

From mxd.dk: 10 things to keep in mind when hiring a PR company



Your PR company, or *publicists* as labels call them, are one of the key figures in your album/tour campaign once you are at the stage of releasing music/news into the world. Publicists are the ones presenting your work to blogs, magazines, radio, newspapers, tastemakers, tv and other people in the industry who are relevant for your type of music. They are also the ones that will tell your story, get new people excited about your work, and the ones being able (together with your label/management) to strategize the best way, and the best time possible, to use the tools you have.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when hiring your team:

- 1. Are you ready to hire a PR company?** The answer to this is “yes”, if you have new music, a budget, and an “artistic persona” to present to the specific market. This means that aside the music, you have (or are working on), press pictures, videos, a biography and other tools/content that the PR person will be using to approach medias. It also always helps to have a “release” planned, in the form of a single, EP or album...but depending on your audience this might not be necessary.
- 2. What kind of PR do you actually need?** This is something to think about before starting to approach PR companies. It depends heavily on your audience, and the market

you are trying to penetrate. If you are an electronic artist trying to make an impact in the UK, your focus (and money) should probably go into online PR, specialized radio PR and, if you have a bit of money left, club PR.

If you are a hard rock band, companies that do combined print and online press, plus “street marketing” might be your best choice. If you are heading more broad into the pop direction, you can start with online, print, and, once you have a bit more presence in the market, add radio and TV. If you have a tour coming up then also focus on regional press and radio. The choices are endless, but it’s all about using your resources wisely, and at the right time. Campaigns can also be very successful with just one company doing print, online and specialized radio PR, especially for newer acts.

3. When is the right time to get a PR team on board? It’s a fine balance and it’s something to start planning and thinking about in good time. With some PR companies you pay per month, and with others per project, so your budget will dictate your timing. Usually album campaigns with tours attached to them can go up to 6 months, others work it just 3 months (which is the minimum recommended for an album campaign).

If you are a band that wants to get print press, it’s very important you keep in mind that some monthly magazines of importance need the album 4-6 weeks before release date to get in the right issue close to your release date. That means that the editor needs to get the music early enough to pass it on to the right journalist, and then he/she needs enough time to listen, before they can write about it, to get it within deadline for the layout of the magazine - and then it still takes time for it to go to print and into the shelves.

This also means your publicist needs to get music/records (yes, in Germany and France, for example, you will be asked for physical promo copies of your single/EP/Album for key press/radio) in good time so that he/she can send them with the post to the editors before those 4-6 weeks deadline. If your campaign is based around digital and online strategies of course things are a bit more relaxed with deadlines, but keep in mind most indie/alternative/rock/singersongwriter’s campaigns start with singles weeks/months before the ep/album is due to release, to create enough momentum for the actual release. So your publicists needs to be on board in good time to prepare. If tour PR is what you are looking into, listings, and key journalists agendas also get booked in good time, especially in main cities (Paris, London, Berlin, etc).

4. Who to approach? This is something to spend quite some time in as well. As mentioned

in the introduction, it is in your publicists hands how and to who your music is being presented to. An indie album in the hands of a hard rock journalist of an influential magazine can lead to be horrible review, which can influence other tastemakers. But how to find the right person? Best thing is to grab the medias you discover bands/artists in, and look into bands that are in a bit of the same stage and have a bit of a parallel artistic direction. This means this particular PR company not only works acts like you, but more importantly, can get them on the media. Check Google or the band's Facebook, find their PR company name and have a look at their website to see what other acts they have worked on. Do check that their list is up-to-date, as bands can go through many PR companies, but not all of them do well. Professionalism, charisma, network and excitement about your music are key. If your publicist is not excited nor confident about your work, that will come across to the medias and your time and money will be wasted. Please beware of PR companies who just take projects on board for a fee, it happens often that bands/artists end up with big bills and zero press. You hire them, they provide a service, so if you have to beg for a company to take you onboard, it's likely to fail.

5. How to approach them? After you have done your research and you are sure about a few candidates, drop them an email. Be short, focused and clear. Send a link to your music, a few lines of where you are in your career (old press, shows, festivals you have played, etc), the timelines you have (release dates, tours, and other partners in the market), and of course why you think they are a good match. Ask them if they could be interested and then jump on the phone or go out for a coffee with them and see if your ideas match. But again, remember you are potentially hiring them, so there should be excitement for the music as the base for a possible collaboration. If they aren't excited, and believe that they can achieve results, they shouldn't be taking you onboard.

6. Proposal, goals. Once you have found your match, and they are interested in working with you, then it's time to get into detail. Before agreeing on anything, kindly request them for a "proposal". This is a short document with their ideas, basic strategy, timeline and goals. It will include a list of medias they want to approach and who they see supporting your release/project. Always be realistic when reading this document, and make sure you also think these are achievable results for where you are in your career. They will also write their fee, period of working and what tools they will need from you - if not, do request this, so you can actually have an idea of what you are getting for your money. And very importantly: Keep this document, so at the end of the campaign you can evaluate the services that were provided to you.

7. Payment and other costs. Payments vary, if it's a month by month campaign, you just pay per month once you receive an invoice. If it's a project fee, we recommend paying 50% upfront, and the other 50% plus costs after the campaign. That gives you a bit of leverage during the project.

When budgeting your PR campaign, do keep in mind the value of the physical records you are using, the postage costs to send them to your publicists, and of course the postage costs from the publicists to the medias (usually they put this amount on their proposals). Also, when the publicist needs to travel to arrange press dates or come to your shows to sort out interviews and radio sessions, you'll very likely have to cover those costs - especially when your publicist doesn't live in the same city as these activities take place. Make sure you are clear with your publicist, so that they run these costs by you beforehand. Then you won't get surprised when you get a bill for a return train from Manchester to London, 2 nights in a hotel and 4 Uber rides.

8. Reports. One of the things you can, and should, expect from your publicist is reports. Depending on the campaign these can be weekly or bi-weekly, and should state the new additions of press/results that has been achieved. Make sure you get these in time, and even more importantly, make sure to take the time to read them and learn from them. Usually these reports also come with descriptions of the media and their circulations, and it's a great way for you as an artist/manager to educate yourself on the media of the countries you are trying to have an impact on: Media come and go, and their circulation and impacts vary often. Also, it's nice if you are able to comment back on the reports to your publicist to keep them engaged.

If you have various PR teams on board, make sure they see each other's reports and results as often as possible. Key breaks in press can help radio support and viceversa. Plus, it can also give birth to a bit of friendly competition between your different PR teams, or make the one lacking feel the need to perform better to match the rest of the crew.

9. Expectations. Sometimes campaigns are successful and run like a well-oiled train. Sometimes they don't, even if your publicist is working hard and doing their best. It's easy to catch these "bumps" if you are getting the reports, and going through them, seeing what goals/targets haven't been achieved, and what's missing.

Don't be shy to ask your publicists if certain publications are passing on the music, so your publicist can explain what their feedback was. This can also help your knowledge of how medias work. If most targets are not being reached despite hard work, then it might be time

to rethink the campaign and formulate a new strategy for this specific market. Maybe the music magazines are not the point of entry, maybe it's the lifestyle ones.

It's vital that you continuously evaluate the reports, chat with your publicists and most importantly, that you're open to having to deviate strategy. And also don't forget that once the publicist has accepted taking on your project, then it's expected from them to continue working it in the timeframe agreed upon, in the best way possible. Don't accept "no one is interested", as it's part of their work to find someone in the media landscape who is, and what the best way is to present your music to them.

10. Evaluating. Once the project is done, make sure to thank your publicists for their time and efforts, pay your bill and then go back to the proposal you got before hiring them and evaluate your campaign. This will help you learn and understand the market, it's media, and more importantly set the base for where you are, and what you need to achieve on the next run. And as a rule, stay loyal with the people that are good to you. A good publicist who sticks with you for a few albums, doing good work will know who loves you, who needs convincing, and who not to bother with.