

ROCK BRAND 101



If there's one lesson to take away from DRUM!'s Career Guide Issue, it's that simply making music isn't enough anymore. For bands to be financially successful these days, a group must build a miniature empire, complete with albums, T-shirts, stickers, DVDs, Web sites, video blogs, coffee mugs, skate decks, product endorsements, action figures, and maybe even a line of shampoos (because let's face it, your singer's feathery hair is the silkiest you've ever seen). In order for any band's empire to flourish, it greatly helps to have a finely tuned marketing machine at the helm, dexterously positioning the band and its products for maximum success. ▶▶▶

**How To Take Control
Of Your Band's
Identity And Use It
To Conquer The World,
One Logo At A Time.**

By Jake Wood | Illustration by Mitch O'Connell

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This is the art of capitalizing on music already written (not quite selling out) and it's time to bring out the inner shrewd businessman and start analyzing and branding everything involved with being a band.

SO, WHAT IS IT?

The first thing any booking agent, manager, or record-label suit will ask is "what kind of band is it?" For some, that question is a no-brainer — Jimbo's Genuine Jug Band Experience probably speaks for itself. For more eclectic bands, the query can lead to an alarmingly hostile debate among members. All too often bands grab from many genres when describing their sound and in the process can confuse or terminally bore the unlucky soul who asked. Industry folk need something they can sell, and if it doesn't fit into a specific category, that makes the explaining, routing, and selling process a bit more labored. It's a painful procedure for most any band, so pick a genre with the least revolting stigmas, remember that it won't be on your tombstone, and let the music do the rest of the talking. If you don't label it first, someone else will, and it might not be so pretty. Beat them to the punch.

BAND NAME

Band names are the unconditionally supportive representatives of the music. Through good notes and bad shows they are always there, representing, but below the surface they're much more than just titles. Because of genre-specific trends within band names, a name can aid in both conscious and subconscious categorizing of styles to the new listener. Sometimes a name alone can either deter or entice people into giving 30 seconds of their time. It's very common for the name to be heard first and the music second, so consider it a gateway to the ears. While we all want to be unique (just like everybody else), having a name suggestive of a genre can help route the music into the right hands.

Trends aside, typically the best band names are those that are intriguing, somewhat stylistically suggestive, and

easily pronounced. Whatever the name may be, it has to pass the bar exam: When someone in a noisy bar asks the name, it must be understood immediately, within two deliveries. If it needs to be written on a cocktail napkin for comprehension, it fails. Onomatopoeias from a drunken uncle, strange esoteric words from a late night game of balderdash, and dead languages from the Discovery Channel all make for interesting names, but they also create fundamental marketing struggles.

On a more utilitarian level, it's very helpful to have a name that is search-engine friendly. Certain words are simply too common to yield any narrowed results (imagine the broad mess with a name like The People) and odd symbols and punctuations can make typing and searching more difficult (my own band, Super Adventure Club, made the mistake of including an umlaut in our album *Üntz*, and as a result it doesn't show up under searches of 'untz'). Prince, however, got away with his symbol back in the early 1990s because he's Prince. Nuff said.

APPEARANCES

What's the first thing people encounter with a band? Is it the Web site? A live show? An album cover? A flyer? And what does that encounter convey at the gut level? Revolting? Sexy? Shocking? Funny? Visual appearance is arguably as important as the music itself because it's another gateway to the unfamiliar. It doesn't have to be pretty (Lemmy Kilmister, quite possibly the ugliest man in show business, is the poster child here), but it's got to have some character, something to attach a feeling to. Rule of thumb: If the mother hates it, it's working.

THE BAND IS A VISUAL STATEMENT

Look cool, scary, irresponsible, scandalous, "authentic," whatever, but make it look legit. When posing for promotional photos or on stage, the band should have a visual statement of some kind, and preferably dressed with a theme amongst members that implicitly says, "Yeah, we're a band." GWAR, for instance, rose to fame specifically because of its members' outrageously gruesome costumes and stage props. The idea is to give people something to talk about, whether it be baby blue mariachi uniforms, MC Hammer pants, this year's birthday suit (trust me, that last one works), or 100 gallons of fake blood — because nobody wants to talk about four guys wearing khakis and faded tech company shirts. And for Pete's sake, quit taking promo photos in front of railroad tracks and brick walls.

ALBUM COVERS

An album cover needs to look professional. If it looks amateur, half-assed, or just plain boring, people will treat it as such and expect the same from the music. Although bands do it all the time, it's pointless to skimp on the packaging of something that probably takes an entire year to make. This is the advertisement for your baby, so make it count.

In keeping with the theme that it's advertising space, and not just a cover, it is in the band's best interest to exploit away and *put the band name on the cover!* Simple enough, right? Seems fairly intuitive to let the people know who you

Genre-Specific Trends In Band Names

RAP/HIP-HOP — misspelling of varyus werdz (again, thanks Prince).

HEAVY METAL — Latin terms for body parts, subjects regarding death, mythical creatures, or religion.

INDIE ROCK — meaningless plural nouns with definite articles like The Shins, The Kinks, The Strokes, etc.

COVER BANDS — misappropriated homonyms of "soul" and puns of "funk," like Soul Purpose or Double Funk Crunch. *Eck!*

*Following these trends won't necessarily lead to a brilliant band name, but it may help identify a broad style of music, and that can be very much in a band's best interest.

are. Confoundingly, plenty of struggling unknown bands continue to elude this law of common sense, and it's mostly to their detriment. Of course, there's the old marketing trick of making something way cooler and mysterious by removing the name, but at the end of the day people either know your band name or they don't.

Clarity is as important as people are impatient, so avoid convoluted text. If it takes more than a second to read the gothic print, then the general public doesn't have the time to figure it out. Additionally, try and avoid incredibly dark album covers with dark text. It might look good in the middle of the day, but 90 percent of album sales will probably be done in dark clubs with poor lighting, and if it looks like a blank canvas at the merch table, it won't help sales (Metallica's *Black* album, however, is a rather glaring exception).

Sometimes, in order to understand what works best, it helps to examine what doesn't work at all. Check out the hilarious collection of the worst (and arguable most truly awesome) album covers of all time at the aptly named worstalbumcovers.org.

VISUAL BRANDING

A general pattern of consumerism is that the more familiar people are with an image, the more likely they are to eventually buy the product. In order to effectively brand something like a band, it's best to have some kind of consistent theme or logo throughout the band's visual elements including album covers, Web sites, flyers, stickers, and all the other swag. After a person sees an image a few times within a few mediums (perhaps an ad in the paper, a poster on the street, and a display on a local marquee), that person is more familiarized with the band and brand and more likely to spend money on a show or a CD.

LOGO

The purpose of a band's logo is to serve as a compact and efficient representation of the band, and with enough repetition the logo becomes infused with *the idea* of the band. The real beauty of a logo, however, is its double-sided use, as it's a means of advertising for both bands and fans. Bands put their stamp on just about everything they create, and fans use it as a means to show support, pride, and individuality.

Spreading a logo around town isn't that hard, but creating the perfect logo can be a long and frustrating experience. The main element that determines if a logo is effective is if it's immediately identified with the product it represents. With examination of successful logos of various bands and companies, certain trends become apparent (see sidebar on next page). Above all, simplicity is king of logo-land. Additionally, monochrome color schemes (remember, black and white is much cheaper to print) are fairly common. There are of course exceptions to these trends, but simplicity really does help. For further strategizing, imagine how easy it would be for a 13-year-old to carve your logo into a school desk. Lastly, a good logo should make an even better tattoo.

FONT

Font choice is particularly important and not to be overlooked. As essential as it is to find the perfect font, it's also very easy to fall into the trap of abusing the font book. Most every graphic designer agrees that it's best not to

Putting The Web To Work

By David Jarnstrom



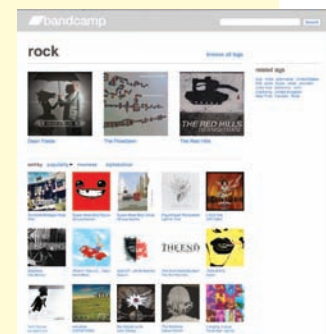
One of the first steps to success you can take without getting up from the couch is to sign up with an agency like ASCAP or BMI (which you can do online at ascap.com or bmi.com) in order to collect royalties as a songwriter or publisher. Make sure your fellow bandmates agree to give you (the lowly drummer) credit for your efforts in working on your music. Then submit your tunes to a company like Bunim Murray Productions (bunim-murray.com), which places unsigned bands in TV shows like *The Real World* and *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*.

Take advantage of social media. By now it should be painfully obvious:

Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter are all fantastic and *free* ways to promote your music. Accounts are easy to set up, and you can adjust the settings so your posts are linked throughout all three, rather than update them separately. Facebook and MySpace have digital music players so people can hear what you sound like, as well as look at pictures, check tour dates, and read your bio and updates.

Make your own videos and post them on **YouTube**. Bands can post live footage, music videos, clips of studio sessions, updates from the road, or just silly stuff to keep fans entertained. The more content the better!

Put your recordings on Bandcamp (bandcamp.com), where you can sell music and merch at whatever price you desire. You can also stream your songs or have them available for free download. My band recorded an album over the course of 30 days and allowed



Bandcamp is a one-stop shop for fans.

people to watch the whole process live on Ustream (ustream.com). We then gave the record away on Bandcamp for free. We eventually pressed CDs and sold them, but the initial promotion proved a great way of attracting new fans.

Jango (jango.com) is an online personalized radio site (similar to Pandora) that has a feature called



Jango's "guaranteed airplay" is a sure bet.

"guaranteed airplay," which allows artists to purchase "credits" for their songs to get played alongside popular artists of their choice. For example, if your band sounds like the Foo Fighters, people listening to a Foo Fighters station will be exposed to your music. Packages start at \$10 for 250 plays.

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use more than two fonts in an image. Various fonts convey emotion and meaning, and too many can be schizophrenic and messy. There are plenty of Web sites with free fonts, many of them way cooler than the stock fonts that come with every computer, so download as many as possible because they may come in handy later for a flyer.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE LOGO

Now that you have a kick-ass logo, it's time to paint the town red. In keeping with the branding rule of familiarity, the goal is to make people as familiar with the logo as possible. While it's certainly better to grab people's immediate attention, logos also work well on the subconscious level: never really being noticed, but always in view. Stickers, stencils, and flyers are the cheapest methods of spreading the gospel, and they actually work as identifiers when seen enough times. For the more brazen, straight-to-the-jugular approach, there's always the rent-a-billboard option, but that lacks major street cred.

KNOW YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC

Mastering your product is only half the battle. The other half is discovering who's listening. Whether it's young Republicans, aging hippies, or wealthy tech-nerds, it's incredibly beneficial to hone in on specific target audiences. After determining what types of listeners the fan base is made up of and any potential target groups, growing the audience will become easier because it will make connecting with the fans much more direct and efficient.

STRATEGIC PLACEMENT

After establishing these target audiences, do some brainstorming, and get the music into the appropriate situations. For instance, have it spinning at skate shops for the teens (don't forget to leave a gazillion free stickers), coffee shops for the 40-somethings, and yoga centers for the spiritually minded. On a broader scale, licensing music to movies, TV shows, video games, and commercials is an additionally effective and lucrative method of reaching a larger amount of people. The only hurdles here are that the publishing field is very oversaturated with music and it's hard to get those coveted spots on popular media.

BRAND YOUR FANS

Although in most cases it's accidental, some bands have the rare influence of changing fans' appearances and converting them into lifers. The Grateful Dead had Deadheads, Jimmy Buffet has Parrotheads, the Insane Clown Posse has Jugalos, and Kiss had the Kiss Army. Although these various clans were probably started by zealous fans, it doesn't hurt to put the idea out there (after all, people just want to belong to something), so think of a good name for a fan club, enhance the camaraderie and exclusiveness of the club (like a "members only" acoustic show), and watch the numbers grow.

DO YOUR OWN STUNTS

The obligatory bumper sticker on the club urinal is cute, but it's just not enough to garner attention from the press. Going beyond the drawing board and getting wild with guerrilla marketing, however, can easily make headlines. 1970's S.F. legends of shock rock The Tubes were quite possibly the kings of such media stunts, and they're an excellent study of guerrilla marketing. One of their most successful and unique stunts was at a Minneapolis-St. Paul show, where pre-sales were soft; The Tubes had their female crew dress up as old women and protest outside the venue the night before the show. With signs that read "no titties in twin cities" and "get the tubes out of town," the controversy landed them on the evening news and subsequently with a sold-out show that both the governor and mayor attended.

Amidst a career of success fueled by borderline pornographic stage shows, The Tubes also had stunts that pushed the envelope just a tad too far. At the beginning of one of their tours through England, their manager brazenly told the press, "We're going to have the Queen in bondage." This caught a lot of fire, as they were banned from over half of the UK clubs on their tour. The silver lining, however, was that the remaining shows were all sold-out because of the controversy (apparently not everyone loved the Queen that much). Bill Spooner, guitar player for The Tubes, laid out

Learn From The Best Logos That Work



GRATEFUL DEAD

The "Steal Your Face" skull and the dancing bears are quite possibly the most lucrative and widespread images of any band. Note the simple color schemes.



IRON MAIDEN

Eddie. Although he contradicts conventional logo design (he's more of a mascot than a logo), Eddie is great because he's a personality with a larger-than-life character.



FISHBONE

Incredibly iconic.



APPLE

The purveyors of sleek.



PLAYBOY



BLACK FLAG

Best tattoo ever.



AC/DC

Built a logo out of their name. The font says it all.



SUPERMAN



MISFITS

Their classic skull logo is so prominent it's almost larger than the band.



SLAYER

What high school desk doesn't feature a Slayer carving?



GOLDEN ARCHES

One of the most famous logos of all time, and probably the most lucrative.



the band's shock-value logic rather matter-of-factly, noting "when you are driving on the freeway and there's a wreck, you just have to look — you just have to."

This doesn't mean that every guerrilla tactic needs to be an infuriating carnage. Some bands gain attention by going on completely green bike tours (not so easy for us drummers), others run kissing booths at shows (very easy for us drummers), and some hold séances in which they claim to be 16th century witches reincarnated (the publicity birth of Alice Cooper). Nobody wants to tell a boring story, so do something that people will talk about, and eventually a reporter will want to tell the story too.

AND, ACTION!

With major labels shrinking and powerful audio/video technology being incredibly simple and accessible, the DIY system is the wave of the present. The more successful bands are those that have adapted and become multimedia production machines, and as YouTube is the number one source of music discovery by kids these days, band videos are mandatory. The band OK Go, for instance, hit a few homeruns with some of the most unique music videos to date (remember those guys dancing on the treadmills?) and has since gone on to much success, greatly due to viral videos.

There is of course an audience for clips that are less than groundbreaking, and a band doesn't need to have Martin Scorsese directing their videos. In fact, simple, short video blogs can greatly galvanize interest, regardless of cinematic quality. They can be stupid, pointless, and silly (everything that makes the Internet great), and have almost nothing to do with the music. The variety of useable material is endless and it doesn't need to be professional. A brief 30-second ipecac prank, a rant from a crazed fan, or a review of favorite local bands; they're all par for the course of online marketing, luring in new fans, and staying in touch with fans between shows.

One of the more straightforward methods to getting noticed on YouTube, is to make a video covering someone else's hit tune. It's an industry trick that's worked for decades — use an already famous song to shepherd in a new act — and it's more effective now than ever simply because of the fate of the search engine. The band Pomplamoose, for instance, may soon become a household name because of their wide breadth of amazingly quirky and polished YouTube videos of various pop hits.

Bottom line is, it's not always about the music, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. There's an art to effective marketing, so sharpen those skills and don't be late to building your mini empire. If you don't do it, someone else will. ■



The Art Of The Deal with Kenny Aronoff



LOTS OF DRUMMERS record and play with top-grossing pop acts, but Kenny Aronoff is the session man's session

man — the cat who takes the red-eye to Nashville for a 7 a.m. call time and gets back to Burbank in the afternoon to tape *American Idol*. To give you an idea how busy he is, Aronoff is scrolling through his Blackberry fielding offers while we have him on the phone. Now *that's* a hustler. Anyone wanting to get similarly paid for plying their rhythmic craft is advised to heed the man's words.

WHAT'S A CONTRACT?

"Most of it's not fine print. Most of it's negotiating and you got to be willing to

work at all kinds of different levels. A lot of people are like, 'We can't afford you anymore.' I'm saying, 'Yes, you can,' because the whole pay scale has changed. Some drummers at the higher levels are saying, 'You're lowering the standard.' I'm saying, 'Dude! What world are you living in? The rules have changed. There are no budgets. There's barely any labels.' Sure, I respect the standard, but you got to be flexible. There are gray ar-

eas and sometimes you might get screwed and sometimes you don't. But you can't score goals if you're not on the field."

START HIGH

"For the young kids there's no rule of thumb. First ask [producers, artists, etc.] what they can afford. And then you ask people at your level, what are they getting? Or you ask someone on the session, 'What are the other people getting?' You should just come out and ask, 'What can you afford to pay me?' And you'll have to ask yourself if you're willing to do it for that. And ask the players what they're getting per session. It all depends on what instrument they play. You go down the list."

WORKING BOTH SIDES

"With the union they're paying scale now

mostly. I used to get double scale and over a certain number of hours I would get triple scale. It's funny because, before, you used to have to file with the union to get paid at all. But the recording budgets just aren't there. Producers, studios, they don't want to use union. A lot of it is private money now where the band is just writing me a check or giving me cash."

THE NEW DRUMMING ECONOMY

"I've got a drum room now. Most drummers in L.A. have a drum room. It's kind of like if you want to play ball, you better have one. Yeah, most of them are home studios. Some sessions are just all overdubbing. That's why I've got a drum room — it's bringing work in."

MONEY VS. SANITY

"Sometimes the money is important. Like the time I flew to Africa for one gig. That's when I'm asking for certain things. You get there at midnight, next day is sound check and show, and you fly back that night. It kicks your ass. But money isn't everything. If money was everything then I wouldn't do things like the [recently telecast] Kennedy Center Honors. I probably shouldn't have taken it [laughs], but typically I do."

— Andrew Lentz