



The United Kingdom is the second biggest music market in Europe and a key focus for bands aiming at international recognition. A thriving live culture and relatively short distances makes the country an attractive destination for touring bands, but breaking in to the market is tricky...

MXD invited **Stefan Juhlin**, co-founder of the [Pitch & Smith](#) agency, to discuss the UK live market and how to approach it. As a Swede based in London, Stefan also has experience from re-locating a business and running it successfully abroad.

The Pitch & Smith agency is has offices in both Stockholm and London and represents artists such as **José González**, **Tove Lo** and **Wolf Parade**. Danish names on the roster include **When Saints Go Machine**, **Taragana Pyjarama** (both of which Stefan personally looks after), **Rangleklods** and **Søren Juul**. Pitch & Smith is generally considered one of the more established independent agencies in London, but it hasn't always been that way.

'One of the reasons we decided to open a branch in London had a lot to do with profiling the company. People tended to look at us as "the nice guys from Sweden". That was nice in a way but sometimes frustrating. Now when we're officially a British company the other

players see us as a serious competitor - for better and for worse. However, it's a more attractive position to be in for us.'

Being based in the British (maybe even European) music capital of London also has its benefits when it comes to doing business, according to Stefan.

'It's unfortunate, but especially the US industry takes you more seriously when you're working from London. Also it's easier to manage some of the business from here. We're an agency, which means we're selling the artists and bands to promoters who then take care of the production. Basically we book all territories except North and South America - for some reason France seems to attract a lot of our artists. Germany is also an important market for us. Being in London makes all that more manageable in a way.'

Stefan relocated to London from Stockholm a few years ago and in December 2014 Pitch & Smith officially became a British company. The Stockholm office is run by Stefan's long-time friend and co-founder Kalle Lundgren Smith. Actually it was Kalle who introduced Stefan to the work in the music industry. They first met as teenagers in their hometown of Eskilstuna where they arranged shows together.

'It was a lot of DIY, punk, hardcore and that kind of stuff. We also played music ourselves, which I guess everybody in the industry has been doing at some point. That kind of learning-by-doing background is very useful in general in this industry. That's how I got here - one way or another I've just been doing it constantly since high-school.'

Later Stefan and Kalle worked together at Luger agency in Stockholm and after less than a year they decided to start up their own company in 2007.

How do you start working with new bands?

'Let's just say it's very rare that I read an e-mail from a band and then follow up on it. Picking up a new band is a lot about gut feeling and the band being able to show some nice and solid facts and a good track record. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.'

'It's always nice to get recommendations. Like if some guy from **Beatbox** said to me that I should take a closer look at a band, the chances I will do so increase quite a lot.'

Stefan points out that having the right team to back up the band is important, especially when the band is aiming at international markets. Starting with a press agent is a good way

of getting a foot inside the door in the UK.

'Name-dropping is always good, and if you've managed to get a few mentions in some key media, like **The Guardian** e.g., then that's a nice start. Also, having someone already working for you in the UK, like a press agent, is a great way to motivate other players, like bookers.'

A holistic approach is also important. Says Stefan:

'Sometimes people are releasing physically on a local label in Scandinavia and digitally in the UK, but unfortunately that strategy is not very attractive to potential local partners over here. A digital release just isn't enough for the UK. When there's a local label on board as well as some press - that's when it starts to look good.'

Stefan still admits that sometimes it's Pitch & Smith that introduce new acts to the local scene.

'Occasionally we do take on bands without officially signing them, even if they don't have much of a track record. We can book a few shows, sometimes just to get to see them play live. In those cases the band has to sound really good and we have to really believe in them. On the other hand, we're in a really nice position if the band is successful.'

When all of the above requirements are met, Stefan recommends the bands to come over and play.

'When there's a release and some press, that's a good time to come over for a few shows. **Ja Ja Ja** actually works really well for that purpose. I personally think that that kind of shows staged by the industry tend to be a bit silly and un-cool. I'd rather recommend to play a branded stage hosted by **Vice** or something. But the Ja Ja Ja shows in London work really well - they've picked the perfect venue, the perfect day of the week and it's been going on for so long that it's become a brand. The bands are really good and they actually have the momentum that I mentioned.'

You work with a few Danish bands and you're also pretty well acquainted with the Danish industry. What do you think about the Danish music scene at the moment?

'During recent years there's been some really exciting developments. There seems to be some really great stuff going on and Denmark is definitely getting closer to Sweden when it

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comes to exporting great pop music. I think **SPOT festival**, **ROSA** and **MXD** are to thank for that - the work they do really pays off. I've stopped being surprised if some really big and really great artist comes from Denmark!