money from music over the years. All still exist in some form or another — but each has had its day. Every time a new technological development comes along, the ratio has been shuffled around in order to make room for the new player in town.

And every time it happens — the dominant force in the industry kicks up such a fuss...

### Patronage

We think of Bach as having existed in the age of the dinosaurs, but honestly, it was just a few generations ago that the most revered musical talents of their day were dependent on the indulgence and enthusiasm of a rich benefactor. Usually these were members of royalty or nobility, and their patronage was hard to come by — but as keepers of culture, it was only right and proper that they selected and encouraged music by artists whose works glorified God — and their paymasters.

## Live Performance

Of course, the patrons of the arts were horrified when music performance became a commodified entertainment for the masses, rather than an edifying or uplifting cultural health food for those worthy of culture. But musicians, and their new business associates, found they could do better when their pay came from the pockets of the many, rather than of the few. And entry to the profession was suddenly much more open.

## Print Publishing

The birth of sheet music was, of course, the death of the music industry. If people could play the music themselves at home on their pianos, then who would attend concerts? Mass production of popular song changed the way that audiences engaged with and consumed music. It didn't kill the concert hall, but it was certainly witness to its serious injuries.

## Recording

Famous artists who had made names for themselves in the concert halls could enjoy renewed revenue with the birth of recording. Not only could you now have the music of the stars of stage and screen in your home... you could hear the stars themselves performing it. Magical. Sadly, the entire industry was more or less built on sheet music, and the "death of music business" happened again.

## Broadcast

With the birth of radio came the newest threat to the music business. If people could hear music at home without buying the recordings, then why on earth would they spend money on music any more? This latest development led to boycotts, lawsuits and charges of piracy. Of course, we now know that radio is the single strongest driver of music retail sales, and it also generates performance royalties, even absent a music hall.

## Synchronisation

Getting played on radio was one thing — but having your song used in a film, a TV show, commercial or videogame is something else again. Suddenly one of the quickest and best ways to make money out of music was to associate your music with something that large numbers of people will see, rather than just listen to. And the interesting thing was that it was no longer the audience who was parting with cash.

So there's this new technology...

Each time a new technological environment for music comes along, everything shifts. What was dominant recedes into the background. What was once lost is retrieved. And it never quite turns out the way you expect it to. When the music industry was doing its best to shut down radio stations and prevent them from distributing their music for free, who knew they were strangling their cash cow?

This is classic McLuhan stuff.

But these transitions are always problematic. The recording ban of 1942 is just like the imposition of strict needle time in British music radio, which is just like the Home Taping is Killing Music debacle in the 1980s, which is just like the suining of customers the major record labels are trying these days. That'll end well...

The best news for music business — and particularly for yours — is that the winners in this game are those who understand the new environment, and find a way to connect an audience with an artist. It really is as simple as that.

## Relationship

Just as patronage is old fashioned, other aspects of the music industry become less significant as we move into the new media environment. The notion of giving money to someone in exchange for a piece of music that you can come home and listen to repeatedly is quite quickly going to be seen as passe.

While we will always want to sell an individual recording to an individual consumer in some kind of physical form, the writing is well and truly on the wall: this is no longer going to be the main way in which money is made from music.

In that respect, despite its current success, the iTunes Music Store is still completely old school.

The new model is about starting an ongoing economic relationship with a community of enthusiasts. It's about attention and repeat engagement. It's about letting go of the idea of the individual transaction and the 'lost sale' of a

pirate download. CDs and mp3s are increasingly souvenirs of an engagement with a musical experience, rather than the occasion for the experience itself.

Become the dominant paradigm

Anyone who's ever used MySpace or Facebook or Mog or Last.FM or iLike or Twitter or Skype or Second Life or Tumblr or Vox or Blogger or Live Messenger or Yahoo! Groups or Flickr or Google Reader or Bloglines will happily tell you:

It's about the conversation.

It's about connectivity.

It's about relationship.

It's not a top-down, one-to-many distribution model. It's not a customer off the street happening by and exchanging money for a product. This is about trust, recommendation and reputation. This is a many-to-many dialogue, and the money goes where the attention lies.

## Conclusion

If I could sum up The 20 Things in one, I guess I'd have to echo McLuhan and say it's about a reshuffle of ratios.

Certain ways of operating have been enhanced. Others have been obsolesced. Some older models have been retrieved – and some things are turned back to front. What is really happening is the opposite of what looks like is happening: People are not stealing your music – they're showing you how to make money from it.

And these things are still shaking themselves out. The music industry has not changed — it is changing.

Naturally, we will see a change of ratios within business models:

- Patronage has already made something of a comeback through online micropatronage.
- Attendance at live gigs has shot through the roof in the last few years.
- Amateur performance and a demand for online music education (including sheet music) is growing rapidly.
- CDs are dying out as the primary method of consumption of music.

We may live in scary and uncertain times — but it's exactly these sorts of times in which the bold and the innovative thrive. The major players, at times like these, either adapt — or they diminish. Slowly but surely.

But the truth is, whoever puts music into the ears of a willing public, whoever can leverage the new environment to add value and aid the music creators and performers in communicating their art, and whoever can stake their claim on the new territory and make it their own — they are the ones who will thrive and grow.

The digital age is profoundly different from everything that has come before it. And this is your chance to find your way in that new environment. Are you ready?

**Do you get it yet? This is *not* a format shift.**

**It's not like moving from records to CDs.**

**This is like what happened when we moved from sheet music to recorded music – only more so.**

**Start with that principle and move forward from there.**

## A personal message from Andrew Dubber:

Thanks for downloading this e-book. I hope that there's something in there that will be of use to you in your music business. I'd love to hear any stories you have about ways in which you've applied some of these concepts and tips – and I'd be very happy to celebrate your success with you.

I wish you the best of luck with your music enterprise in the online environment. If there's anything you think I could do that would be helpful to you in that respect, please don't hesitate to drop me a line.

See you at the [New Music Strategies](#) website.

Cheers,

Andrew Dubber

June 2007