Abstract

"Without music life would be a mistake". ~Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

Music is all around us. It is difficult to go anywhere without hearing some form of music. Amongst all of the sounds, there are always a number of people who wish to be behind the sounds. With the widening of musical horizons for the average music listener, due to several avenues to hear various genres of music, like the internet, satellite radio, television, and many more, people are now being bombarded with the countless differences in the music world. The analysis of the current state of the music industry, coupled with the experiences and personal growth of this writer, give a testimony for passion in music and a written out path for others to consider following. There are several ways to reach different levels of success in music. Small Town Success examines one route to reach a specific level of success. This writing is compiled premature to the full amount of success that this writer wishes to achieve but is confident in the path he has chosen and where he is going. With the help of experience, the internet, four years of Ball State education, and a genuine love for music, this thesis scrutinizes the difficulty of achieving musical success and challenges the need for hopeful musicians to be located in areas of highest music traffic (Los Angeles, Nashville, etc). Success can be had by anybody, anywhere, and music is the perfect platform to support this idea.

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Small Town Success: "How to" Guide for the Startup Musician

By Craig Furnivall
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Introduction:

The music industry is currently in a position where the traditional model of being “discovered” and “achieving success” has shifted and evolved into a playing field where it is anybody’s game. The power and control of the major record labels is diminishing, the accessibility of new music is increasing, and the correct “path to success” is as elusive as ever. There are a number of industry analysis experts, online bloggers, music company executives, and many others who claim they have the answer to the future of music. Fortunately for this writing, there is currently no right or wrong answer. The road to success has many avenues depending on which direction a person wants to go, and which path he or she wants to take.

As for me, I am just another hopeful musician who has done what he can to try to decipher this code. Being from the Midwest, I have seen extremely talented musicians come and go, not sure where to place their talents or what steps to take to try to get themselves out there. Despite all of the opportunities this current music industry predicament has created with the internet and outbreak of various genres becoming more mainstream music, the majority of the Midwest still remains trapped in the mindset that you have to be on the coasts or in a major city to become more known. However, I think you can definitely get a great start in the Midwest, and potentially achieve every goal you set without ever leaving here. I, myself, have had the pleasure of playing various types of venues in both Indiana and California. I am no industry expert, but I am a struggling musician who has placed himself amidst all the chaos. Based on my experiences, my conversations with various other musicians, and a little help from internet articles, I feel that I have compiled a useful writing for any startup musician; and valuable insight for those who come from similar backgrounds as I have.
A Bit About Me:

To understand where I’m coming from, you need to know me a little better and where I stand with music. “Love Life, Live Your Dream” is the motto that I live by. Love where you are, and make sure to maximize the moment by constantly learning and experiencing with the situations that are presented to us. Live your dreams by growing into the person that you want and strive to be. Picture the goal and live the path toward that goal, so every step that you take is one step closer to the person you want to be. For me, that is with music and my continual drive to understand myself, understand music, and how they correlate with one another. More importantly, my goal in life is to be an inspiration through music. I feel that being from small town, Indiana does put me at a disadvantage, but that, in turn, fuels my drive to succeed and pave the way for others to do the same. Anybody with the right amount of drive, ability, and luck can accomplish huge things in the music world. Since luck isn’t a variable we have that much control over (outside of sayings like “You make your own luck” or “Luck is everywhere, you just have to know where to look”), we can only focus on the other two variables in this simplified equation.

If you’re taking the time to read this, I assume you are driven enough to try to expand your knowledge and perspective on how to further yourself in this crazy music game. For me, drive in music is being able to believe in yourself so much that you’re willing to sacrifice in other aspects of your life. An example, I’m writing this as my final thesis for my college graduation, but I have no intention of using my degree other than to show the importance of what education is to me. This is kind of extreme, but the amount of time and effort it takes to even remotely further in music is much more than most people think. I know that outside of the
hours upon hours I have spent on my actual music, I have spent countless hours networking in local music scenes, talking to various connections in bands, venue owners, and promoters, and updating, editing, and promoting online through forums like MySpace and Facebook. I know band members who average over 4 hours a day on MySpace and Facebook alone. Staying active in whatever music scene is present to you is important to becoming and staying known.

I’ve gone to several shows with a variety of bands and all different genres. Being present in your scene shows that you truly support he music scene and in turn, the scene will be more likely to support you. We’ll talk more about this later. Point being: Being driven takes time.

Regardless, decide what you want to accomplish, and how far you want are willing to go.

Obviously, I cannot judge whether or not your ability is adequate to endure criticism and move forward, improving on what is already working toward your ultimate goal. Typically, I feel that intense motivation and drive is a result of a certain amount of accomplishment. So, I’m guessing that you are driven because you believe in what you have done and continue to do, and that somewhere along the way, you have received encouragement and support that has given you enough confidence to keep pushing on. However, as national television has painfully shown the world through shows like American Idol, there are many out there that may possibly think they are better than what they really are. I do not doubt that these people and others can still achieve success, just for the purpose of this writing; I am assuming that you want to succeed as a musician for your own musical talents and your ability to communicate your music to the listener. This also applies to writing your own music, as opposed to performing others’. I am not against cover songs; I just choose to rarely play them. For me, bands/musicians that play covers (as opposed to a remake) show a lack of ability to write their own music. Granted,
there are several musicians out there that make a fantastic living playing only other people’s music. There are phenomenal performers that are such masters at what they do and choose not to ever write a single song, and they are an obvious example that this can be a very successful route to go. On the flip side, there are incredible song writers who actually make much more money than the performers that perform their music who are all over many of the most popular songs all over the radio. For the sake of this writing, I am choosing to mainly stick to what I have chosen to do, where I’ve gone with it, and where I intend to go. With that said, a good starting place is to compare where you feel that you stand within the genre of music that you play. Think about who the best artists are within that genre, or consider how you would feel if your favorite artist called you and asked you to be in his or her band. Would you feel excited? Nervous? Worried? You may feel all of the above, but would you feel prepared?

Depending on what you want to achieve, everything you’re currently doing with your music is preparation for that final destination in success. Always be ready, or at least making strives to be closer, for that “ready”-version of you.

My ideal, ready version of myself is playing and performing original music, and making enough money to support myself in that being enough to support myself financially without the aid of another job. I choose to play mainly original music, I choose to play acoustic singer/songwriter music, and also, I choose to play in a 3-piece rock band that is easily defined as Party Rock, but known for being a vocally-driven, dancey pop punk, hard rock with an underlying funk feel band. I understand that my decisions to pursue these two paths have many upsides and downsides. I have come a long way, and I am very aware of how much farther I need to go. As I state in many places of this writing, I can only give you what I
currently know, and what I predict will be important, specifically to the paths that I am choosing to go. I do my best to incorporate other paths and possible ways to go about this business, and I even show contradictions and possible alternatives to some directions that I have chosen to go, and what I feel may have been a better option. All in all, I love what I do, and I hope that this writing can assist you in everything that you’re trying to accomplish. There are many parallels and overlaps in the decisions we make as musicians, despite genre, style, and goal. I firmly believe that musicians have the obligation to help further one another, while striving to stay true to oneself and true to individuality. Music is a realm of living, as opposed to a competition. Though we compete with one another in what we want to do and where we want to go, it is possible for a person to like more than one band, and in that case, I’d be fine with a person enjoying my music and others.

The Marketing Mix:

In relation to music is the business side of everything. Success in music runs parallel with business in music. One of the most basic marketing concepts in the marketing mix, which is basically choosing a target market (who you want your music to be aimed at) and deciding what you are going to give to them, and how you plan on doing so. If you are unfamiliar with the marketing mix, it is simplified into “four P’s”: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. I will briefly outline how your music fits into each category.

Product. Your music is your product. Your image is your product. Your sound is your product. Your presence is your product. Basically, everything that you do, create, share, and use to communicate your music is your product. Quite commonly, people think of only your
.mp3s as your final product. Depending on what you want you want to accomplish, I would suggest getting out of this mindset. For me, I have always taken pride in my live show, and the ability to sound as good as a recording while in person. With this in mind, your music and stage presence and even how you interact with those around you is your brand image. I know that I have had a number of people be excited to come to shows who have never even heard me perform or have any idea what my music may sound like. This gets into promotion, but you need to keep in mind that your product is everything involved with the music, including you.

(Side note: my use of the word “show” is actually incorrect. Shows are typically only considered by those with attendance in the thousands. The types of venues I have played have been in the hundreds, but never the thousands, therefore making these “gigs” or loosely, concerts. All in all, I don’t see that being that important, so I will be calling these musical gatherings shows, gigs, concerts, or whatever else in the following pages. I just wanted to make that quick distinction.)

Having your music in a tangible format is an incredibly important step once you decide you want to start booking gigs outside of your immediate social network. Most venues won’t even give you a chance if they don’t have a way to listen to your music. Though, there are often ways to get around this if you’ve developed contacts and references from playing music and knowing people, I would use this as supplemental in your booking to your actual material. Increasingly, MySpace has grown from a useful tool when I got my start in music, to a standard in all booking. Having your own music in a medium where it is easily accessible allows fans, promoters, and venues a place to actually hear what you have to offer. So, once you make the decision to begin booking, I would suggest you first try to get some recordings down. Initially,
poor quality recordings will probably suffice. I know that my band, Jack of Suede, used live recordings from one of our first shows as our basis for roughly a year online. I wouldn’t necessarily suggest this, but I also know that recording in a studio is expensive, especially if you’re new to recording and performing your music. For me, recording is one of the most difficult, frustrating experiences of my involvement in music. Know your music. A recording captures every note, every riff, every chord, and unfortunately for me, the rhythm. (Side note, I’m awful at playing with a click track. So, if you plan on recording a lot, I would suggest practicing with a metronome. This isn’t necessarily essential, but it saves a ton of time if you record with a click track in the studio.) All in all, have recordings available in order to stay in the minds of your listeners. On this same note, the question of other merchandise arises. For my band, we pretty much made T-shirts right away, quickly followed by trucker hats and other Tee designs. Looking back, it would have been a much better idea to build a stronger fan-base and increase how well we were known before spending the money to create merchandise. Though we have done well selling our stuff, I still have a box full of unsold clothes and stickers.

Attached at the end of this writing are some spreadsheets similar to what we used in Excel to keep track of our sales and merchandise. Overall, remember your product is everything involved with the music, and that it is important to have recordings available to be listened to.

Price. Pricing, for me, is difficult in these times. What is fair? What are people willing to pay? Where does my product fit into the sea of merchandise? In regards to CD sales, I have pretty much stuck to the iTunes .mp3 standard of $.99 a song. For example, the Jack of Suede EP of five songs was sold for $5. We did this because we thought it was fair in cost (a dollar a song), easy to give change at shows (as opposed to $3 or $4), and people thought it was fair.
This was also built on the result of a ten song acoustic CD that I recorded in high school under the band name: A Million to One. A girl and I recorded this ten song CD and decided to sell it for $5. What we eventually learned from the people purchasing our CD was that the majority of the people said they would have been willing to pay $10. Now, this brings in a moral dilemma of “I don’t want to overcharge my friends and family”, and that is definitely an issue that has always played a role in my thinking, as well. However, from a business standpoint, I constantly have to remind myself that my music is my livelihood. And when I begin to try sum the countless hours writing and recording, on top of the financial costs of recording, I have to remember that despite my desire to be giving, I need to be realistic. A friend of mine compared the cost of our CD ($5), and made the point that people pay more than that for a drink at the bar. So, when put that way, I like to think that my music is worth at least a drink at the bar! However, a complete contradiction to what I previously said, it is also important to have your music out there. I know that many would disagree with my decision to charge for an EP or demo, because the importance of having the music out there and available for people to listen to and share far outweighs that amount of time and cost that the CD takes to make. I definitely find importance in this, and I will talk more about this under promotion, yet, I have always tried to combat the high cost of a CD by graciously (and annoyingly) giving out Jack of Suede stickers everywhere that I go. Our sticker has our logo and our MySpace address. I have found that this is an easy way for people to still have access to your music and still stay affordable and not feel like I’m giving away everything I’ve worked so hard for. With our other merchandise, I found that an even $10 was the best route for T-shirts, trucker, hats, or whatever else. I would guess that the average T-shirt is $15, and many people buy T-shirts that are $20 and more. When I
talk about making Merchandise later, I will specifically talk about what we decided to do as far as cost, marginal profit, and avenues we went to save money and stay affordable. All in all, I feel that $1 a song is fair for music, and that clothing is best left at $10, at least for this entry level of success in music. With pricing, I also feel that it is important to talk about how much to get paid, and/or how much to charge to play for events...

Place. Where are you playing at? Coffee shops, bars, your mom’s backyard, school events, talent shows, open mics, basements? The best place for people to hear your music is online. For this, I am defining “best” as easiest to use, most convenient, most widely accessible, and solely focused on the sound. Great ways to get your music out on the internet are through places like MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, PureVolume, Sonicbids, and many, many others. Personally, I feel that MySpace is the most important. Some bands have been doing home recordings and getting discovered via MySpace without ever playing a show. An example of this would be Panic at the Disco! (made famous by their hit “I Write Sins, no Tragedies”), who were signed by Pete Wentz of the star-status band, Fall Out Boy, without ever playing a single show before getting signed. Another band that got his start from home-recordings is the Rocket Summer, known for his songs “Do You Feel” and “So Much Love”, who is a single guy who recorded his first album at the age of 16. What makes Rock Summer unique is that it is just one person who does all of the vocal, guitar, and bass layers himself, and uses software to create the drums. He’s credited with being one of the first single-person powerpop sensations. These examples show the importance of having recordings and utilizing these tracks to further your music. There are several musicians who are recording artists for hire, and musicians who choose not to ever tour or play live shows, and obviously several musicians who sound infinitely
better in the recording studio than live. At any rate, internet presence is huge in reaching any level of success in music. We’ll talk more about this in Promotion. As far as other places go, there are obviously innumerable amounts of venues to play, whether they already exist, or you use your own resources to find a place to play. For example, I’ve played many house parties and random basement jam sessions, but to keep it simple, we’ll just talk about venues.

Obviously, specifically for acoustic music, coffee shops and open mic nights are quite popular in getting yourself out there. I know that whenever I go into a new music scene, I always try to find out what/where I need to go to just have the opportunity to get out and play. Once I get established, I tend to try to only book nights where I’m specifically playing and my name is on the bill, but when getting started, I find it important to take advantage of these free opportunities. Open mics are a great way to get practice performing, get to know other musicians in similar situations as yourself, and to find out what venues are available in your area. Typically, a place that has open mic has other nights that need performers to fill their slots. Also, while talking to others at an open mic, you can find out what other places are around that are popular to play at, what types of music are typically played there, how you would fit in, and even find bands/musicians to share the stage with. It is important to consider the type of relationship that you have with these people. I’m all for being friends with everybody that I meet and trying to be helpful and supportive, but I also have ran into the difficulty of trying to balance friendship with business. Especially with getting paid for shows, I tend to be way too nice and not willing to demand fair amounts to be paid. There really is no secret formula to how much you should be paid. The more you play and the more shows you play and the more people at those shows and your general draw and following will be the major
factors in that. In our home scene, Jack of Suede had a pretty steady following of 25 people or so, and a typical draw of another 25 or so, depending on the night and venue. I know this doesn’t seem like much, but having that support is far better for you and the venue than just your mom and dad staring at you in the audience (still invite them, if you want). The difficulty with trying to balance this, is how much is your draw worth? If they’re charging a door cover, then each person has a dollar amount to his or her attendance, and if they’re there to see you specifically, then that is a portion of money that you are entitled. Again, I’m an awful person to ask about all of this, because I have repeatedly let venue owners, booking people, and other bands take advantage of our draw, our energy, and our music, because I was too nice. A specific example is a band that was very similar to us was able to demand a guarantee of 350, where my band got paid 200 for the same show, just because I valued my friendship too much, and not enough emphasis on what we do for the venue. So, figure out what works best for you in business and relations, and stick to your guns. Be confident in your abilities and realistically evaluate what you bring to the table, and make sure that your strong points are noted. Be flexible and know that if you are as good as you think and catch on with your audience, inevitably, these things will start working out on their own after awhile. I didn’t feel like we had accomplished much until I was getting contacted directly by venue owners, promoters, and touring bands directly. Also, consider what type of music that you play and how they fit into a venue or line-up. It’s not necessarily important to fit perfectly into a show; in fact, I have never felt that I was a perfect fit for any show, acoustic or with the full band. This is important in creating your set-list and what type of message you want to send. For me, I pretty much never really like playing acoustic music in bars, unless the bar is specifically known for acoustic music.
With people drinking and partying, I do not feel that my style of acoustic music fits that well, because I tend to only play original music. Coincidentally, when I play several covers of songs, I tend to get a more than welcoming response, and have made some of the most money from playing longer sets (2-4 hours) with mixtures of original and cover songs in bar and bar-ish places. On the contrary, my rock band plays only original music, and for the style of music that it is, it is typically better to play shorter, original sets, at venues that only have live music. For example, it is widely popular for shows in the powerpop and hardcore scenes to have several bands that each only play between 20-40 minutes. I’m not sure if it is decreasing attention span in these genres’ fans, or if it is just because these shows typically have more bands playing, but we have always fared better planning to play shorter sets than our standard 45min to an hour and fifteen minutes. Let me make clear that overall, my original music has, by far, had the best response and enthusiastic feedback than any cover I have ever done, but it also took a long time for people to continually come back to hear me play, learn the music, and be as excited to hear it as I was to play it. (I felt the need to put that after talking earlier about the great response you get from covers) Anyhow, there are a variety of places to play, places to share your music, and places to promote yourself.

Promotion. Any vehicle used for your target market to learn more about your product (including music, atmosphere, persons involved, etc). The first thing that comes to mind is promotion of shows. In my head, I picture a college-town village covered with neon colored flyers, littering the telephone poles and streets. With flyers, there is obviously word of mouth, Facebook, and MySpace. Basically, anyway you can get that information out is what works. Outside of shows, just getting your name out as a band is promotion. Much like I mentioned
earlier with passing out stickers, we wanted to get our name out as much as we could when Jack of Suede began. So, we were playing about ten shows a month, for very little pay, for the sole purpose of getting our name out there and giving the local scene plenty of opportunity to come out and hear the music, live the atmosphere, and witness our live show. As we grew in popularity, we began to dwindle down the number of shows we played, because we began to value the importance of spacing out how often you play. Early on, it’s great to perform a bunch to flood an area with your name, but as you do gain a following, playing too often begins to dilute how special each show is, and some people who would normally come out to see you, begin to pick and choose which shows they want to come to. Luckily, we were also pretty social beings ourselves, and with being social, we were constantly meeting new people, who in turn, wanted to come out and see what the music was all about. This, again, brings up the importance of networking and being present in your music scene. To stay actively known in your scene, you must stay active. Responding to messages on Facebook/MySpace (which I am going to refer to as FaceSpace), actively going out and talking to people at yours and other’s shows, keeping in touch with the people that you meet, possibly starting an email newsletter, always updating your FaceSpace, are only a small number of the requirements to stay involved. One important internet cultural phenomenon that I want to address is YouTube. There are a number of links online about how to make a viral video campaign. Many of these are specifically addressed to and by marketing/advertising/promotions companies who are trying to get a particular brand or product out there, but with relevance to music, YouTube has obviously made some major impacts for musicians. The biggest example that comes to mind is Soulja Boy, made famous by the Billboard Hot 100 number one song in September 2007, “Crank
Dat”. He originally uploaded his music himself on Soundclick.com, and then uploaded a low budget movie on YouTube. Some articles and reports have even said that Soulja Boy has the most watched online video of all time, and at one point in time, Soulja Boy had the number one most downloaded song ever on iTunes. Granted, at the time, iTunes was still growing in popularity and this may have played a role in “Crank Dat” being such a hugely popular song, but this does not deny the power of what the song has done. Clearly, the song does not reach such notable popularity from the lyrics alone. The Soulja Boy dance created such a craze, that it is difficult to ignore the power that online video has on the music industry. Another great example is the “Free Hugs Campaign” video. If you don’t know what it is, you should YouTube it and watch it. At the time, Sick Puppies was an up and coming rock band out of Sydney, Australia. The huge success of the video, which has easily had over 50 million plays (including international), has skyrocketed the band to an international success, currently relocated in Los Angeles, California, with the last two CDs released by Virgin Records. Obviously, promotion can be widely done on the internet through the various outlets, as long as we don’t forget that a big part of promotion is what we want to be associated with our brand (band and music). Another great YouTube boosted band is OK Go. Their song “Here it Goes Again”, showing the band lip-syncing and dancing on treadmills helped propel the song to mainstream radio status. Also, this made the band seem more creative and fun. Whatever promotion that we decide to use, we want to consider what type of message that it is sending. For Jack of Suede, we thrive on an image of being fun-loving, energetic, down to party, and always having a great time. So, we choose not to use morose and deathly images with our flyers like many rock bands do. Giant bloody skulls with spiders and snakes just don’t fit the image that we want to portray. Decide
what type of atmosphere you want your music to create, what types of feelings and emotions you want to elicit, and then make sure that everything you do with promotion support what you are trying to communicate. Again, this includes how you carry yourself, how you approach your music, and how you come off to others.

The Live Show:

How you come off to others may vary from situation to situation. For me, I try to be talkative and genuine when I meet people at shows and other musical places. Once I step on stage, I am a small ball of energy just churning and growing and just exploding with passion and love for what I do. Though similar, I am very particular in what messages I am sending in both circumstances. Which is why I find importance in evaluating your stage presence (if you find your live show as important), when deciding what message that you are sending. Confident performers are more fun to watch and listen to. Try observing other performers that you look up to and admire. Everybody kind of does his or her own thing in the moment, but I feel that it is important to be doing something! I still constantly judge anybody that is performing. I know that people are judging how I carry myself on the stage, so I do the same to others. I’m not looking to tear them down, I am observing what does work and doesn’t seem to work for them. In a way, I am job shadowing and trying to find tips and secrets that will improve my own stage presence.

The ideal flow of music seems to vary from situation to situation. Just the other day, one of my friends commented that a particular band’s live performance sounded just like the recording, and it was a huge selling point for my friend. However, I have also heard some
bands get criticized for having a regimented sound that is identical from show to show, as opposed to jam bands like the Grateful Dead and Phish who can have 12-minute renditions of the same song, playing mostly improvisational riffs, and unstructured direction. I’ve heard people praise a band for a remake, like the band Framing Hanley and their remake of the popular rap song by Lil Wayne, “Lollipop”. On the contrary, they are very openly criticized for only riding the coattails of the rapper, and becoming famous for an infamous cover song. Again, it is important to decide what you want to accomplish with each song that you choose. REGARDLESS of song style, it is pretty much universal that a band will still sound more professional with meaningful transitions between songs. I can always tell a huge difference in the shows that I play if I use a set list or not. Choosing what type of flow that you want to keep and how professional sounding that you want to come off plays a role in how people remember your show. The obvious first impression is the sound of the music, but everything that you do and say on stage helps the listener decide how memorable you were, and if it was good or bad.

Another way for them to remember you is to wear your merchandise. For us to be as financially affordable as we could be, we ordered the number of blank clothing at cheap, bulk-buy websites like cheapestees.com to get blank tee’s (or whatever you’re wanting), we designed all of our own tee-shirt designs (to avoid design costs at the places we would get our clothes pressed), and then we would choose a local tee-shirt maker (the same types of places that make baseball tee-shirts for little league teams). We found, that through this process, we could keep costs as low as $5 a shirt for a one-color design. Depending on print costs, the company we would buy shirts through, and the type of shirt we would get (we were partial to slim fit styles), that number would fluctuate between $5 and $8. Again, I have a very basic
breakdown of merchandise costs at the end of this paper. We also chose to make trucker hats, mainly because I just love trucker hats and wear them all the time, but they sold very poorly. I guess just because I wear a hat every single day, doesn’t necessarily mean that other people do the same! Either way, we were more or less making $3 per shirt. I found that this was a pretty decent return on what we spent. Though we have shirts left over, we have already made back what we had spent on them. Clothing is basically like creating walking billboards for your music. Also, people that frequent your shows tend to want to represent by wearing your clothing, which is both flattering and also creates excitement in others that may or may not have heard of you. If people in a venue are only there to see one band, but they see that a bunch of fans are wearing your clothing, those people who don’t know who you are will be more likely to take the time to check out your show. Also, unfamiliar shirts (if interesting enough) can lead people to question. “Hey, what shirt is that?” This turns into free publicity for your band and your music, and hopefully a free positive review if the person asked happens to really enjoy the music that you play. This is one small, possible way to get your music into areas outside of your immediate music scene.

If you want to get out of your local scene, it is important to consider traveling.

Booking:
Booking for yourself within your scene is more or less outlined above: Networking, staying active, talking to others, and approaching venues. However, new venues and new areas can be a bit intimidating when trying to get started. I know that I was completely unsure of what to say or do when I was looking around. I started out by just asking traveling bands, area bands, and friends of friends where they played and who to talk to in order to play there.
Typically, name dropping is a good idea if the band/person you’re name dropping is well-known and supported in the scene. However, be careful to make sure that you yourself like them, their music, and the type of message that they may send to that music scene. This strategy worked for awhile, specifically for neighboring towns. To this day, I do the majority of my booking through other bands and people on MySpace and through email. The difficulty is coming up with what to say in these messages. Here is an example of a “cold call” email that I sent out to a venue when I was staying in Long Beach for a summer to try and play acoustic shows (any changes are denoted by parentheses):

~ (Person in charge of booking)

Hello! I’m an Acoustic Performer from Indiana who just landed in Long Beach, California last night. I’m in Southern California until July, and I wanted to contact (your venue) to see if you had any openings at all during my time out here! Even if it’s open mic, weekday, anything.. just looking to play music and have a good time, and I’ve heard nothing but good things from your Venue!

Craig Furnivall (acoustic music) - http://www.myspace.com/craigfurnivall  acoustic guitar/vocals.  
a small town kid, with a west coast dream. Craig Furnivall has been playing shows around his hometown of Indiana for over 4 years now. His fun, energetic personality carries through his music and stage presence. His lyrics are meaningful and easy to relate to, while his confident demeanor and catchy vocals hold your attention and heart. With such a diverse repertoire of original songs, Craig has played in a variety of settings, including bars, coffee shops, keggers, art galleries, university functions, talent shows, and concert halls. And most importantly, his passion for music drives through every chord, rings with every laugh, and shines through every smile.

January 13th, 2007 - The Rochester Community Center  
February 1st, 2007 - Front Porch Music  
March 3rd, 2007  - Pruis Hall  
March 31st, 2007 - The Tally (Student Center)  
April 11, 2007 - Beatnik’s Coffee and Bar  
April 14th, 2007 - the Beer Barn  
April 28th, 2007 - Battle of the Bands (Windermere)  
April 28th, 2007 - the Artist Within  

Upcoming:

May 26th, 2007  - Rainbow Bar and Grill  
May 27th, 2007  - (Sully St.) @ the Tempest

Rochester, IN  
Valparaiso, IN  
Ball State University, IN  
Ball State University, IN  
Marion, IN  
Muncie, IN  
Muncie, IN  
Muncie, IN  
West Hollywood, CA  
West Hollywood, CA
In all honesty, my draw in the Long Beach and Huntington Beach aren't very high since I'm from Indiana. depending on date and time, I can probably only get between 5-25 people to a show. sorry

A few songs can be heard at (my website)
I can be contacted either at this email address (my email address) or my cell phone: (555.555.5555)

I will be in the Long Beach area from now until the beginning of July. Any shows, slots, or references to other venues or musicians would be greatly appreciated!! Thanks for all of your time and consideration!

I look forward to playing music for you!

Keep Living the Dream,
~ Craig Furnivall

There are a number of points that I really like and really dislike about these initial emails. First, I feel a strong point is listing accomplishments as far as venues played, as well as that there is already a future in future shows that I will be playing. Also, leaving plenty of ways of contacting me and listen to the music was a good idea. However, I feel that the email is too long. Why would a venue owner want to take the time to waste his or her time reading such a long email about somebody they don’t even know or know anything about? As much as I thought venues wanted a little bio, I imagine that it is pretty much unnecessary, since they have all the information that could possibly need on the MySpace page. The comment about my “draw” (number of people I think I could bring out to a show) was probably something that the venue owner realistically wanted to know, but he or she can make their own assumptions based on everything else I said about just arriving. All the number gave was a specific statistic that I will probably not do very well for them. Finally, probably my biggest mistake was not looking up specific dates that I wanted to play. My subject line should have had a specific date that the person checking can quickly look up and answer if they have that spot open for me.

(Also keep in mind that most venues book 2-3 months in advance) My message was too
indecisive and gave the person reading it too much work, in length, content, and how to respond. When booking with Jack of Suede now, I use the following format:

I compliment something about their venue. I name drop who suggested or how I found out about their venue. I remind the specific date that I am looking to book. I include the following information at the bottom of the email.

Notable Venues Jack of Suede’s members have played on:

The Rainbow Bar and Grill Los Angeles, CA
The Blue Cafe Long Beach, CA
Doc’s Music Hall Muncie, IN
The Triangle Greenville, OH
The Launching Pad Muncie, IN
The Rooftop Franklin, IN
The Tempest Santa Monica, CA
The Tally Ball State University, IN

Wuhnurth Festival 2008
Muncie Gras 2008

Notable Bands/Musicians JoS has shared the stage with:
1997 (Victory)
White Tie Affair (Epic)
Soraia (Philadelphia)
James Brown Car Alarm
Midwest Hype
Barcelona (Seattle)
Walrus (Chicago)
The Fastest Kid Alive (Chicago)
2*Sweet (C.Walrus)
My American Heart (Warcon / Bodog)
Kids of Survival (New York City)

Finally, I just sign off with our catch phrase.

Love Life,
Live Your Dream.

Craig Furnivall on behalf of Jack of Suede
http://www.myspace.com/jackofsuede

I have found that this is the most effective format that I have ever used. I do not necessarily know if this is exactly what people are looking for, but I would guess that this covers
most of the bases, while staying concise and to the point. I would definitely tailor everything that you do to fit your own wording and style, but for me, this has been the most effective.

**Conclusion:**

I admit that I do not have all of the answers, and I understand that everything that I have had to say has been through trial, error, and speculation. The same can be said about the music industry’s current position. The music world is definitely a place of uncertainty with most traditional approaches and strategies being thrown out the window. I sincerely hope that these words and experiences will assist you in whatever musical endeavors that you may have in the future. Be resilient, be patient, be confident, be active.

Love Life,

Live Your Dream.
This is just an example of the online spreadsheet that we keep an ongoing record of for our tee-shirts. This is doubled by a weekly inventory check and a paper version of this same table that is updated on site when a shirt is sold. I admit that it is fairly low-tech way of keeping track of expenses, but it is important to keep track so you know how much you can afford to spend. Also, we have always chosen to take whatever money is made and put it into a band fund that is used to pay for various costs like merchandise, drum sticks, guitar strings, gasoline to travel, or whatever else is needed. We have found that this is the fairest way of making sure that every decision we make financially is best for the band.
This is an example of how we keep track of pay for gigs (pay numbers have been altered for privacy). We use this excel sheet in addition to our merchandise expenses and sum payouts with money made from CD/merchandise sales to figure our total income as a band. We then subtract all expenses to see where we stand in the long run. It seems like a really simple and obvious thing to do, but I know a lot of bands who choose not to keep track. I decided it was important enough to know how far I've come and if my investments are paying themselves off, so I have kept excel sheets on all of my musical ventures. As a business person, I feel that this is an essential way to know whether or not the decisions you are making are in the right direction, as far as profitability and affordability are concerned.
Works Cited


