A CLOSER LOOK AT THE COUNTRY MUSIC INDUSTRY

- addressing new changes
- answering tough questions
- behind the scenes

INSIDE A MAJOR RECORD LABEL

MAKING STARS

how labels push artists towards stardom

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

with industry professionals

7 Ways
to make it in the music business
Intro

Welcome to theBeat!

You’re reading a one-of-a-kind magazine designed for those interested in learning more about the music business. This magazine is a mock-up magazine with the purpose of fulfilling necessary requirements for “HnRS 4990: The Honors Project” offered at Bowling Green State University.

HnRS 4990 is the capstone course for Bowling Green State University’s Honors Program. Completion of the class is dependent upon the completion of the Honors Project. The Honors Project is meant to demonstrate a student’s culmination of learning throughout his or her undergraduate experience. It must generate original scholarship, make interdisciplinary connections, and provide a justification of any theories/methodologies used. The interdisciplinary connections made must incorporate both a student’s main discipline of study, along with another field of study. With that being said, the basis of theBeat is mostly marketing and general business (within the country music industry). Other incorporated fields include art, music, and design.

All research was intended for the country music format, but findings may not be strictly limited to one genre of music. TheBeat will examine pertinent creative and analytic choices made during the launch of an artist’s musical career. It will answer questions such as, “What does a record label look for when selecting a new artist to sign?” and, “What steps does a record label take after signing an artist to help the artist gain positive recognition?” These questions, along with others, have been addressed through secondary and primary research.

I have included sources from prominent research associations, award-winning authors, and personal interviews I conducted. To really make theBeat something I am proud of, I chose to incorporate several articles about the music business that I wrote based on direct experiences. I attained many of these while living in Nashville for nine months, and interning at Warner Music Nashville, one of “The Big Three” major record labels. My other work related experiences in the field include my employment at both MajorLabelScout.com and the radio station WBGU-FM 88.1 cast out of Bowling Green, Ohio. The entire project showcases the knowledge I’ve gained during my undergraduate career both from my education at the university and through direct experiences outside of the classroom.

Similar to my own learning style, theBeat is not afraid to ask questions, or challenge already existing research. It poses and answers the question of what differentiates the “good” from the “great”. It also offers a comparative view of what “making it” really means.

TheBeat is representative of my time as an undergraduate student at Bowling Green State University. This time has been a monumental period of growth in my life, and I have worked hard to reflect that in this piece. It is my I hope you find theBeat just as special as I do.

Cheers!

editor
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DISCOVERING TALENT

So how does John Doe, a “nobody” musician hoping for fame, get to celebrity status? How did Tim McGraw become Tim McGraw or The Beatles, The Beatles?

In the Nashville community, some of the most prominent labels are Sony Music Nashville, Capitol Nashville, Warner Music Nashville, and Universal Nashville. Each of these labels functions with the help of multiple departments within the organization. All of these record labels receive unsolicited music. How did Tim McGraw become Tim McGraw or The Beatles, The Beatles? The Beatles, The Beatles?

Let's start off with ways that music can make its way to an A&R department:

UNSOLICITED DELIVERY
It is a rare circumstance that an A&R person inserts a randomly unsolicited CD into their record player, falls in love with the sound, and immediately seeks the artist out to propose a deal. In fact, this basically never happens. The chances of such a chain of events taking place is possible, but rare. So no record labels don’t even accept unsolicited mail. If a record label accepts unsolicited music submissions, any person can submit music, regardless of industry connections or musical history. Unsolicited demos do not even have to be professionally recorded (however, that does not hurt). The music may or may not get listened to, depending on a label’s specific philosophies about unsolicited music. Some labels may block all unsolicited mail, or some may block only international submissions. Others may accept any and all incoming submissions.

There is a lesser chance of an artist getting signed through sending unsolicited material to a major label. The A&R team already gets a lot of music. Unsolicited packages tend to be home to many unfamiliar names, no professional contacts, or experience. While there is always the “you never know” mentality accompanying unsolicited packages, the amount of exceptional submissions to not-so-exceptional submissions tends to be a poor ratio.

At Warner Music Nashville unsolicited material is accepted. Every day interns check the mail, open up the unsolicited submissions, and listen. Submissions range from someone pitching a song or someone trying to become an artist. Either way, the name of the person, the song he or she sent, and any other contact information is recorded in a log and saved. The likelihood of a record label moving forward with an unsolicited demo is not as likely as if an artist or writer had a publishing deal, an agent, or a manager. That’s why it’s helpful for an artist to have a manager or agent who already has connections within the industry. It can make it a lot easier to get the music heard.

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In comparison, Sony Music Nashville will not accept any unsolicited material. As stated in their artist and song submission policy, unsolicited mail will never be listened to. Likewise, any unsolicited songs sent through e-mail will be unread and deleted.

Other major labels have similar approaches, like Capitol Nashville. From their artist and song submission policy, Capitol Nashville directly states, “We’re unable to accept unsolicited demos or music that we haven’t asked for from you directly. Typically, the material we select from for our artists is found by our talent scouts, given to us by a publishing company, or provided by other established contacts including producers and songwriters. However, we encourage you to keep performing and recording.”

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FINDING THE NEXT BIG THING

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“Give me that artist that has something to say that I haven’t heard before—where you haven’t heard anybody say ‘I love you’ this way before.”
— Scott Borchetta, BMLG

“We’ve signed maybe one act that came in off the street. It’s all word of mouth. We all know everyone in town.”
— Jim Catino, Sony

REFERRALS
New talent is most often discovered and followed through referrals. Reputable sources that suggest artists to A&R reps are more likely to get heard than those without reliable backing. Human nature is to trust in that which we know. A person is naturally more inclined to check out a recommendation of a movie or album if they hear it from a friend. It basically works the same way in the music industry. A&R will listen when someone they trust really believes in new talent. These “someones” are most often artist managers, song pitchers, and talent agents.

Talent agencies seek artists, develop them into what they want, and promote them like crazy. They host showcases featuring the artists they represent. Two of the biggest talent agencies in country music are William Morris Entertainment (WME) and Creative Artists Agency (CAA). The shippers bring out A&R reps from all different labels, and people curious in what hot new talent is out there. Folks come out to the showcases, listen, and follow an artist. It may be several months, years, or maybe even never before an artist with a talent agency gets signed to a label. Many labels may choose to just follow an artist for awhile before they make a decision. Given WME and CAA long-standing, positive track record with finding successful artists, they still serve as a trustworthy source for A&R reps.

In a Music News interview, Sony Music Nashville’s VP of A&R, Jim Catino, had a conversation on the way he discovers music. When asked what are the chances of getting heard through cold calls, e-mails, or showcases from people the A&R staff hasn’t met, he commented, “I’ve been doing A&R for almost 10 years and I’d say we’ve signed maybe one act that just came in off the street. It’s all word of mouth. We all know everyone in town. It still comes from the publishers, the producers, and managers. They are all constantly shopping the artist.” His comment further endorses the importance of developing and maintaining respectable connections within the industry.

In the same interview Melissa Spillman, Manager of A&R at Capitol Records Nashville, commented, “Personal relationships are still paramount. Publishers who have a presence on Music Row and songwriters and artists who make themselves known, those are the best ways to get music heard.”
Lucky for me, I was able to sit in on a meeting with the very talented A&R staff at Warner Music Nashville. Read on to see what I learned...

It is four o’clock on a Thursday. Typical loud, thumping beats and melodies have been replaced with the calm, sullen hums of office lights. Everyone seems to be fixated within his or her work, a steady and focused concentration. In my wing of the hallway, a very important meeting is about to take place in a few minutes. Weeks of preparation and tough decision-making have led up to this meeting. The A&R staff and CEO of Warner Music Nashville are meeting with A&R’s senior vice president, Scott Hendricks. They are to discuss which songs are going to be pitched to Blake Shelton for his upcoming album. Of the thousands of song submissions WMN receives each week, the A&R staff will choose just sixteen songs today. Whether or not those songs get cut is up to them. Whether or not those songs get cut is up to Hendricks. Whether or not those songs get cut is up to Blake. Whether or not those songs get cut is up to...

As five of the most key people in the company sit in Scott’s closed-off office, I enter and feel lucky enough to be able to sit in. Scott sits behind his desk, as the others sit in chairs that outline the perimeter of his room. I chose the empty seat, and begin to observe what is taking place.

Cris Lacy, Vice President of A&R, tosses Hendricks a CD. It is her turn to share the songs she has collected. The CD is filled with handpicked songs she has chosen forBlake to cut. Hendricks pops the CD into a disc player and sits back. He has the final say in all big decisions. Occasionally Lacy instructs him to “skip to #4” or “listen to the great bridge and chorus of #7,” but mostly, the music speaks for itself.

When a song begins to play, we all remain silent. Drifting into our own personal place, some close their eyes or stare into the distance. A boot taps along to the beat, fingers dance on an armchair, and a head bobs in a rhythmic motion. I begin to envision the possibility of Shelton singing this song. I imagine him and the reaction of his fans as he reaches his hand out to them while singing this song. I can almost see a tear fall from an eager fan’s eye. I see a man shout the words at the loudest decibel he is capable of. A women his senior feels as though she is about to faint and…

Suddenly, the music stops.

“Nooo, I don’t like it,” Hendricks remarks. “Alright, go to number 5,” Lacy responds. And just like that it’s on to the next one. And the room turns quiet again, and all that matters in that moment is the song that’s playing. And what has just taken place is proof of a beautiful balance. There is no useless bickering, or hard feelings. This small team has an unstated understanding of one another. The way they operate is a delicate balance of mutual understanding. Everyone feels a song differently, but when one is right, they all seem to know. Eyes widen and smiles open up. And occasionally, if that simultaneous love for a song isn’t there, and someone still really believes in the song he or she pitched, (s)he will defend it, giving reasoning as to why it’s deserving. In the end, through the many decisions it takes to get there, they will decide on sixteen songs to pitch to Blake.

Observing this meeting was a true testament to the involved A&R process. Thinking about what I’d witnessed, I considered a few things. The music business is centered in the fast-paced entertainment industry, offering a very limited amount of safety nets. Finance, sales, and marketing departments can estimate figures as to how much revenue new artists will generate. However, the way the public chooses to react to the artist is never perfectly predictable. Whether an artist becomes the “next big thing” or another one-hit wonder is ultimately up to the public. That’s a daunting investment for any company, and a pertinent reason why the A&R team is vital. They provide consistent creative assurance. They are the team that picks and produces the music that the rest of the company divisions will later work with.

When the meeting came to a close, I asked all those in the room what they believed really made a song a hit. Lacy was one of the first to respond by saying, “You know you have a great song when you find yourself listening to it outside of work. It’s something you want to share with the people you care about, and the people whose opinions you value.”

As Hendricks chimed in with a similar response, stating that great music is all about what you “feel is special” and what “makes you dance on an armchair, and a head bobs in a rhythmic motion.”
Merchandising helps keep an artist profitable, especially in recent years since album sales have drastically decreased for the entire industry.

There are two types of merchandising: tour merchandising and retail merchandising. Tour merchandising includes any merchandise sold at a concert or show. Retail merchandising is everything else: online goods, fan club products, mail order goods, or products sold at retail stores.

Historically, tour merchandising has been more profitable for artists. Fans are enthused by a show they just saw, and want a souvenir. However, retail merchandising is also critical to help further promote and familiarize the public with an artist. Living in the digital Age makes it easier to reach an audience with a wide demographic, regardless of the exact physical location.

Another resource to sell and distribute products is electronic commerce, most often referred to as “e-commerce.” E-commerce includes all products bought and sold over electronic systems, like the Internet. In recent years, e-commerce has played an increasingly large role in the success of a business. Through the Internet, consumers have the option to purchase products with a click of a button.

The U.S. Census Bureau released research on the third quarterly retail e-commerce sales. The research sampled over 12,500 businesses using e-commerce, and assigned weights to each business based on their respective sales figures (to serve as representative samples for the entire U.S. e-commerce businesses). Findings revealed that an estimated $57 billion was racked up in e-commerce during the 3rd quarter, a 3.7 percent increase from 2nd quarter sales.

That’s just in the U.S. alone! Taking and fulfilling orders in other countries also expands the opportunities for sales.

As technology expands, so do opportunities for sales. Online sales are not limited to just computer desktop interactions. E-commerce can also incorporate mobile commerce, also known as “m-commerce.” M-commerce includes all sales transactions that are executed through a mobile device. Products like the tablet or smartphone are key in this market. National Public Radio, NPR, reported 2012 to be “the year of mobile commerce.”

M-commerce accounted for $25 billion worth of consumer purchases in 2012. This puts m-commerce at 11% of total e-commerce sales.

Notorious digital media and Internet marketing research company, eMarketer, expects 2012 sales of $25 billion to grow upwards of $86.9 billion by 2016. They reported that the tablet to be the biggest driver of sales. It makes sense as one considers the ease of buying online, especially mobile. Now consumers can buy a shirt in less than 30 seconds when they’re standing in line, sitting in a dull meeting, or passing time at the doctor.

Selling artist merchandise helps generate sales in more ways than one. Not only does the artist typically receive a percentage of the gross sales, they also gain recognition from consistently being in the presence of the public eye. It’s a simple concept that drives business. The more people see/hear/experience someone, the more familiar they become with that person. So selling merchandise at shows, in stores, through the mail, online, and in any other imaginable place will help an artist become familiar to the public.

The most successful internationally recognized superstars seem to capitalize on these opportunities. Taylor Swift, the only female to have two albums sell more than 1 million copies in the first week, has taken advantage of many merchandising opportunities. Swift has partnered with Walgreens, Papa Johns, and Keds for the release of her latest album “Red.” Keds is selling limited edition red shoes for her new album. Walgreens is selling her album in stores. Papa Johns allows customers to order Swift’s new album with the purchase of a pizza, all of which can be delivered to your door… Yes, you read that correctly, it can be DELIVERED to your house. Although seemingly unconventional, it is these types of promotional merchandising ideas and strategic partnerships that push an artist’s sales to new heights.
The role of the publicity department is to increase positive exposure for artists through a variety of media. They are typically involved in launching campaigns and monitoring the press mentions of artists. They attract attention and create hype. The critical eye of publicity/public relation employees reviews everything from photo shoots and television appearances, to radio interviews and press releases. Press releases announce important release dates, appearances, personal statements, and more to the media. All of the previously mentioned outlets help publicity create an image for an artist, grow that image, and maintain the public intrigue connected to that image.

Major record labels typically handle publicity in one of two ways. They can either outsource publicity services from independent firms, or they can utilize their own publicity department (if they have one). Sometimes, a hybrid of these two is used. Bob Merlis, owner of Los Angeles publicity firm Merlis For Hire, worked in publicity at a label and then he created his own publicity firm. In an interview with Artisthouse Music, he mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of both. The benefit of outsourcing is the specialized services of the independent publicity firm and the reduction of workload for the in-house publicity department (if applicable). The disadvantage of outsourcing is the additional cost.

Another increasingly prevalent source for artists to gain exposure is through social media. Social media platforms help instill a better presence in the marketplace for all artists. These platforms serve as an easy way to connect and interact with the public. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram all help stimulate public awareness of an artist. In a recent survey by Forbes, 100 CMOs were questioned as to how social media impacts awareness and loyalty. Over half of the CMOs who responded represented companies bringing in annual revenue streams over $1 billion. The vast majority of these CMOs agreed social media impacts brand awareness, brand loyalty, and sales. When handled correctly, they all agreed these would be impacted positively. Publicity can help drive ideas and campaigns through these platforms, further exposing the artist to the public eye.

Publicity is critical when it comes to generating buzz and excitement for an artist. They work to keep artists relevant in a constantly changing, competitive industry.
The world of promotion is a fast-moving, constant race to the top. The promotion team is responsible for getting artist(s)’ current singles played on radio. This hard-working team is especially pertinent in country music, since the country music format still heavily relies on radio. The success of an artist at radio can often determine their overall success in the marketplace.

One common thread in the promotion world is the use of charts. Charts can include a mixture of publications: Most rank the popularity and time-relative movement of current singles in a specific format. This is based on the radio stations that are monitored, or report their playlists. A couple popular publications that issue charts are Mediabase and Billboard.

Smaller radio stations can report to radio magazines what they are playing, and at what frequency. Some of these smaller stations are non-reporting. They don’t have to report, but it can help put together a bigger picture of what is being played across the country.

Generally, a label cares more about bigger radio stations. The larger stations do not always have the choice of whether or not they can report. Big commercial stations are automatically monitored. A breakdown of these popular charts may offer more insight about what exactly a promotion team monitors, why, and how it determines their next actions. Let’s check them out –

**Billboard**

Billboard is an international publication that shares current news, themes, and trends about the music industry. They cover all genres of music. Their most popular charts are released each week: The complete Hot 100, Billboard 200 chart, the top half of the current chart catalog, and the top 10 of historical charts. Billboard states that Billboard Charts are “calculated using custom formulas collecting sales, streaming, and radio play”. Billboard charts are some of the most widely used charts in the entire industry.

Billboard differs from Mediabase in the respect that Billboard’s chart ranks singles by audience impressions. They get the audience impression numbers through a research company called Nielsen Broadcast Data Systems, or BDS. To get the numbers, BDS targets prominent radio stations across the United States. Then they gather a sample of typical listeners and monitor what their listening patterns are throughout the day. BDS calculates how many listeners each station has and multiplies that by how many spins a single song gets (or the number of times a specific single is played in a day). They also take into consideration that if a song gets played at noon it will probably have more listeners than a song playing at 3am. This is all factored into their mathematical system. After attaining numbers on songs by each station, BDS sums up all of the numbers to get a national view of what’s popular. Summing all of these numbers associated with specific audiences across the country in relation to their listeners is the “audience impression”. And it’s those final numbers that Billboard uses to create their charts, one of the most accurate and reliable in the industry.

**Mediabase**

Mediabase, a division of Premiere Radio Networks, is based on the activity of over 1,800 radio stations and over 175 radio networks in both the United States and Canada. Mediabase, or “MB”, monitors the activity of these stations 24/7 with real people. MB employees listen to stations and report what is playing. This information is then collected from all over the country and a chart is created. Each chart features real-time information about radio airplay, which songs are playing most frequently and what songs are predicted to keep rising, or falling, on the chart.

Reporting radio stations subscribe to MB’s monitoring service through network connections. The MB network consists of more than 1,800 radio affiliates. Other people who use and rely on these charts, like record companies and entertainment executives, subscribe on a cash basis. While some record labels may try and contact non-reporting stations to play their artists’ singles, it is the reporting radio stations that are typically the targeted stations. It is because it’s these stations that directly affect the charts that the industry uses as a whole. They typically have larger listenership as well.

Information on these charts not only help the promotion staff at the record label, but they also offer guidance to radio programmers. Radio programmers can access MB charts and determine what songs to play on their show. The chart could be considered a guideline for programmers. By seeing what is most popular, and most played across the country, programmers can develop their show to appease to the masses.

So, here’s the bottom line: The chart numbers will fluctuate, but it’s the promo reps and regional managers’ job to keep pushing their artists to the top of the charts. They are the warriors. The fighters. The strategic radio rockstars that make #1 happen.
What is it that drives the success of a singer, band, or artist? Perhaps it’s the inner workings of a passionate team or the culmination of shared creativity, intellect, and drive. To learn more about these influences and gain a better understanding of the industry as a whole, I sat down for a conversation with Peter Strickland, General Manager at Warner Music Nashville.

Strickland’s experiences qualify him as one of the most dynamic, creative thinkers I have ever met. The Boston native first set out to work as a buyer for the chain of record stores, Strawberries Incorporated. He worked there for 4 years before he decided to take a different job that would allow him to get more involved in marketing. This next position was a Field Rep for Warner/Elektra/Atlantic (WEA) Distribution.

Strickland has worked for Warner Music Group for 25 years, 19 of those years being with Warner Music Nashville (WMN), the country music division of Warner Music Group. He went from WEA to WMN as the National Sales Director, and eventually became Vice President of Sales and Marketing for WMN.

In 2007 he was promoted to the Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing. Just this year he was promoted again, to General Manager of WMN.

Throughout Strickland’s career, he has generated successful campaigns for acts such as Faith Hill, Big & Rich, Blake Shelton, Randy Travis, Dwight Yoakam, and many others. He is also a driving force behind Jack Records, the comedy label imprint formed with Warner Brothers in 2004. Jack Records supports notorious comedians such as Jeff Foxworthy, Larry the Cable Guy, Bill Engvall, Ron White, and Lisa Lampanelli.

Hear what Strickland has to say on marketing, decision-making, and what it takes to make it in the music business. – On the following page.
At CMA After Party (11/1/12) you mentioned you've been with WMG for 25 years and that it's the best you've seen it. What do you contribute to that?

Leadership. Espo (referring to John Esposito, current CEO of WMN) brings a leadership skill that is inviting. It allows people to think freely without having to worry about bringing things up in meetings. He has management skills that bring on that type of work ethic, and he gives the ability to take employee skill sets to the next level – where creativity is encouraged.

If you're too structured, creativity is suffocated. Everyone at WMN, based on working in that environment, brings more of a family community (rather than “this is my job – I come in, and get out”). That's important. Everyone here is building and working on the same team, towards the same goal. Here there is a family/friend atmosphere, and that is really important for the success of what we do. If you have the right people in the right positions and leadership that lets people do their jobs, and spread their wings, then that leads to success.

What does marketing/sales/brand management use to do research before they make strategic decisions?

Because brand management is the core department that other departments come to, we use radio information, publicity information, and sales information. All of that helps us in determining a path in which to market. Although you have all that information in front of you, your gut plays a role in this – and that's what makes the music industry different from so many other industries. Art is different than selling a product even though we are selling a product (the end result being a CD or whatever that may be is a product) – the artist itself is art, and the goal is to brand the artist, then the product stems from that, which will eventually sell if you're hitting the right people. If you're lucky 1 or 2 out of 10 artists actually break. So that's about 8 that usually don't make it. It's analyzing all these different sources of information, and your gut telling you where you go from there. Sometimes you just ignore it because you feel this is the path you take.

There are other influences that stem from the market place. Hunter Hayes for instance, he is so talented, but everyone was saying he was the "Justin Beiber" of country. It seems like that was their main focus.

Quite a popular nickname for Hunter!

Exactly. And my goal was not to focus on that. It was to focus on his talent. His talent will give him longevity in the business - Not the screaming teens that are his biggest fans now. Because that lifespan is very short lived. My goal was to focus on his talent, and not marketing to his younger audience that was going to happen on its own anyways, and we didn’t need to fuel it. We needed to establish him as an artist. I’m not saying we nailed it perfectly, but it definitely worked out well. Getting 3 Grammy nominations solidifies that we've gone down the right path – 18 months in the market place and the last 12 months really becoming popular. That tells me that we are becoming popular. That tells me that we've taken a lot of good steps. Have we misstepped? Probably we have, but it's not like a big sore on our head, it was an “alright it didn't work, let's just go to the next thing”. Most of the puzzle pieces have really fallen into place for him.

In comparison, the band HER & Kings County falls into the 8/10 that do not make it. A&R's job is to find talent whether it fits in “the box” or not. It is based off of raw talent.

HER & Kings County was going to be a radio-driven artist. HER & Kings County decided to take a different path (based on their different style – a unique approach designed for them). They had been on the road building fans and our goal was to help them continue building fans on the road, while creating a record. What happened over time was that they ignored the fact the road was what gave them the path, and they were on the road less and less. Their road presence was important in building their career, because their music was not straight down the middle (something that radio would immediately accept). You have to build the grounds well underneath it. Then when you go to radio with something totally different you actually have people responding positively rather than shell shock. So say the Northeast is where they're from, and they did 100 dates in the Northeast for a year or 2 years, then when their song is played on the radio, people will know who they are, or have some sort of recognition of their name (lessening the shock).

On another note, we developed a visual for them. We made music videos and set up a web presence. But at the end of the day the band really didn't have the same initial vision that we all collectively decided on. While the vision has the ability to change, their circumstance made it hard for them to do that, since they were so far “outside of the box”. It's really hard to break somebody like that.
So, how much say does brand management get in whether you commit to an artist or not before the initial sign?

None. I don’t want a say.

Really?! You don’t WANT a say?

No. Because my job is not to identify songs and great talent. My job is to make stars. Once A&R identifies talent, then I have to build the brand. If asked my opinion, I’ll give it. But I don’t want my opinion to sway their opinion, because it’s up to A&R and the president of the company who they sign. I’m involved sometimes in the process, but I’ve made it clear to them that I don’t want to be a big influencer. That’s what they do. And that’s just like I wouldn’t want them telling me something about my part of job (how to dress somebody or how they should do their hair or what brand we’re going after). We try to stay in our own lanes. When the lanes get blurred between departments, it makes it very hard to make a decision.

So, I saw the Railers live (newly signed WMN band) and WOW are they awesome! I heard you requested to be their personal brand manager. What about them made you decide to do that?

Well, you’re one step ahead of me. I haven’t seen them live yet. A&R and Espo met with them and they unanimously signed them. We all met up later and went to dinner and I explained to the band what I do. We had a blast at dinner. When you sit cold at a dinner with people you will know if it’s someone you want to be with or not. I knew right away I wanted to work with them closely. It’s just like relationships. Ya know?

Like a really great, or really awkward, first date?!

Say a band came back with a 100 clippings of someone like The Rolling Stones, and you thought it was a terrible choice of image for them. Do you tell them that? …Or how do you handle the situation?

Yes. I tell them if I don’t think it’s a good fit. Ultimately, I don’t push my decisions on them. I’m here to help and guide and keep out of harms way. I will tell them if I think going in a certain direction will hurt them. If they totally disagree, I won’t stop them.

We’re an artist-friendly label. We’re not dictators. We’re just here because we have the experience. Take my information, absorb it, and make a decision. I won’t force you.

Take someone like the Josh Abbott band. Josh plays certain songs because he believes he knows his target market. He’s looking for songs that appeal to 20-somethings, the college generation. It seems like a valuable quality to work with an artist who is aware of who is their target audience.

I’ll agree with you to a certain extent. Considering the other side, Josh signed to Warner. He can play in college bars to those 20-somethings for as long as he wants to. But he signed to a major label to expand that audience. He can only go this far (holds hands close together), but if he wants to go this far (holds hands far apart), then he has to look to the future rather than just the present. I’m sure he knows his audience inside and out, but let’s talk big picture: the future.

Interesting. Just to switch gears a bit, I’ll ask this next question about Miss Taylor Swift: Billboard ranked her #1 on the “Top 40 Money Makers” list, and Forbes #11 in the “Celebrity 100” top earnings list BEFORE her latest album ‘Red’ came out. Now she’s got partnerships with CoverGirl, Target, and Keds – even unconventional deals with businesses like Walgreens and Papa John’s. What is your take on these unconventional partnerships and how do you go about deciding whether or not to go through with a potentially risky, untraditional type of deal?

You have to get yourself to a certain level before you even have access to that. Taylor Swift probably would have never been able to do that on her first record. I remember when all this was happening with RED, and everyone else said “We have to do that too!” If I went in with Hunter Hayes to do those types of deals, there is no way that we could pull it off because his numbers are not nearly as impressive. Taylor Swift is a household name.

HAI! Yes! You get a feel from the room. They were very colorful. They were put together. Even though I hadn’t heard a beat from them, I thought they really had their stuff together. I really dig them, and connected with them.

My next step is to sit down with the band and A&R and ask them what is their vision. Where do you see yourself? What’s A&R’s vision? What do you see them looking like? What do you want to look like? If you were to buy a thousand magazines off the newsstand and pull pages and come back to me, what do you see your image looking like? I tell them to do that. Clip magazines. Bring it back to me. I won’t necessarily buy you a bunch of clothes, but give me an idea where your head is at so I can mold it.

Being in a band can be difficult too. Where is the main focus? Is it the female? Is the lead singer always the front man? Are there several band mates in the front? Where is the focal point? The way they answer individually will give you an idea of where to be. Figure out what works visually. And things will probably change as you develop the brand before hitting market.
I'm not discrediting Taylor Swift, but she didn't
Consequentially, that hurts any other artist
Swift's eyes is a success (because she got the
John's eyes is a failure. the campaign in Taylor
9,000 pieces out of that 175,000 (5% of stock)
175,000 Taylor Swift RED CDs one-way,
release. It created awareness.
I had them put sales ad on the boxes letting
When Larry the Cable Guy was at his height, I
the Papa John's campaign crazy or brilliant?
big Machine (Taylor Swift's label) and
any other potential label's relationship is
hurt with Dominos?
Going forward, Domino's is going to be
thinking twice about it. Big Machine (BMLG),
Taylor Swift's record label, wound up taking
those records back even though they were
only sold one way. They understood they got
the short end of the stick, but it still leaves a
feeling of a lack of success. If BMLG were to say
take 10,000, and see how the campaign works,
and Dominos sold 9,000 – then Domino's
would have thought “Hey, this worked great!”
and have a greater chance of embarking on
future campaigns with other artists.
The same thing happened at Walmart. They
rolled out t-shirts in various Walmart locations
and they over-shipped. They had WAY too
many t-shirts. They didn’t sell. They sold 15% of
what they bought.
You really have to have a sense of the market,
like what the market can bare when you put
it out there. With Walmart, it’s always risky
because they have roughly 4,000 locations.
So if you put 10 t-shirts in each location, that's
40,000 t-shirts. That's a lot of t-shirts. And if
they don't sell, you're screwed. Maybe you can
sell them on the tour, but there isn't that
guarantee. You HAVE to make sure you know
your market.
So you've have done brand management
for a majority of your career. What is it
about brand management that is your
favorite aspect of it?
In brand management you do have to have a
business sensibility because you're in charge
of the various budgets for different artists. You
have to determine how and where money gets
spent – you have to understand that concept
and have it in your DNA. There are creative
guys who have no concept of the money side.
So it's important to understand business. There
is a fine line between having business drive
creativity or having creativity drive business.
And it has to be creative driving business. Not
the other way around.
So why I think this job is great, because we
start with the artist since day one of
signing and it's our goal to get the artist ready
for marketplace to succeed, and facilitate all
the needs for every department. So we are
the central point in every artist's career. And
all these other areas certainly help break
the artist. But if we're not doing our job, it's going
to make their job twice as hard. We make stars!
That's what I love about it!
Do you have any words of wisdom as a
businessperson in the music industry? For
example, WMN has changed drastically over
the past 20 years (along with the industry
itself as a whole). How do you stay afloat?
Well...we started this with gut, and I'll end
with gut. That's something I don't think you
can learn. It's what inside tells you. Let it drive
your initiatives. Put your head down and do
the job you're responsible for doing. Don't tell
people how to do their jobs, because you lose
focus on what you're doing. That's how I
survived a changing industry. Because I'm
responsible for solely what the company puts
me in charge of and I have to deliver that.
Creativity has to rule business. I think that's the
way it should be stacked. I've never been
concerned about my title. Ultimately, you have
to find your path to where you want to be.
I moved to Nashville because I was in
distribution. I changed to a label because I
wanted to be more involved in the creative
process. I wanted to see how it was done. I
came as a sales guy so I could learn it. I made
sure I talked to people, watched how things
happened, and absorbed what I saw.
Marketing became what I loved to do the
most.
I never went to school. I took some business
courses at Harvard. But only to get a bit of
help.
Really?! Do you think attending a school
that has specialty programs like
entertainment studies and music business a
necessity to get into music business today?
Nowadays, that's probably a good thing
to have. The biggest thing is passion. You have
got to show people what you're passionate
about. You could walk around this building
and see different levels of passion, and how
people express that. And as a leader as the
company, it's my job to identify whose got it
and who doesn't.
So that is my advice. You have to be
passionate about what you're doing, and show
it. At the end of the day you will succeed.
Work hard. Don't care about the money you get
paid. Because if you love what you're
doing and you're passionate about what you're
doing, the reward will come at some point in
time. It will. It did for me!
Breaking into the music industry is no simple feat. It takes a lot of drive and dedication. It is not for the faint of heart. Get ready to get your game face on. Read these 7 basic rules of what it takes to break into the industry – theBeat will help get you there.

Here theBeat shares 7 simple steps that help you, as an artist, trying to break into the music industry. Take notes, try them out, and see what happens. You may also want to write down or address or hang it up somewhere... You just may have to thank us later.

1. RADIATE PASSION
There are a countless number of people trying to break into the music industry. If you don't have drive, and passion, and a serious dedication to the music you're creating, then reconsider the industry you're trying to enter. There are always new artists trying to break into the industry, working tirelessly to take someone else's spot. It is the ones who radiate passion and enthusiasm towards their music that survive.

2. SOAK UP KNOWLEDGE
Meet people in the industry. Seek out other artists. Read about them, watch interviews, listen to new music. Knowledge is power. The more you know about music and music business, the better.

3. FIND A GREAT TEAM
The team that helps you with your career is just as important as the music itself. They are the ones who have more resources and connections, pushing your music to the next level. Your team can include anyone from a personal manager, agent, and/or the various talented employees at a record label. Doing it all yourself is a challenge that is very likely not going to end well. Find this perfect team, and thank them. They are the ones who have the potential to break you into the industry, exposing you and your music to the marketplace.

4. MAX OUT SOCIAL MEDIA
One of the best tools for artists today is social media. The various social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Vine, etc.) are virtually free tools that allow an artist to communicate with the outside world. It is an easy way to share music, promote upcoming shows, and become more present in a culture that values technology. So sign up for some of these today! Not only are these social media platforms a way to promote yourself as an artist, but they also help you become more personable to your fans. Your fans are looking to connect with you beyond just your music. Tweet about your trip to the park or the fact that you made cupcakes. It doesn't have to be strictly business. Your social media presence makes you more relatable to your fans. If you feel like someone they would hang out with, then they are more likely to buy into you as a person, and ultimately your music. Think about a musician who has done very well, like Dolly Parton. Doesn't everyone want to be her friend?!

5. MAKE THE MOVE
If you're not already in the city where the music is made, then get there. For country music, it is Nashville. For hip-hop, pop, and rap–seek out New York City or Los Angeles. Sure there may be a hundred excuses not to do it (money, your job, family, etc.), but any serious musician has to consider this if a music career is truly what he or she wants to dedicate his or her life to. If you want to make it happen, then don't wait for it to happen. Be aggressive, and make the move. Don't wait any longer.

6. NETWORK
This is one I cannot stress enough. NETWORK like crazy in the city that fits your music needs. If it's Nashville, talk to everybody. The people in the industry is relatively small. If person A can't help you out, there is a good chance they know person B who can help. Grow these relationships and make an effort to continuously meet new people in the music industry. The people you surround yourself with can either help or hurt your career. If you surround yourself with other passionate music junkies, you're doing yourself a favor! Let their love for music ignite a spark in yours. Let them fuel you creatively on the days you aren't feeling all that creative. Let them help you expand your knowledge of music. Check out new shows. Get excited about new music together. Bounce ideas off one another. No matter what, keep growing as an artist by continuing to branch out and meet new people in the industry.

7. BREAK OUT OF THE SHACKLES
Break out of the things that are holding you back. Stop worrying about if the music you're making won't be what the radio wants or what your family would like to hear. Don't let your perceived problems tie you down from pursuing your dreams. If you are afraid to move to a new city, don't be. Experience some new experiences and challenge yourself. This will help you grow. (The periods of growth are great song writing material – WINK, WINK!) Put yourself and your music out there. Show it to everyone you know and let it take you where it may. Break free of the shackles.