

# Internet's a double-edged sword for indie artists

Some things don't change. Making a career of music is as challenging as ever, even in the era of point-and-click instant rewards and cheap technology. Music fans with computers have more access to more artists than they could ever imagine and making an album is as affordable as it's ever been, but actually, that's where the difficulty comes in. Just because any folks with the means can make an album doesn't mean that they should, and for those who definitely should, it's the getting heard above the din that's tough.

Artists still need name recognition. They still need airplay. They still need journalists to listen to their work and publicize it. Musicians still need word of mouth from fans and to play live shows to inspire that much-needed buzz. There still exists a "music underground" — it's just now with Internet radio, online music magazines, Web pages, message boards, e-mail newsletters and blogs, millions upon millions of people around the world can be in on the secret.

"E-mail, Web sites, blogs, postcards, word of mouth, file sharing and live shows are spreading the music," said musician Scooter Scudieri. "The demand for fresh music and more choices has led to the creation of new delivery systems through Internet, cable and satellite."

In his terms, the major label-run industry is a relic, "an industry running on an antiquated business model that has a 95 percent failure rate." The Internet as a tool for marketing, fan interaction, sales, airplay and booking tours is the future of the industry, he said. "The new music industry contains two elements: the musician and the fan. It is that simple."

First of all, the Internet allows indie artists to sell their music worldwide easily. Artists aren't restricted by their means (or lack thereof) to get picked up by distributors.

"The internet is providing us with a huge battleground now," said Jim Gustafson, who plays with Poobah and runs indie label Alibi-Gustunes Entertainment (see directory in this issue for this and 400+ more). "Now we can reach all these people in the free world who might be interested in the music."

He added, "It really pleases me to have some guy in Germany e-mail me to tell me how much he likes my record." (Poobah has never played Germany.)

It works both ways. "A while back I e-mailed Ronnie Montrose... and he e-mailed me back and I talked to him.... It's great; they can get back to you at their leisure. There's so much more access to these people," he said.

Gustafson listed another possible advantage of the Internet, "News spreads so fast on the Internet, even if some of it isn't true!"

Many media outlets and venues still need a physical press kit, but an artist's Web site is still a great promotional tool where people can post their bio, contact information, press



## Indie Internet resources

### Buy Indie Music.com

This Internet shop has a self-titled compilation series and was accepting submissions for *Volume 4* as this issue went to press (\$25 submission fee, no parental advisory tracks). CDs are sent to A&R reps at indie and major labels, indie and college radio and independent magazines. Bands are also promoted on the shop's Web site and newsletters. Artists can sell their CDs through the site.

### CDBaby.com

Independent artists sell their CDs through CDBaby.com, which stocks and ships product on behalf of its artist members. Artists get paid weekly, making \$6-12 per CD sold. Digital tracks are also sold via download services as well, with a 9 percent cut to CDBaby for distribution.

### The stats

Founded: 1998, by president Derek Sivers, who'd started selling his own CD the year before and then added some friends' music.

Artists: 87,458 artists as of March 16, "and growing by about 100 artists a day," according to the company's VP John Steup. "We hit one million CDs sold around May 2004 and currently are at over 1.5 million. We've sold over \$15 million in CDs — and most of that within the last three years — and have paid artists \$13.5 million of that total. Yes, the artists really do get the lion's share."

Staff: 47 people and growing, and someone listens to every CD that comes in.

### eMusic.com

A subscription service where music lovers can download 40 or more songs per month from indie labels, eMusic delivers MP3s with no proprietary software needed or copy restrictions. At 22-25¢ per song (\$9.99 for 40 downloads is the beginning subscription), people try new music based on recommendations from its editors, reviews and download lists from subscribers who share similar tastes. Not having to pay per track, "You're probably more likely to say, 'I'll give this a shot,'" said eMusic COO David Pakman. "If you took the coolest record store and you added 100 of the most knowledgeable music critics and put it online, you'd have eMusic."

### The stats

Founded: 1998. The first company to sell songs and albums in digital format via a subscription service.

Downloads: More than two million per month

Songs: 550,000 tracks

Labels: 3,500 indie labels

Artists: 30,000+

Editorial department: 100+

Customers: Service is aimed at music lovers 30+, who are more likely to pay for music and not spread it on file sharing pirate networks. People trying the service get 50 free downloads, and the artists still get paid.

### Indie-music.com

Members have access to an online database of resources for musicians, including studios, gear, other musicians, Web site building, venues, radio, labels, print media and agents. Visitors to the site have access to free items, such as a copyright kit, and can submit press release information and work for review in the free newsletter, which includes "industry news, calendar listings of upcoming conferences and festivals, and music submission opportunities," listed cofounder Paul Bultman, and is sent to industry people as well as artists.

Started by music industry professionals who were also indie musicians, to help other artists find services and resources to help their music careers. The subscription service enables the business to keep the database current; advertising on the site supports the articles and reviews.

### The stats

Artists: 7,000 bands registered

Venues in database: 7,310

Newsletter subscribers: 14,000, including "1,279 labels, 319 promoters, 159 publicists and 358 agents," Bultman said.

Resource database: 23,555 records

### MusicSubmit.com

This promotion service sends press releases to Internet radio stations, magazines and music blogs and submits artists' info to Web directories and search engines, making 50 unduplicated contacts per artist per month. It was started by Trevor Lyman who saw an opportunity to help other indie artists after he discovered how much work it took to find the resources and promote himself.

### The stats

Founded: 2003

Artists: 2,000 served over the last two years.

Internet radio stations and online magazines: 1,000+ each

Online music directories and search engines: 30-40

### NetMusic.com

A catalog of almost one million tracks from 4,000 indie labels, the service allows radio listeners to download music they just heard broadcast via what NetMusic calls "Listen, Click and Buy." The company also includes www.audiolunchbox.com.

Not to forget: MP3.com, MP3-tunes.com, Download.com, Sounds 24-7 (ItsFun.com, where artists earn 50 percent of their proceeds, ListenUp.com and CyberRadio.com), iTunes.com (300 million downloads as of March 23, not limited to indie artists, of course), Rhapsody, Sony Connect, Napster, MusicNet, BuyMusic, MusicMatch, Digitalmusicworks.com (indie label releases albums online only), and MSN music (acquired indie Smithsonian Folkways' catalog of 35,000 songs).

Do you have a resource where you hear new music that's not on the typical radio station or traditional retailer? We'll keep an ongoing list. Send them to: catherine.bernardy@fwpubs.com.

— Cathy Bernardy