



dear john

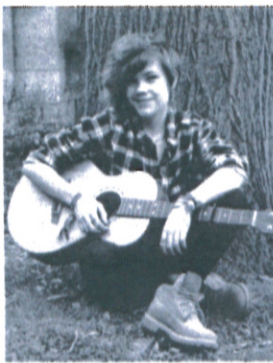
Q A

What difference can online and social media make to promoting my music?

In the early days of punk, the fanzine *Sideburns* famously published an oft-reprinted sketch of three basic musical chords with the instruction, 'Now form a band'. Perhaps the modern equivalent would be an equally rudimentary drawing of an iPhone or a tablet with the caption, 'Now promote your music'. Certainly the potential artists now possess to reach their audience without the intervention of a music label or a PR company has been a real game changer over the last decade or two. However, as with every innovation,

there is a learning curve to be taken on board and potential pitfalls to avoid in making it work to best advantage. Just as technology is ever-changing, the learning process in this case is ongoing. This week's guests are both young and up-and-coming performers in two very different markets, but in both cases, astute use of online promotion and social media is helping them build a following and a reputation. Here, they share some lessons they have learned along the way to achieving this goal.

what the experts say...



Just Millie

Just Millie is quickly gaining recognition as one of south-west's most talented new solo artists and has made the transition from performing for family and friends to performances at the Live and Unsigned 2012 competition, *Messtival 2012* and supporting the Loveable Rogues from Britain's Got Talent, while playing at open mic events, clubs, pubs and festival venues.

"From about the age of eight, I would occasionally sing for regulars in the clubs and pubs our family owned. By 13 I was teaching myself guitar and, after learning a few cover songs, I did my first gig a year later, carrying on doing open mic nights around the Southampton area to gain more confidence. Along the way someone suggested I enter Live and Unsigned, I got to the semi-final of this competition and then was contacted by Baby Girl Music Ltd which resulted in the recording of my new EP *On the Line*. Since then, I haven't put down my guitar - gigging anywhere I can and loving every minute of it.

"Social media has a massive impact on promoting both music

and brand, but as I have always been quite shy when it comes to promoting myself, I'm lucky I have people around me who are willing to network for me. Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter ensures continued support from my current fan base and helps engage new members.

"I started writing my original songs quite late on, so if I could go back and do it differently I would begin writing material at a much younger age. By doing this, when it was time to start recording I'd have plenty of originals to choose from, rather than having pressure to write several songs over a short period of time. Now I continually write new material even when not in the studio."

Tommy Eye

Tommy Eye is an up and coming UK rap artist whose latest tunes are regularly played on SBTV, BBC *Introducing*, *Flava* and many other platforms. Giggling regularly in London and Southampton, he has supported urban acts such as *Devin* and has successfully released tracks via iTunes where his independent album *The Fall of Icarus* is available from Monday (July 22).

"I always loved drama and performance growing up - if it was the local theatre or school, I wouldn't miss an opportunity to get up on stage and express myself creatively.

"When I was exposed to hip hop music as a teenager, I quickly grew to love it, and the two worlds soon combined. You Tube and Twitter have been proving particularly effective for myself with connecting to a wider audience. It's amazing for building up a portfolio of my work - for example, you only need to type 'Tommy Eye' into YouTube now, and you'd instantly get all my latest



music videos ready to watch.

"Having said all that, social media on its own still can't provide the financial backing that labels

and other music bodies often can, and having a generous budget is always going to help an artist in terms of effective promotion. Unfortunately I've learnt the hard way that a lot of the people in the music industry don't have your best interests at heart, but rather they may just have their eyes on your wallet. This can be particularly true of PR and booking agents, meaning independent artists really need to be street smart in terms of where they invest their limited budgets.

"What seems like a great contact, may actually turn out to be just someone ready to take you for a ride and make a bit of money as they do it. I've found that building a collective around you of trustworthy friends and connections who have skills and talents you don't, is one of the best moves an independent artist can make. These are the people that will believe in you and your music, and if they believe in what you're doing then they are much more likely to go the extra mile when it matters most."

dear john sums up...

Just Millie echoes an observation I have heard from performers who self promote but have also had experience of working in the traditional label-led system. While modern technology can help you reach your own audience, there is a trade off in terms of needing to specifically invest time and capital in this area in addition to making your music.

Just as a singer might consider linking up with more accomplished musicians so they can concentrate on what they are good at, if you are not the most technical person in the world you may want to follow Just Millie's lead in seeking out support in this area. On the other hand, as Tommy Eye rightly points out, it is very important to be clear in your mind what your vision is for your career and to have a good idea of what help you are looking for and roughly how much you should be paying for it. Although technology in our industry may have evolved, the potential for the starry-eyed to get ripped off remains sadly as potent as it has always been.

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