

For me the fall has always symbolized the beginning of a new year. With the carefreeness of summer gone, the time to take care of business becomes the priority. That means filling your calendar, preparing the band and generally promoting your product to potential buyers.

The promotion package or press kit is one of the most important tools that a musician can have for getting their message across to employers, media and record reps. Most of these people agree that a press kit should be simple and to the point, with not too much hype attached to it. A good promotion package should contain the following items: a picture, a bio, a demo in a streaming format or CD, a song list and reference list (for purchasers), a cover letter and a business card. Nowadays a press kit can be either physical or an electronic press kit (EPK).

First, every performer should have at least one good photograph. It needs to capture the image that you want to project. Remember you're in the entertainment business and your visual image can account for a large portion of the sell job. Black and white 8X10 horizontal shots are still the industry standard, but color is becoming more prevalent. Use a professional photographer to obtain quality shots and stay away from cliché poses. Dress is important. The final product can be reproduced in various ways including photographically, laser copies, even photocopies or electronically. Be sure that the photo reproduction looks professional.

Next, your bio would give a brief explanation of what the band offers, its background, accomplishments and a list of members and instrumentation. Avoid hype, mostly because the reader knows who wrote or hired someone to write the biography. Keep it honest, straightforward and limit it to one page.

The demo or CD is also a good tool when you can't get the buyer out to see a performance. I always prefer to have the purchaser see the live show, because it leaves nothing to the imagination. Sometimes this is not possible. If you are using your demo to attract a record or distribution company, I suggest that it be finished product. That means good sound, good performances and complete arrangements, so that there is no mistaking your artistic direction. If you're a cover band, your demo should imitate your live performance (not too polished) and can be made up of partial songs. With the changes in technology, CD's are now easily produced, even in your home studio. Regardless, always try to keep the listeners attention and always use your best material.

For employers, a song list will give them an idea of what material you play (cover or original or both) and it should be an indication of your musical image. A list of all of your tunes is not necessary, but always lead with your best received material. Likewise, a reference list of satisfied customers is also useful. It gives the buyer an opportunity to check with other people who have hired you, to see if you 'walk your talk'. A few references are ample and they should be from the markets in which you want to obtain work. A cover letter is also important. If you're using email, include it in the body of the message. It needs to outline who you are and what you want. This could be anything from a recording or distribution deal, to a musical review or a chance to play a certain venue.

Finally, a business card is always an advantage in those face to face introductory situations. It gives all the pertinent information, without the bulk of the complete promo pack. Speaking of all the pertinent information, every piece of your promotional package should have your band name, address, phone/fax numbers, web page, email address and of course the contact person. If the buyer likes your CD, but has misplaced the written material, it usually means no gig.

Oh yeah one last thing, be creative with your promotion. Make sure your gigs are in the local listings. Put up posters or pictures at the venue, so people know who you are. Create a web site. Use social media. Try and make your promo stand apart from the others, and most of all, have fun with it.