



DIY Radio Promotion

Overview

Radio promotion includes a wide range of activities and strategies, which can make it a confusing process to navigate alone. This handout will focus on how to get your music played on the radio, but it is worth noting that there are many ways to get radio exposure: interviews, special-interest stories, event-promos and more. If you are interested in pursuing this kind of exposure, refer to our handout on *Publicity for Musicians*, which includes a section on radio announcements and promotional coverage.

Before we delve into strategy, it's important to understand the differences between radio formats:

- **Commercial Radio:** This category includes large, for-profit stations that show up on your AM/FM dial and are typically owned by private media groups. They derive the majority of their revenue from advertising and use the billboard charts to program their playlists.
- **College Radio:** This category includes radio stations that are supported by universities and primarily run by students. These stations are generally small, but can have a sizable following, especially in communities where the university is a prominent part of the city fabric.
- **Non-Profit and Community Radio:** This category includes public (e.g. NPR affiliates) and small community stations. NPR stations air a mix of nationally syndicated and locally developed programs. Community stations don't have national affiliates and therefore have more flexibility with their programming.
- **Satellite Radio:** This platform broadcasts radio from satellites, primarily to cars, for a subscription fee. The largest satellite radio provider is currently Sirius XM, which offers a huge variety of stations, each with a unique programmatic focus.
- **Internet Radio/Podcasts:** The Internet has become a hugely popular platform for radio, and involves several formats. The first is online streaming of traditional terrestrial radio (e.g. listening to your local NPR station via your phone or computer). The second is original radio content that is streamed exclusively online (see more in Internet Radio section). The third is services like Pandora and Last FM, which offer tailored music recommendations based on a set of criteria that the listener establishes.

When Does a Radio Campaign Make Sense?

Most artists pursue a radio campaign to support the release of a new album and/or tour. Getting airplay can help spread your music to new fans, build excitement for local and national concerts, and increase your album sales. The first step is to create a set of flexible goals for your campaign so that you can build a focused strategy. If your primary goal is to sell more tickets for a tour, you'll want to target stations that attract your target audience in the areas where you'll be performing. Securing on-air interviews or promotional spots is also a great way to generate exposure, interest and audience for local shows. If you're looking to establish yourself in a new community, it may make more sense to build relationships with a few influential professionals in the market who can help push your music to local fans. Generally speaking, it's best to invest in a radio campaign as soon as possible after the release of a new album or project (1-3 months out), to capitalize on the 'newness' of your news.

Should I Hire a Radio Promoter?

Another important question to consider if you are interested in building a radio campaign for your ensemble or newly released album is what you can reasonably accomplish alone vs. what a radio promoter may be able to achieve on your behalf.

A good radio promoter will understand the ins-and-outs of commercial, non-profit and college radio and have strong working relationships with DJs and program directors across the country. There is no doubt that a well-connected, seasoned radio promoter will greatly increase the chances of your music making it into the right hands. Of course, that doesn't always translate into airplay, but it can certainly help you cut through the noise. The price-tag for a radio promoter is also highly variable – you can expect to pay anywhere from \$1500-\$6000 for 3-12 weeks of work.

As with all things, it's important to do your research and ask for recommendations. If you have colleagues or friends who have run successful radio campaigns, ask them who they worked with and what kind of goals and/or deliverables they established at the outset. Look primarily for promoters who have worked with artists in your genre—they will have relationships with appropriate DJs and directors—and have a work/communication style that most compliments yours.

The Do-it-Yourself Radio Campaign

If you are just starting out and don't have the money to invest in a professional radio promoter, there is still a lot you can accomplish alone. Building relationships with area DJs and program directors can serve you well into the future—even if you do, at some point, hand over this work to someone else. Below are a few steps you can take now to expand your network and learn more about the radio community:

- *Listen to programs and stations that you want to target.* Regularly listening to programs and stations that air music in your genre will introduce you to key radio personalities, the range of music that is aired, and influential artists in your community. This information will help you be more strategic and effective in your outreach to stations.
- *Join the Conversation.* If getting directly involved is not possible, there are many ways to learn about and connect to the local radio scene. Many local DJs and radio programmers have robust online presences—either via blogs, Twitter or Facebook. Follow their content, respond, and share the hidden gems you've discovered. Radio professionals got into the business because they are artists and/or love music—they like discovering new music and connecting with local artists. You'll be surprised how easy it can be to connect with these professionals and start building a meaningful relationship that will serve you both personally and professionally.
- *Learn the Ropes.* Many commercial and non-profit radio stations have long-standing intern and fellowship programs, which you can participate in for class credit. If your college has a radio station—get involved! There's no better way to learn the ins-and-outs of radio than by contributing as a student DJ, intern, or work-study student. This not only gives you a clear behind-the-scenes look at how a radio program and/or station is run, it helps you build contacts that can support your future efforts in radio promotion.

The previous two bullets describe ongoing, best-practices that can help set you up for success when you're ready to pound the pavement. Below are strategies for launching a targeted radio campaign:

- *Develop a Targeted List of Contacts.* If you are able to get directly involved in the radio scene, either as an active participant or observer, you should keep a running list of individuals and stations you interact with—a roster to use when you're ready to release a new artistic project. If you don't yet have a list, you can create one by researching college, community, and public stations that are appropriate for your genre. In addition to the station names, it's crucial to find the contact information for the person who is responsible for curating the show that would most likely air your music.

- *Your Promotional Package.* Once you have a targeted list, pull together material for a promotional package that you can send either via mail or email. Although so much of our world now exists online, many DJs and program directors report that they prefer to get a physical CD rather than an electronic press kit. Mp3 files can easily get lost in the shuffle, mis-categorized or simply deleted. If possible, send your materials in both formats so that you cover all your bases. Your promotional package should be fairly lean—it should include your album and an artist one-sheet. (See our *Promo Kits* handout for more information on creating an effective one-sheet.) Be targeted in your efforts, but also try to cast a fairly wide net (up to 100-200 mailings) to increase the chances of your material getting noticed.
- *Follow-Up and Keep in Touch.* There's no shame in following up to see if a DJ or program director received and/or had the chance to listen to the album you sent. In most cases, the program director will be responsible for ultimate selections and also the most responsive to inquires. An exception to this rule is if you are targeting a DJ with a popular show in your genre. The key is to be brief, honest, and enthusiastic—introduce who you are, briefly state that you're following up on the album that you sent in, and solicit their thoughts. Many radio professionals will appreciate the time and care you took to reach out, and it may come as a welcome reminder to take a first or second look at your album. You may find that calling is more effective if you have already sent an email—inboxes get unruly quickly, and it may not be the best mode of communication for a particular staffer. If you get a DJ on the phone, and they sound annoyed that you've called, just thank them for their time and consideration and end it there. *No harm done.* If a DJ does play your music on his/her program, be sure to follow-up with a thank you and give their station a shout-out in return on your website, social media platforms or mailing list. Ask the DJ if he/she would mind being added to your mailing list so that you can keep him/her up-to-date on new creative projects.
- *Share the News With Your Fans.* Most radio stations have online and social media presences. Leverage your airplay by interacting with the station through social media. If a station posts an update about your album, share it. If you're letting fans know that they can hear you on X station, tag the station in your post. The more connectivity you can create between you and a given station, the better. Just like you, radio stations big and small are looking to increase their listenership—you can return the favor by introducing fans to their work.

Internet Radio

Internet radio is rapidly growing in popularity. Obtaining significant airplay on these radio formats is less complicated (and costly) than the commercial campaigns that once ruled the day.

There are many platforms that allow listeners to access original content that is exclusively created for and available on the Internet. For example, [Shoutcast](#) and [Live365](#) have large listings of Internet radio stations. You can find an Internet radio station that focuses on your genre and reach out to the program director with your EPK (electronic press kit). These radio stations are not geographically segmented and therefore are better suited for general promotion, an album release, or a national tour.

Another option is to pursue airplay through services such as Pandora, which offer tailored recommendations to individual listeners. There is generally an online submission form to facilitate this process. However, not all music that is submitted to these platforms is automatically accepted—there are curators that approve or reject your submissions. Generally speaking, online radio curators are looking for artists who already have some visibility (they consult blogs, local show listings, traditional radio, album sales/downloads, social media, etc.) and/or have new music that compliments their collection.

There has also been much debate about the disparity between royalty payments from airplay on Internet radio platforms and terrestrial radio stations. While the promotional benefits of having your music played on the radio are clear, it's also important to understand the royalty compensation structure and build realistic expectations for how much you can expect to get paid from radio airplay. If you are pursuing radio play (online or terrestrial), be sure to create an account with [Soundexchange](#) to collect royalties for music that is played online.

What is Charting and How Does it Work?

One undeniable benefit of a successful large-scale radio campaign is the possibility of “charting” – getting enough airplay in a given period of time to garner a spot on the major radio charts. (e.g. Billboard and Mediabase). In addition to the large exposure you will receive from the airplay itself, being listed on one of the major radio charts puts your name in front of millions fans and the most influential industry professionals.

Billboard publishes a host of charts that are individually or collectively based on key fan interactions with music, including album sales and downloads, track downloads, radio airplay and touring as well as streaming and social interactions on Facebook, Twitter, Vevo, Youtube, Spotify and other popular online destinations for music. These measurements are tracked year-round by Billboard and its data partners, including Nielsen BDS, Nielsen SoundScan and Next Big Sound. To learn more about the type and volume of data that is collected to produce the Billboard charts, [visit their legend here](#).

The likelihood of getting sustained, high-volume airplay on a commercial station—which could result in charting—is relatively remote without the backing of a major label or the help of a seasoned radio promoter. However, there are some independent and genre-specific charts that could be within reach (e.g. The Deli Magazine; College Music Journal). While it’s important to understand how charting works—at least in broad strokes—there are many other ways an independent artist can seek out radio play and gain exposure through influential local, non-profit and college stations.

Additional Resources

- [Getting Radio Airplay: Tips from the Experts](#) - a guide to radio promotion and charting produced by CDBaby
- [Charting the Course: A Radio Promo Discussion](#) – Music ThinkTank’s seven-part interview series on radio promotion with leading professionals in the industry
- [How to Get Your Music Into Pandora Internet Radio](#) by Michael Zaprunder, Music Curator for Pandora