

Internet Music Internet Magic

**How To Market, Promote and Sell
Your Music Online**

by Wendy Sheridan

<http://www.moon-and-star.com>
<http://www.musicforthegoddess.com>

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Published by Moon & Star Records, PO Box 1825, Rahway, NJ 07065-3030 USA

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1. Introduction

The music industry has been going through tremendous changes in recent years. With the advent of the Internet, independent musicians and labels now have access to the global marketplace, instead of just the local neighborhoods where the band lives. It's no longer necessary for you to get the "big record deal" in order for your music to be heard. This book shows you how to use the greatest marketing and promotion tool available to the independent musician: the Internet.

You need to have a few things before you can effectively start your Internet marketing campaign:

- A band (or other "musical entity").
- The name for your band.
- One or more *original* songs, already recorded. If you have a cover band, and you don't do your own material, you might be violating copyright laws by making cover songs available for download. Of course, you can always get a license to record songs from the current owner of the copyright. (How to do that is beyond the scope of this book)

Once you have these things together, you can get started.

A note about this book: You can't talk about the Internet or web pages without using acronyms or geek-speak. We try to introduce you to terms gently, and explain what all the code words mean as we bring them up. We also try to provide you with links to more information online about various topics, in case it's something you want to know more about.

2. If you build it, they will come (The Musician's Guide to web sites)

Every band should have a website

Your band's website is your online promo package or press kit – and you don't have to package it up and pay for postage for millions of people to see it. You just have to let them know where it is. A well-made website immediately lets people know that you are serious about your music (because you've either spent time, money, or both making the website). The quality of your website will reflect on the perceived quality of your band – how professional you are.

After reading this section, you'll know if you can handle creating your own website or if you need a computer-savvy friend to do it for you. It's very likely that you have a rabid fan who is also a techno-geek, who will do your website as a favor, or for a very reasonable fee. There are also plenty of freelance web designers and programmers out there who would be more than happy to help you realize your vision.

Your band's website is the gateway to your online presence. Your website will be making the first impression of your band to your fan base, to industry people, and to casual surfers who may become your best fans. This is your doorway into the global community. It's important to your success to make your band's website the best it can possibly be.

What the heck is the Internet, anyway? The Internet is the term for the billions of files (web pages) that are sitting on servers all over the world that can be accessed by any computer anywhere with a connection to the global network (world wide web, or WWW). Each page has a *location or address* on the Internet, called the URL (universal resource locator). That's the official name for all the strange characters of a web address (*http://www.yourband.com* is a URL). Each of these web pages are written in HTML (hypertext markup language). The HTML code tells the web browser how to display the information contained on the web page. There are a plethora of books and web sites that explain what HTML is and how to use it. The granddaddy of them all is www.w3.org, the group that maintains the current standards for the entire Internet.

1. Your band's website is your Electronic Promo Kit. You may have heard the buzz about the EPK, or electronic promo kit. Many bands are opting for the electronic format as opposed to the traditional, paper-and-tape-or-CD format, for several reasons. First, if your EPK is on your web site, you can then just hand out a business card with your URL on it to agents, artist reps, club owners, and fans, rather than press, print, package and mail out an expensive hardcopy promotional package. So the EPK is much cheaper to distribute. Second, with all the new technology available, you can have animations, or even music videos included in the EPK – so booking agents and club owners can actually see a live performance, rather than having to guess by looking at your static photo. Third, your competition is already doing it, and your band needs to stay on top of the technology in order to be seen.

Not only can your EPK have a home on your web site, but you can also put it on CD-ROM or DVD, and include it in a traditional, hardcopy promotional kit. You can include the visual images and web pages on your regular audio CD as well (a mixed media CD), and sell it just like you would an audio CD. The added content can be a nice incentive for your fans to purchase your album.

2. **Register your name** - *www.yourband.com*

You don't have to have your "dot com" name registered to get a website, but it goes a very long way to give you a professional edge. Having your own domain name means that you're serious enough to invest in your band. Plus, the URL will be easier to remember than some long web address. Nowadays, you can have your domain name registered for under 10 dollars a year, or even free, with certain web hosting packages, from various web providers.

Check to see if your band name is available to use as a domain name. There are a lot of websites on the Internet for domain name registration. All of these have a WHOIS lookup utility that will tell you if a particular domain name is already taken. If your band's name *is* taken by someone else, you can change the name of your band or you can add a word to the end of the domain name to make it unique. These bands have added the word "band" to the domain name for just this reason: *www.freakband.com*, *www.atomikaband.com*. And don't forget, there are other extensions that may be available besides **.com**. There are also **.org**, **.net**, **.biz**, **.info**, **.cc**, **.bz**, **.us**, and **.tv** extensions for URLs located in the United States. Other countries have a unique country extension. Here are some extensions for some other countries:

.ca	Canada
.uk	United Kingdom (England)
.au	Australia
.jp	Japan
.de	Germany
.ru	Russia

Keep your registration current! We've all heard stories about someone who let their domain registration lapse for one reason or another, only to have it bought up by a domain vulture. This domain vulture holds the domain name hostage, and tries to sell it back to the original owner, usually for several thousand dollars. If the original owner doesn't cough up the money, the domain vulture links the domain name to another site (usually a porn site), and all the work you've put into promoting your domain name is gone. Once you have gone through all the trouble of registering a domain name, don't let the registration lapse.

3. **Once you get your domain name, you have to "park" it with a web host at registration if you don't have a web site.** This is because every registered domain name has to point to some IP address somewhere on the Internet. If you haven't selected a web host (or you're not ready to), you may not be able to reserve your domain name. There are plenty of web hosting or registration services that will allow you to park your domain with them for a very nominal fee. Parking a domain is not the same as having a website. However, it's just a placeholder so you can reserve your domain name.

If you build it, they will come (the Musician's Guide to Websites)

Where you put your website will depend on your budget. There are web hosting solutions ranging from free to thousands of dollars per month. How much a website will cost depends on a number of factors: monthly bandwidth, file storage, and types of services needed (for example: shopping carts, secure servers, streaming audio or video servers, email accounts, and scripting support).

- 4. Include online marketing and promotion in your budget.** Make sure you have your online promotion and marketing strategy factored into your band's budget. Creating and maintaining a web site can be a time-consuming job. Yes, it's fun for a lot of people, and it's certainly creative, but it does take time and knowledge. If you don't have the expertise, there are plenty of freelancers available who would love to help you. Hopefully, one of them is a fan of your band and will be willing to do it cheap or even for free.
- 5. Free web space.** There are a number of places on the Internet that host free websites. A quick search on "free web hosting" using a search engine listed over 3 million results. Some of the larger free web hosts are: www.netfirms.com, www.geocities.com, angelfire.lycos.com, www.tripod.lycos.com, and www.fortunecity.com. www.freewebspace.net proclaims itself as the largest searchable guide to free webspace providers. If your budget is limited, free web hosting is a very easy way to start your online presence.

Bandwidth limitations for free web sites: A lot of the free web hosts have rigid limitations on bandwidth. If you reach this limit (and on some sites, it's an hourly bandwidth rate), your site is automatically "shut down" to further viewing. Sometimes it just generates a "File not Found" error (404), or if the host is polite, they will put up an error page saying the site is "temporarily unavailable." The bandwidth limitations for a particular web site should be listed in the Terms of Service agreement (TOS), and possibly on a FAQ page. For example, Geocities has a 3GB/month bandwidth limitation. This may not be a problem for sites that just post some textual information, use minimal graphics, and have no song downloads, but it could become a headache for popular sites or if you want to have fancy Flash animations or offer MP3s to download.

Storage limitations for free web sites. Free websites also tend to have limitations on how much you can upload to your free web site. For example, Geocities allows 15MB of storage. That may be enough for most purposes, but remember that a typical MP3 is compressed at about 1MB per minute, so that's room for only 2 or 3 songs. Luckily, there are alternatives to

What is Bandwidth? Bandwidth is the amount of data transferred over a defined period of time. When web hosts talk about bandwidth, they are talking specifically about how many bytes of data are transmitted per month. Your web hosting package information includes your bandwidth allowance for each month. You can think of it like minutes on your cell phone package, and if you go over your bandwidth allowance, you will be charged additional amounts for every extra megabyte that's transferred. Sometimes, these overage rates are very high. It's important for you to read the fine print on your web hosting agreement so you know what you are getting into. It's in the fine print where most web hosts differentiate themselves. Look for a web host that has a "grace period" if you run over your bandwidth for the month. Some hosts will let you automatically upgrade to a plan that includes your extra traffic, without hitting you with the per Megabyte fees.

If you build it, they will come (the Musician's Guide to Websites)

having your songs uploaded to your website, so you can work around the storage limitations if you have to.

Content limitations for free web sites. Free sites (and some pay providers) put restrictions on the content you are allowed to post to your website. Often, adult or pornographic matter is prohibited. Additionally, posting of copyrighted material (that is not your own), in particular, songs that aren't yours, is prohibited. This will be in the TOS. Violation of these rules will get your site shut down. There may also be limitations on what you are allowed to do from your website (like have an online store). Remember that paid hosting also has similar restrictions. Read your TOS before you buy.

- 6. Web hosting for cheap.** Once you are willing to pay for web hosting, many of the restrictions placed on free sites are lifted. You can use your own domain name, you get more storage space and bigger bandwidth allowances. You can also get additional features like email addresses (*you@yourband.com*), streaming servers, shopping cart, script support, and statistics. Shop around to find a package that has the features you want at a price you can afford. You can get hosting for as little as a few dollars a month.

Know what you are paying for. Compare prices and services between several different hosting providers before you make a decision. Talk to friends online and off, and ask them if they've got any recommendations for you. Read the FAQs (frequently asked questions) carefully, and read the TOS. Some providers will include domain registration fees in the hosting prices.

- 7. Do NOT post personal information on your website.** Now that you have a place on the Internet to call your own, you have to decide what to put there for the world to see. Remember that anyone with an Internet connection can go and visit your site: Your parents, children, relatives, ex-wives, bosses, fans, A&R representatives, journalists, etc. It's considered "good practice" to refrain from putting up personal contact information (like your address and telephone number). Think of the Internet as the biggest bathroom wall in the largest club on the planet, so use good judgement about posting personal information. Email contact is OK, but you can practice "safe surfing" with email as well.

- 8. Hide your email address from spam robots.** Some people run programs called "robots" or "spiders" that search the Internet for email addresses embedded on web pages. Once they find them, they sell those email addresses to other people who then send you email about products and services that you probably don't want or need, and certainly didn't ask for. Unsolicited email advertising is called "spam" (if you didn't know), and there are a couple of things you can do when you create your web page to minimize the harvesting of your email address(es) by spam robots.

- **Use Special HTML Characters.** This is the easiest way to thwart the email spiders, but it's also the easiest method for the spiders to detect and compensate for: simply use the HTML code "@" instead of the @ sign in your email addresses. You can put this code inside a link or just as a text email address:

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